

WAY BACK WHEN...

A RECOLLECTION OF THE SIA'S EARLY DAYS



Dave Beatty

There was no scaffold association, now referred to as the scaffold and access industry, and the administration of federal OSHA had recently begun. I received a phone call from Jerry Towse, of Sacramento, who asked if I would be interested in helping to form a scaffold association. I was also told of a gentleman, David Victor Saleeby, an executive vice president of the California Lathers and Plasterers Association, who was genuinely interested in assisting in the start of our association. I replied that it had been tried, unsuccessfully before, but let's try once more.

"Vic", as he was known by most of us, then called an organizational meeting in Southern California. Fortunately, I kept a copy of the minutes of that meeting which I will draw upon for some of this article. Presently, there are four of the founding members still involved in the SIA, Jerry Towse, Jerry Schapira (both Past Presidents), "Bud" Jones and me.

Although an association had been previously attempted (a scaffold manufacturers' association was already in existence, limited to manufacturers, known as the SSFI). Our goal was to enlist dealers, distributors, manufacturers, and those involved in the installation of scaffold. Our immediate target was the Far Western states.

In 1975, we realized we were limiting our membership by the name "Scaffold Contractors Association," as many potential businesses were suppliers and not contractors. The name was changed to a more encompassing description, "Scaffold Industry Association." Our potential membership increased exponentially.

At this point, I would like to single out Clyde Wellman, previously a Southern California manufacturer of scaffold components, who was attempting to establish dealers throughout various areas of the U.S., and who brought with him his SIA recruiting kit. As an unofficial spokesman, Clyde "spread the word," and we enlisted many new members.

The association "wave" rolled eastward – chapters were formed – and our 1978 annual convention was held in Chicago. The association gathered momentum, and in 1979, we convened in Boston. I do not recall when Canadian chapters were formed, but I believe it was at the Boston convention or just prior to it. Subsequently, annual conventions were held in Vancouver and Montreal.

During the course of our expansion, the "insurance factor" became a major component of our recruitment. Many of us saw our rates double or triple, and other insurers refused to renew our policies at any price. "Scaffold" had become taboo, giving rise to our own insurance arm of the association, the SIAI. Also, more members joined.

Back to Vic. It was during the organizational meeting that I knew a man of his fierce determination and dedication would not fail. He didn't, and we all succeeded. That success can also be attributed to the "believers" in those formative years, and their voluntary efforts.

"Why should I join" was frequently asked. More truthfully expressed, it would have been "what's in it for me?" There are a myriad of answers. Simply put, when you are negotiating a sale or rental of your product, someone, somewhere, with a mutual interest, is advocating yours. The SIA's first "showdown" with federal OSHA took place in San Francisco, with Vic, Jerry Towse and I attending, among some

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others. The issue? Scaffold planking. Jobs were being shut down in California because federal OSHA required full thickness 2-in. planking. At the end of our discussions, we prevailed and the feds also benefited, to wit; what defines scaffold grade planking.

Many of those sometimes funny, embarrassing or heartbreaking occurrences travel with us. It is a part of the (our) evolution. The sudden loss of Vic was such one to all of us, and especially this writer. His daughter came up to me during a convention subsequent to his death, with tears flowing, and said that her father felt Frank Koughan and me as his "sons." Neither of us has ever been paid a greater compliment. I need to add Harold Forbes to the "loss" column, as he was one of the hardest working of all SIA members I have known.

On the funny side, I would like to quote from the minutes of the organizational meeting.

Let's start with money, it's always a good place to begin!

The date was July 21, 1972 at the Sheraton Universal Hotel. There were 29 attendees. The budget report was presented by Mr. Saleeby, and we had accumulated \$950. We were \$50 short of \$1,000 because someone had not paid, and I have been looking for that person for 35 years, without success.

Suffice to say we blew it all on expenses for our initial meeting, with no compensation to Mr. Saleeby, who took none for quite some time to come. Dues were set with an initiation fee of \$100 for new members, and monthly dues of \$20. Classes of membership were also introduced at that time. If paid on an annual basis, a 5% discount was offered.

It was announced that our next meeting of all members would be sometime in April 1973.

San Francisco was eventually chosen as the location for our first annual convention, and later the date was to be April 28. I called Vic and told him I had a conflict with that date and could not attend because Sandra and I were to be married. He responded with the comment, "David, I really need you at the convention. Can't you change the date of your wedding?" I replied, "Would you like to speak to Sandra?" That was the end of the conversation!

After we were wed, and after the reception, we drove to the convention site at the Marriott Hotel, where I introduced Sandra to SIA members and their wives. Victor commented, "Well, that's what I call dedication."

