

A SUMMARY
OF THE HISTORY
of the
AMERICAN SOCIETY
of
LEGISLATIVE CLERKS AND SECRETARIES



Presented by
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First, let me explain that I am not the official historian of this organization. Perhaps I inherited the title of unofficial historian because of my gray hair. I prefer to think that I'm just one of many cheerleaders in our group.

In 1979 I was asked to compile a history of the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries for presentation at the Seminar in Orlando. Several times after that I was asked to summarize the history at meetings such as this.

Frankly, I enjoy this assignment because in addition to reporting the history I'm able to take some liberties and add some comments of my own. I'm a former newspaper person and you know the "fourth estate" likes to editorialize and feels an obligation to report the bad news along with the good news. Please forgive me if I use my "poetic license" this afternoon and toss in a few personal opinions.

Some of you old-timers have heard this report before. Think of it today as a refresher course. I hope to convince the new members that they have just joined an organization whose history is colorful and eventful and whose members are enthused and ambitious and proud.

Our Society was founded in 1943 which means we are 42 years old this summer. 1943 was the beginning of a new period for professional legislative administrators and parliamentarians because

finally we were united in one self-serving organization with a common purpose, that of improving legislative administration and establishing better lines of communication between the Clerks and Secretaries throughout the nation and its territories.

Quite frankly, our organization like most organizations has had some problems over the years. We've had our ups and downs, some good years and some bad years. We've had our disagreements and hard feelings. But finally we learned to work together and fight our competition and not each other. Today we are strong and united ---- and we are proud of our accomplishments.

It's important that we take a few minutes and talk about some other organizations that were in existence when our group was formed in 1943. The Council of State Governments was then 10 years old, having started at the University of Chicago in 1933.

At that time the state legislatures were poorly organized with short sessions and low salaries for members and staff. State law making bodies probably were dominated by lobbyists and special interest groups and no doubt were not a co-equal branch. They were staffed by a highly qualified Chief Clerk or Secretary plus a very few administrative assistants. This typical legislative staff was supplemented by people on loan from the executive branch plus numerous part time patronage people. Clerks and Secretaries then were in a strong position of leadership, were held in high regard by government officials, and had little competition from other

legislative staff. As a result much of the contact between the Council of State Governments and the Legislatures in the 1930's was through Clerks and Secretaries.

Meetings between the states were beginning to emerge, first on a regional basis and then on a national basis, and the Council of State Governments had become the vehicle for solving problems shared by all the states. Clerks and Secretaries because of their early involvement with the Council attended many of these meetings and participated in the programs.

Subsequently Clerks and Secretaries started communicating with each other and visiting each other. They arranged annual get-togethers on their own which were poorly attended because obtaining approval for travel was difficult. Other legislative staff directors were later invited to these meetings. We believe this loosely organized group was called the American Association of Legislative Officers but was in existence for only a short period of time in the late 1930's and early 1940's.

We found evidence of another organization called the Legislative Service Conference which was formed in the 1940's in Chicago. Several Clerks and Secretaries were influential in establishing this new organization, helping draft the by-laws and recruiting members; however, they soon lost interest because the group was dominated by bill drafters, reference agency heads and fiscal officers. Another new staff position called Director of

the Legislative Council was beginning to show up on the tables of organization in legislative bodies. These Legislative Council Directors later took over the leadership of the Legislative Service Conference much to the displeasure of many Clerks and Secretaries.

The 1955 meeting of the Legislative Service Conference was held in Miami Beach. That year for the first time legislative members outnumbered legislative staff and consequently a reorganization took place. The name was changed from the Legislative Service Conference to the National Legislative Conference.

Clerks and Secretaries played a major role in organizing the new Conference, making certain that all staff people would have a voice and that Clerks and Secretaries would share a piece of the action. Several of our peers were named to the executive committee and chaired or served on other important committees.

In 1974 in Albuquerque the National Legislative Conference merged with two competitive legislative groups into the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the organization with which we are now successfully affiliated. Our Society has retained strong ties with the Council of State Governments on a regional basis and with the National Conference of State Legislatures on a national basis.

Some old timers like to think that Clerks and Secretaries could be called the grandparents of the Conference because of our

involvement in the formation of both the old NLC and the new NCSL and because our Society is 31 years older than the Conference. Again, many of our peers have played a major role in NCSL during its 12 year history and are enthusiastically supportive of its mission.

