

The American Civil Engineer

1852-1974

The history, traditions and
development of the



by William H. Wisely

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PREFACE

When the Bicentennial of the United States of America is commemorated in 1976, the American Society of Civil Engineers will have been a witness to 124 years of those two centuries. This historical account, hopefully, will help to relate the American Civil Engineer to the development of his country and his profession through this period.

A "Historical Sketch" of ASCE, authored by Secretary Charles Warren Hunt, was published as a book in 1897. Mr. Hunt followed this with a sequel in 1917 that was published in Transactions, Vol. 82, under the title "The Activities of the American Society of Civil Engineers During the Past Twenty-Five Years." In 1947 Professor Edward C. Thoma, M. ASCE, of Purdue University wrote a short review on the "Rise and Growth of the American Society of Civil Engineers," which was made available only in a limited edition of mimeographed copies.

The chief aim of this book is to provide an accurate documentary reference to the broad range of ASCE activity since the founding of the Society. If the record is more detailed than may be desired by the casual reader, it has been made so in the interest of completeness.

The book is not, however, a chronological recital of events as they occurred. The various programs and service areas of the Society are treated independently, each as a story in itself. This is intended to enhance readability and to provide better topical access for reference purposes.

Except for the appendices, the use of names of living persons has been almost completely avoided. It is deemed

paramount that the thrust of the Society as an entity be unobstructed even by the most impartial effort to identify and judge the roles of the host of individuals who have contributed so much to the work of ASCE. These evaluations and interpretations are left to other historians.

In a further effort to improve readability, specific source references have been limited to a few major items. The primary sources of documentation were the published *Proceedings and Transactions*, the annual report of the Society, *Civil Engineering*, and the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Direction. It will not be difficult, therefore, for the reader to pursue a more detailed inquiry in the time frame in which an event is reported.

The hope that the book will be a useful historical reference has been noted. An even more important purpose would be served, however, if it might help both the student and the practitioner to orient themselves to the rich heritage of the civil engineering profession. Present and future leaders of the Society may also benefit from the guidance given here concerning past successes — and failures — in policy and administration. During my work on the book I have had frequent occasion to regret that the research could not have been undertaken before my own service on the staff began in 1955.

The project has been infinitely absorbing and stimulating, and I am deeply obliged to Executive Director Eugene Zwoyer for his continuing interest and encouragement. Many other members of the headquarters staff have responded most generously to my frequent and oft-times impatient requests for data and assistance. Public Information Services Manager Herbert R. Hands and Miss Mary E. Jessup, formerly News Editor of *Civil Engineering*, have been especially helpful in the exhaustive research task that has been necessary. The cooperation of Paul A. Parisi, Director of Publication Services, and Irving Amron, Editor of Information Services — who indexed the book — is noted gratefully.

The Book, *Engineering and American Society, 1850-75*, (University Press of Kentucky) was a particularly useful refer-

ence, remarkably perceptive in its analysis of the motivation of the early American civil engineer. Its author, Dr. Raymond H. Merritt*, was kind enough to review this manuscript in detail, and his thoughtful and scholarly criticism was a major contribution.

Highly competent reviews were provided also by Past-President G. Brooks Earnest and Secretary Emeritus William N. Carey, both of whom have been deeply involved with the management of the Society for many years.

Acknowledgment is made to the Department of Civil and Coastal Engineering of the University of Florida — Dr. James H. Schaub, Head, and the office staff collectively — for their tolerance and cheerful cooperation. The staff of the Physics and Engineering Library of the University was ever ready to assist, often under trying conditions.

Grateful appreciation is extended to Professor Daniel H. Calhoun, author, and to the MIT Press, publisher, of the book *The American Civil Engineer — His Origins and Conflicts*, for their permission to use a portion of that title for this book.

As she has done so many times in the past 44 years, my dear wife has again indulged me in a professional adventure that has imposed heavily upon my family and homelife. This time she has not only graciously foregone much inconvenience and interference with our retirement activities, but she has also served as my reviewer and critic. I dedicate this book to her.

October, 1974

W. H. W.

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