

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF THE ACTUARIAL PROFESSION IN NORTH AMERICA, 12-14 JUNE 1989

More than 1,200 actuaries gathered in Washington, D.C. in June 1989 for three days of celebration of the centenary of the formation of the first professional actuarial body in North America.

The event was hosted by the Canadian and four United States of America actuarial bodies—in order of formation, the Casualty Actuarial Society (1914), the Society of Actuaries (1949), the Conference of Actuaries in Public Practice (1950), the Canadian Institute of Actuaries (1965) and the American Academy of Actuaries (1965). The Society of Actuaries had itself been formed by the merger of the yet earlier Actuarial Society of America (1889) and American Institute of Actuaries (1909). The celebrations in 1989 thus marked not only the centenary of the ASA, but the 75th anniversary of the CAS and the 40th of the SoA, and it was clear that the host bodies intended to mark these milestones in an appropriately lavish way. The Americans and Canadians had encouraged actuaries from outside North America to join their celebrations and, appropriately enough, exactly 100, from 23 different countries, did so. As might be expected, given the close ties over many years and the major involvement of British actuaries in the early development of the profession, the United Kingdom had, at 39, the largest contingent, shared almost equally between Institute and Faculty. The Institute's representation included President Roger Corley, Past Presidents Geoffrey Heywood, Gordon Bayley and Peter Moore, Vice-Presidents Ian Rushton and Roy Brimblecombe, and Honorary Secretaries David Purchase and Chris Daykin.

The Centennial Celebrations took place on 12-14 June in the Sheraton Washington Hotel. For both formal and social events the venue was excellent. The use of technology in a really worthwhile manner certainly impressed the visitors from overseas, and, I suspect, many from North America as well. We were welcomed with an elaborate 12-projector audio-visual show using many hundreds of slides; and throughout the general sessions video cameras projected a 15-foot high image of the speaker onto a screen behind the dais. A few speakers were mildly disorientated by thus being 'watched by themselves' over their shoulder, as it were, but for the audience it was a rare treat to be able to watch, as well as listen, from all parts of the large hall.

The theme of the discussions was 'Challenges of the Actuarial Profession'. After a thought-provoking address 'The Challenge of Professionalism' from retired Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Willard Z. Estey, we turned first to 'The Challenge from Within'. Presented papers in this session included 'Tendencies of Development in Risk Theory' by Professor Hans Buhlmann of Switzerland, and 'Whither Actuarial Science?' by James Tilley, the latter demonstrating clearly that the omission, on the cover, of the first 'h' of the title

was in no way predictive. A considered analysis of the intellectual foundations of our science was presented by these two speakers, and set in historical perspective by Jack Moorhead. 'The Challenge from Without' followed, exploring the pressures from regulators, employers, other professions and society in general. Emphasis was frequently placed on the need for actuaries to be less specialist, and more outgoing communicators—one of several instances of themes which were not unfamiliar to the U.K. contingent.

General sessions were followed by a number of simultaneous 'breakout sessions' (workshops) at which specific aspects of the topics raised could be discussed in more detail. The range covered was immense. A number of members of the Institute were involved in these sessions, including Roger Corley and Chris Daykin. The final morning was devoted to 'The Challenge from the Leadership', during which the Presidents of the five host organisations examined the opportunities facing their members, and considered how best to strengthen the profession in North America—a discussion which took forward the perceptive thoughts in a Task Force report on the same topic of a few months earlier. From a U.K. viewpoint, and with developments in the European Community very much in mind, the analysis of the problems of both geographical and functional separation seemed particularly pertinent.

As befits a celebration the social side of the event, for delegates and those accompanying them, was of equal significance. Opportunity was provided for a number of tours, which for this delegate at least provided an interesting contrast between the old (as represented by the Gutenberg Bible in the Library of Congress) and the new (as represented by the exhibits in the National Air and Space Museum). I remain perplexed, however, as to which of the two categories the moon rock displayed in the latter should be placed in. Several other events were arranged; the highlight, without doubt, was the Celebration Dinner on the evening of Tuesday 13 June, followed by splendid entertainment by the Canadian Brass.

Another interesting feature was the exhibition of actuarial artefacts. Thirty or so well-chosen items gave an insight, by way of books, calculating machines, journals, newsletters and photographs, of the early days of the American profession. But in addition to this, our hosts were rightly anxious that there should be some permanent evidence of the Centennial. Many papers were presented, a few of which have been mentioned above. More significantly, a new monograph by Charles Trowbridge, 'Fundamental Concepts of Actuarial Science', and a book by E. J. (Jack) Moorhead, 'Our Yesterdays: the History of the Actuarial Profession in North America 1809–1979' were published for the occasion. This last, in particular, is an excellent and fascinating read, which will be greatly enjoyed by, among others, Jack Moorhead's many friends in the U.K. Lastly a charming pewter cup bearing the ingenious Centennial logo was given to each person present.

Naturally the overseas actuarial associations represented also wished to mark the event in tangible form. At a special breakfast on the final morning, therefore,

a presentation ceremony was held for the official representatives of the visiting bodies. Some sixteen gifts were presented to the sponsoring organisations, including a hand-painted flowered red Japanese vase, and an engraved pewter tray from Switzerland. The Society of Actuaries in Ireland presented a silver bowl, the Faculty presented a quaich (together with the appropriate liquid), and Roger Corley presented a crystal decanter on behalf of the Institute.

A happy and joyous occasion indeed in Washington, looking back a little as is appropriate for an anniversary, but for the most part looking forward in a most positive and optimistic manner. The atmosphere, especially for the visitors from outside North America, was most warm and friendly. The celebrations will be remembered by those fortunate enough to be present for a long time to come.

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