And that is what this brief history is all about. Dedication. It is also about those of you who have constantly and generously given of your most precious commodity, time, which is irreplaceable, when building and reinvigorating this great association. Thank you for that, and thank you Mr. Towse for making that phone call. ■

This article was written by David Beatty, a founding member of the SIA who served as the association's second president from 1975-1977. He has been working in the scaffold industry since 1938 at the age of 9. He now serves as a consultant to the scaffold industry and can be reached at (209) 233-3104 or (209) 223-2068 or at dbt@infostations.net.

LOOKING BACK

SIA HISTORY SHOWS STRENGTH IN UNITY

In the early 1970s scaffolding contractors on the West Coast were going through some difficult times. "Some of us had insurance problems, some of us had union problems, and we were faced with the new federal OSHA standards," says SIA's first president Gerald F. Towse. He recalls discussing all of these with Cletus E. "Bud" Jones during a meeting of the California Association of Lathing Contractors in April 1972. "We wondered why the scaffolding industry didn't have an association of its own."

"We wondered why the scaffolding industry didn't have an association of its own."

In fact, several previous attempts to establish such an association had been unsuccessful. But this time, most likely because of the threat that the OSHA regulations posed to their business, scaffolders were ready to band together for the common good. D. Victor Saleeby, who was the managing director of the Lathing Contractor's association, offered to help the scaffolding contractors get an association started. "Bud, Victor and I started calling everybody we knew who might be interested,



and Victor started putting together bylaws and other things that we would need,” says Towse.

The Scaffold Contractors Association, as it was called then, held its organizational meeting on July 21, 1972. The minutes of that meeting report that representatives from 23 scaffolding companies, three scaffold manufacturing companies and three insurance companies attended, as did Victor Saleeby. Towse, serving as acting chair, led a discussion that enumerated the areas in which the scaffolding industry could benefit from its own association. They included insurance, safety codes (OSHA), legislation, labor relations, contracts, industry standards, licensing and information dispersal.

“After discussing all of the foregoing scaffold industry problems, the Chairman requested a show of hands as to how many persons present felt that a Scaffold Association was needed and they would support it. A unanimous show of hands indicated the support of the audience,” according to the minutes of that meeting. (Not all the companies present ended up joining the association,

however. Those present recall that approximately 15 companies signed up in the first months.)

Attendees adopted bylaws and set fees for the members, who were at that time limited to scaffold erecting companies. Scaffold manufacturers, suppliers and allied firms were invited to join as associate members.

“When OSHA came out with its new scaffolding regulations in 1971 it didn’t conform to what we were doing,” adds Schapira.

The first officers and Board of Directors included Towse as president, David Roberts as vice president (replaced shortly thereafter by Melvin Masterson), and Kenneth Abbiss as secretary/treasurer. Board members were Ross Chandler, David Beatty, Mel Masterson, Cletus (Bud) Jones, Roger Geis (replaced by Harry Clements

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shortly after the meeting) and Jerry Schapira. Victor Saleeby served as the unpaid executive director during the association's formative months.

Jerry Schapira was the only founding member not from California; a friend from California who was in the industry had told him about the meeting, and he decided to attend.

"There were many items we couldn't live with."

"They thought at first that they should be just a California corporation, but I suggested that we get more people involved from outside of the state and they eventually thought that was a good idea," he says.

After months of organizational activities (forming committees, etc.) the association's held its first annual session in April 1973. (The early leaders were a dedicated group; Dave Beatty actually left his wedding reception with his bride to make an appearance at that meeting.)

Issues with OSHA

The association started on the West Coast because scaffold contractors in that region were more concerned about the OSHA regulations than contractors in other parts of the country, according to Dave Beatty, the organization's second president. "There was a big difference between the East and the West; primarily all of the scaffold work back East and in the Midwest was heavy duty, because they were dealing mostly with brick and stone construction. Their scaffolding had to be set on seven-ft centers. But here we had primarily wood and plaster or stucco construction, which doesn't require a heavy-duty scaffold. We had always done it with strings on 10-ft centers."

OSHA wanted to require all companies to follow the more stringent standards. "When OSHA

came out with its new scaffolding regulations in 1971 it didn't conform to what we were doing," adds Schapira. "There were many items we couldn't live with."

So the scaffolding association became the voice of the industry during repeated meetings with OSHA. Although it took time, the new association eventually began to make a difference. "We proceeded through our workings with OSHA to help them rewrite meaningful standards," says Dave Beatty, the association's second president. "We showed a spirit of cooperation. Victor

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Saleeby was in close contact with them all the time.”