As I mentioned earlier our group, the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries, was founded in 1943. Joseph A. Beek, Secretary of the California Senate, was elected as our first president. He held that office for 25 consecutive years.

You have probably heard that the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries was mainly a social organization in the early part of its history, but please don't conclude that fun-loving was its only interest. It served useful purposes that should be reported. For one thing, it provided the president, Mr. Beek, with a podium for 25 years to remind Clerks and Secretaries of the importance of their contributions to state government. He challenged them to justify their positions of trust. He warned them as far back as 1943 that their profession would have competition from other staff who would fill newly created positions. He probably had in mind Service Bureau Directors, Legislative Council Directors, leadership staff and House or Senate administrators. He inspired Clerks and Secretaries to become proficient in their work. He told them to modernize their procedures or someone would replace them who would modernize. He advised them to know more

about rules and parliamentary procedure than other staff people. You might say that because of these inspirational meetings our organization for many years was also an evangelistic society. The gospel message was for Clerks and Secretaries to do a better job.

But it was more than a social society and an evangelistic society. It was also a protective society. I mentioned earlier that our group protected the rights and privileges of Clerks and Secretaries and all legislative staff in our dealings with the other organizations with which we had an affiliation. The American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries was involved in the successful fight to preserve a place for staff in the formation of the old National Legislative Conference in 1955. You should also know that it was involved to a much greater extent in the fight to protect all staff when the merger took place in Albuquerque in 1974 with the formation of the new National Conference of State Legislatures.

In all fairness I must report that our organization as well as individual Clerks and Secretaries were having some difficulties in the late 1960's. We were not responding to the competition from other staff in our home states. We lost some of our effectiveness with the Council of State Governments and with the old National Legislative Conference. The dominant staff sections were Service Bureau Directors and Legislative Council Directors and not Clerks and Secretaries. Attendance at Society

activities was down and interest was fading. To help revitalize our organization, a national seminar for Clerks and Secretaries, the first professional development seminar for any legislative staff, was held at the State University of New York at Albany in 1967. Albert J. Abrams, Secretary of the New York Senate, sponsored the seminar. Despite the skeptics, 16 people attended.

The annual meeting in Miami Beach the following year, however, attracted only 13 people from nine states. I attended that meeting. We were discouraged and depressed. Now you can understand our enthusiasm when 150 or more delegates from over 30 states and territories register for these seminars.

The actual re-birth of our Society probably took place at that Miami Beach meeting in 1968 when those 13 Clerks and Secretaries vowed to expand activities, promote attendance, and increase liaison between members. Mr. Beek, who then was in poor health, declined to run for re-election. He was named president emeritus and a resolution was adopted thanking him for his 25 years of outstanding leadership. He passed away the following year at the age of 88. History will show that his contributions to this organization have never been equaled.

Ward Bowden, Secretary of the Senate of the State of Washington, was elected as the new president. T. Thomas Thatcher, Clerk of the Michigan House, was named vice president.

An unfortunate happening took place that year. Mr. Bowden,

the new president, passed away in the middle of his term while working as Secretary on the floor of the Washington Senate. Vice President Thatcher assumed the duties of president. In 1969 Mr. Thatcher was named to a full one year term as president. The following year he declined re-election, thereby establishing the custom and usage that presidents of this organization now serve only one term.

But a new course was set for the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries. We truly were "born again." Let's discuss some of our accomplishments in the past 16 years. Permit us to brag a bit.

Presently there are 12 staff sections active in the National Conference of State Legislatures. Today we are the envy of these other staff sections. We are better organized. We are more progressive and innovative. We lead in attendance. We do more for our members.

This year's professional development seminar in Sparks is booked as the 19th annual seminar. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that this is the 18th annual seminar because in 1968 the Society experimented with regional seminars rather than a national seminar. Attendance at Clerks and Secretaries seminars has increased more than ten-fold since 1967.

The seminar programs vary from year to year and seem to

improve each year. The trend is to utilize some faculty from our own profession. A display of printed materials from the various states is usually featured. This year, breakout sessions by job categories are again being held. A meeting exclusively for Clerks and Secretaries is scheduled. The term "professional development" can rightfully be applied to these meetings. In 1976 a new tradition was established when the annual Society business meeting and election of officers, previously held at the Conference, was re-scheduled for the seminar in San Francisco. Another activity that increased the interest in the seminars was the addition of a state dinner to the seminar program. This, too, has now become a tradition. The National Conference of State Legislatures is now taking our group seriously and each year we receive more cooperation and assistance from them.