“OSHA was strongly bureaucratic—exceedingly bureaucratic,” notes Ken Buettner, who served as SIA’s

“OSHA was strongly bureaucratic — exceedingly bureaucratic,” notes Ken Buettner, who served as SIA’s 11th president.

11th president. “I don’t think that they really understood the industry, and what getting out there physically putting up scaffolding was like. But with time they came to understand the industry and the industry came to understand the need for growing safety.” Over time, OSHA representatives and members of the scaffolding association began to overcome their initial distrust of each other and to develop a better working relationship.

Name and Membership Changes Spur Growth

During the early years the association operated out of Saleeby’s offices in Los Angeles and the early leaders credit him with much of its success. “He was the driving force; he lived the association,” says Towse. “It became, after a short period of time, his only association. He was able to keep everyone working together right up until his last days.”

“Victor Saleeby was association wise; he had the foresight to see what was required,” adds Beatty.

One thing the association needed to make it more effective was new members. Towse remembers crisscrossing the country on recruitment drives. “I spent most of my three years on the road with Victor trying to get membership,” he says. “We hit the telephone books, because that was about the only thing there was in those days. Whenever I went somewhere, I would grab a telephone book out of the hotel room and call the scaffold people listed in there.” They would hold an informational meeting about the association for groups of scaffolders in

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an area, and these meetings would often lead to the formation of a local chapter of the association.

By the time Towse turned the gavel over to Dave Beatty at the third annual meeting in San Diego in 1975, the association had grown to include more than 100 members from 16 states and Canada. But members felt

“Some of us had insurance problems, some of us had union problems, and we were faced with the new federal OSHA standards,” says SIA’s first president Gerald F. Towse.

they could do more to increase its size and effectiveness. They voted to change the group’s name to the Scaffold Industry Association. “Deletion of the word ‘contractor’ from the association’s designation was explained as a natural outgrowth of expansion,” according to a news clipping from the time. “Many members engage primarily in distribution and leasing of scaffolding and shoring; others erect scaffolding; and still others are manufacturers.

So the new name was selected to afford blanket identity without great and cumbersome length.”

Scaffolding manufacturers were invited to become regular voting members, and the definition of scaffolding was changed to include “scaffolding, shoring or any device used to support workers, materials or equipment,” according to the news story. “This dovetails with an association drive to attract companies offering swing staging and hydraulic platforms and shoring contractors and distributors.”

Insurance Crisis

Although OSHA was the biggest concern at the time of SIA’s founding, another problem soon grew just as big. “The other thing that gave the association impetus was insurance,” says Beatty. “You couldn’t buy it. As soon as anybody looking for insurance said scaffolding, the next sound you heard was the door closing. And when you could buy it, the rates were totally unaffordable.

“We knew that as members of the association we had something to offer, and insurance was one of those things,” he continues.

The crisis came in 1978, during Jerry Schapira’s term as

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the association's third president. "It happened during our annual convention. There was a big accident in West Virginia when a forming system fell and 51 workers were killed," he says. "The word went out all over the country that it was a scaffolding accident, although it really wasn't." (Although an investigation showed that the cause of the accident was that the poured cement being used to hold the scaffolding had not properly set, the "scaffolding accident" label stuck in the public's mind.)

"A lot of us lost our insurance because of the bad publicity that this was getting," Schapira continues. His company went for three months without general liability insurance, and even those who eventually found some coverage were unable to get enough.

SIA stepped in to fill the gap. Saleeby and Schapira worked with Bill Gaston of Atlanta, who later became SIA's 6th president. Gaston, who had a large scaffolding company, got his insurance in Bermuda. After several meetings, SIA officers decided that the association should start its own Bermuda-based insurance company.

"We needed to raise \$400,000 to initiate acceptance," Schapira adds. "Companies put in \$5,000, \$10,000,

\$15,000. These were loans that were to be paid back, not an investment." All companies were eventually repaid with interest, and the SIA Insurance Company enabled member companies to buy much-needed insurance coverage for more than 20 years.

Improving the Industry Through Education

Since its inception, one of the association's goals had been to help its members create a safer, better workplace for scaffolders working in the field. That required more training and education, so in 1988 SIA formed a separate non-profit foundation to increase the opportunities to provide it.

Bill Ayres, SIA's ninth president, served as chair of the SIA Education for 18 years. "The foundation supplies funds for education and gives money to various committees of the SIA so that they can provide educational training," he explains. "In the early years, the foundation helped develop the scaffold training program. More recently we have funded videos for the Swing Stage Committee and have funded translation into Spanish of SIA safety codes." The foundation also provided money

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for the development of the SIA's web site, which includes information about various training programs that scaffolding companies and employees can take through SIA.

Period of Transition

During the association's first quarter century, executive director Victor Saleeby handled much of the legislative, lobbying and public relations functions as well as the day-to-day minutia involved in running the association. "Those of us who served as president while Victor was alive were very fortunate," notes Buettner. "He was able to provide us the continuity and the deep, deep knowledge base that we needed."

When Saleeby died suddenly in 1997, the association, which had by this time moved to Van Nuys, Calif., went through a difficult time. The SIA board chose Gary Larson as the new executive director. The transition seemed a natural one, since Larson had worked with Saleeby at Gatekeeper Management Services, the company that managed the association. The arrangement did not work out, however, and in 2000, the SIA removed Gatekeeper Management Services and hired its own staff.

"The president at that time was Harold Forbes," says John R. Miller, SIA's current president. "The association was fortunate that he was retired at the time and acting as a safety consultant. If we had any other president, someone who was working full time, he would not have been able to give the association the attention that it deserved."

From 2000 to 2002 SIA struggled to survive, as its membership ranks were continually reduced by consolidation of scaffolding firms. "All of a sudden, where we had five members we would now have one," observes Buettner.

Much of that consolidation was due to the continually rising cost of

insurance. "The cost of insurance is a detriment to new business owners going into this business, and most small companies can't afford it. So now the only way for medium to large companies to grow is to consolidate and acquire. That means the big companies are getting bigger and the small independents are giving up the fight and selling out," Miller continues. "Membership has dwindled as a result."

The association was also forced during this time to sell its insurance subsidiary due to the widespread losses that the insurance industry suffered after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. (The SIA continues to offer insurance programs to members, however.)

In 2005, during Howard Schapira's tenure as president, he moved the association to Phoenix in an effort to reduce costs. To help SIA get back on its feet financially, the Schapira family gave the association free rent for a year in an office building it owned.

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15TH ANNUAL SIA CONVENTION Reno, NV - 1987 "SIA's Sure Bet"



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Putting Strategies in Place for the Future

Although the association's move from California was painful for many long-time members, it did give the SIA a clear ground on which to build a modern organization that reflects today's realities. That process began when the SIA board, working with a professional firm, adopted a strategic plan for the association in 2006.

"The transition is over," says Miller. "The strategic plan is in place and its execution is well underway.

One of the first steps was the hiring of additional staff members. SIA's staff now includes Richard R. J. Marshall, executive director; Maureen Orey, director of training and education; Eloise Schultz, director of membership; Nicki Santo, director of communications; and Amy Siems, operations manager.

The association is also launching a membership drive. Miller has organized a summit of 14 of the largest scaffolding and access companies to address bolstering SIA's numbers.

"We need those companies who have acquired or who are acquiring other companies to support those acquisitions with SIA membership at the branch level," he says. If the company has only a corporate membership, the message is not getting down to the branch level and the everyday end user, where it needs to be. "They're the ones who need to know what's going on at the SIA and to take advantage of the SIA education and training programs. We need that voice down at the grassroots level." He also wants the SIA to offer more education and training programs this year to reach those end users.

Having a stronger membership will allow the scaffolding industry to withstand attempts to over-regulate it. Miller notes that scaffold violations, which had dropped back to number three on OSHA's most-cited list, rose

again last year to number one. "We need to be out of that top 10. If we don't clean this mess up, OSHA will try to come in and clean it up for us, and they're not qualified to do it.

"If we beef up membership—if these big companies will sign up their branches and increase the voice—we can go to Capitol Hill to the Department of Labor and demand a meeting with these people so that we can regulate ourselves."

SIA has had international members for many years, but Miller plans an even bigger emphasis on recruiting international firms into the association. "We have an influx of European and Asian and South American firms coming into this country. Many members, who are U.S. manufacturers, are leery of those firms, but they're coming with us or without us. We need to embrace them so we can introduce them to the way that we do business here. We don't want them to introduce sub-standard products and undo what we've done over the last 35 years."

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Finally, Miller wants the SIA to enhance the industry's image. "We want to introduce this profession as a rewarding career path. We need to have a pool of well-trained scaffold and access professionals to pull from."

Although the problems the association and its members face today loom large, they are not insurmountable. To SIA's founding members, the problems of their time looked

just as overwhelming. But they set the example by uniting and working together through the association to find solutions. If scaffolding companies today will support SIA in a like manner, the association will continue to be successful in finding good answers to the problems that its members face today. ■