Some of the most informative meetings for Clerks and Secretaries are held in state capitol buildings where tours of legislative facilities are conducted, the law making process is demonstrated on the spot, and samples of legislative publications are made available. In several instances Clerks and Secretaries have been bussed a considerable distance from other meetings to make this possible.

I mentioned earlier that we are more formally organized than the other staff sections. We have our own by-laws which were established in 1972 after a long and constructive fight. The pur-

pose of our organization was properly defined in the by-laws and reads: "The purpose of this Society is to improve the administrative effectiveness of State Legislatures and to develop better procedures in enhancing the law making function."

The by-laws provide for a strong Executive Committee, giving responsibilities and authority to the officers and the Executive Committee. The committee now meets quarterly to transact Society business and plan future activities.

Many of our people have been elected to serve as officers or members of the NCSL executive committee. Others have served as chairpersons or members of NCSL standing committees. We now take an aggressive role in the campaign to make sure that Clerks and Secretaries are fairly represented ---- and our campaigns have been highly successful.

We now have our own separate dues and our treasury shows a healthy balance. We aren't hesitant to spend our own money for worthwhile projects. Dues were first established in 1972 after another battle. Prior to that it was difficult to finance our activities and Society officers were expected to pay many of the expenses out of their own pockets.

We have our own logo, adopted through a national contest sponsored in 1975. The contest attracted 25 entries. The logo appears on our business letterhead and all our publications.

Jewelry was first manufactured in 1976 featuring the logo.

We adopted a Code of Ethics in 1973 and modernized it in 1977. The framed Code of Ethics now hangs in the offices of most Clerks and Secretaries.

Communication among members of the Society is excellent. Thirty-nine issues of the Legislative Administrator have been produced since the first issue went to press in 1969.

Three weekend workshops have been held: one in Dallas, one in Salt Lake City, and one in Washington, D. C.

We have conducted four Interparliamentary Sessions with our counterparts from Canada. The last meeting was held in St. Paul with a record attendance.

We created a new category of membership called "associate members" and these people have become active, productive members of the Society.

Our standing committees and special task forces have been active. A glossary of legislative terms was published. Four comprehensive surveys have been conducted and published. A card index of major parliamentary problems was produced. Four surveys of staffing and compensation were completed and distributed to all members. A directory of Society members with photos, biographies, addresses and phone numbers is distributed annually. We are active

in re-writing and updating "Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure." Each year more members volunteer to serve on our committees. Committee chairpersons are now invited to attend the quarterly Executive Committee meetings.

I truly believe that thru our Society we as members have gained a new admiration for each other as administrators and parliamentarians. Although we live in a political atmosphere we have learned to work together in this organization in a non-partisan way. We have one goal in mind: to improve the system that employs us and at the same time improve our own status as professionals.

And with all this increased activity we have not forgotten how to socialize. Our state dinners, our early bird receptions, our hospitality rooms and other informal gatherings have helped us to become working partners. We learn from each other and share problems with each other as friends, not strangers. Our acquaintanceship knows no state or territorial borders.

It has been said that perhaps the greatest benefit derived from membership in this organization is the friends we make and the help they can give us. Let me give you an example. I was named Chief Clerk of our House in 1966 after our long-time Chief Clerk passed away at the age of 62. I had been one of his assistants for 17 years and during that time he was always there to answer my questions. I thought he would be around forever. After his death I had no one to reach for help. But after attending

a few meetings of this group I had met some dedicated professional parliamentarians. Some names that come to mind are Tom Thatcher, Bill Kendrick, Lucille Dow, Al Abrams, Mark Gruell, Glenn Ellard, Louise Stockton, C. A. Blankenship - - - and there were others. What a valuable pool of experience and knowledge! I called or wrote to them when I needed help. And I got the professional answers I wanted.

In conclusion, let me say that a review of our history should give us a new respect for our organization, for all its members, and for the trust placed in us by our peers. Our history gives us a better appreciation of the contributions made by others during the past 42 years.

We welcome new people, both as members or associate members. We think we can help you. But more than that we need you and your ideas. Your presence will inspire us to do better. Your involvement will make certain that we don't become complacent or smug. With your help we can make this organization even better.

I hope you agree that the history of the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries is truly a success story. We have accomplished what our founders set out to accomplish way back in 1943. With the help of the new members this year, and the new members next year, and in all the years to come, the history of this great organization will continue to be a success story.

Thank you.

Ed Burdick

