

CHAPTER ONE: THE BEGINNING YEARS

It is now twenty five years since a charter was granted by the Construction Specifications Institute to the Baltimore Chapter to pursue the goal of better specifications. We knew no more then of the course on which we were embarking than did these men who in 1948 first organized the Institute and then chartered the first chapter in New York City in 1951. The history of that event has been included as an addendum to give a firsthand picture of the then as opposed to the now. In the next eight years many others were to join in. However, I daresay none knew, or more than dimly perceived, the technological revolution that we were to be a portion of.

To our younger members World War II is an historical fact but not a living experience. To many of us however, too many of us, it was a truly living experience. It was also our first introduction to the power of automation. We, for the first time, met IBM in the offices of the War Production Board and were required to translate our computations into punch cards. It is an interesting story but not part of our history. What is of significance is that CSI came into existence at the close of this war, the dawn of the computer age. CSI did not know, nor did the computer manufacturers immediately recognize, the applications of their products to construction. It was not until 1969 that the marriage was fully consummated by a CSRF (Construction Science Research Foundation) study made by The Stanford Research Institute but funded by CSI. We are still probing the implications of that study. (See THE SPECIFICER for July 1983 and the letter from Charlie Carroll.)

Some of you may feel that this indeed is interesting but what has this to do with Baltimore. Strangely, and most interestingly, a great deal. I shall try to tell you about it. However, the telling is going to be an "oral" history, not a dates and facts summary. Instead, one with many personal recollections. Also a lot of period background, the problems faced, the accomplishments reached. It will not be artistic, but between the lines you will find our history as the many contributors remember it.

Baltimore's interest in specifications can be attributed in my judgement, at least in part, to two individuals, both distinguished architects. I will tentatively say D. K. Este Fisher, first and James R. Edmunds, Jr., second. The order might well be reversed, and there may have been more, many more, architects, but, I do not know since I did not come to Baltimore until 1950. The former wrote widely in the AIA JOURNAL about materials and their correct usage. Este, I should point out, was a Christian gentleman and felt it unfair to ask a conscientious builder to submit his price on the basis of the best job known to God or man, and allow a competitor to submit his proposal on the bidder's conception of the "best" job, realising neither was bidding on the same level of workmanship. With "Big Jim" it was a little different. For reasons that I can only surmise he was greatly interested in materials. Mr. Edmunds most assuredly was not a philosopher, nor an introspective person, so one can not regard his attempts to classify and catalog materials as Aristotelian. Yet, through the great influence he had in The American Institute of Architects, he got that society to thinking about a better way of building, categorizing and specifying materials. All of this took place in the late 40's and 50's before CSI came to Baltimore.

Now do not get me wrong, neither of these gentlemen personally did a great deal to further the cause of specifications although Este wrote many articles on the subject for the AIA JOURNAL. However, neither competed with Ben John

Small or the others on the cutting edge of the art. Since both had very active practices, what they did do was create a climate in which some of the major offices were willing to allow their specification writers to pursue the muse on the hope it would payoff. Well it did, but not directly (like cash in the bank) for those who urged their employees on.

The best illustration of this interest in specifications is the fact that James Edmunds III was on the Board of CSI in 1950 with some very distinguished colleagues. Now how did that happen? I don't know. The point is he stayed but a year and a half. His associates were probably too brilliant and too committed for him to stand by idly. Further, his personal interest had to be to his practice, not to specifications exclusively. This is a point that will come up later. As a consequence he resigned. I suspect in fairness, to make room for someone with more time to give. If my thesis is correct, his father saw the potential and, if the organization proved to be what he could visualize it becoming, he wanted his firm in on the ground floor ready to take advantage of any developments that might come along. Thus Jimmy went, learned, evaluated and then gave the local chapter tremendous support without ever becoming involved beyond acting as a mentor and father confessor.

This sounds crass and commercial. It is and it isn't. James Edmunds, Jr. was one of the ablest architects Baltimore has ever produced. There are probably some who would dispute this but it remains my belief. I also believe that he saw in CSI an answer to a problem he had experienced in AIA of getting the membership interested in the study of materials and the dissemination of knowledge about them. The Foundation he tried to establish through AIA never came to fruition. His interest did produce, for a few years, the AIA INDEX OF BUILDING MATERIALS.

Jimmy (James Edmunds III) keep in mind, did not start out to be an architect. After the war (during which he served with the Marines) he went back to the University of Pennsylvania, graduated from the architectural school, returned to Baltimore and took his registration exams in 1951. In view of this brief stint in private practice, his presence on the Board of CSI really could not have added much to The Board despite his intentions which unquestionably were good.

Therefore, when in 1957 and '58 interest in CSI surfaced in Baltimore, he did a great deal to bring about the founding of the chapter. The news about CSI came from Charlie Carroll who had joined the D.C. Metropolitan Chapter since Washington was part of his sales territory. Upon hearing the news from Washington, Jimmy urged Andy Koppleman, who at that time worked for Jimmy, to go over and attend the meetings. This he did, with the result that Andy also joined CSI. (Andy says this was not how it happened. See Andy's statement.) In the meantime, Charlie had met Alan Gershon and gotten him interested in CSI. With Andy's help they got Alan going to Washinton also. To the best of my knowledge, Alan did not join the D.C. Chapter. In the meantime, Jimmy Edmunds had gotten Jim Campbell (of Fisher, Nes, Campbell and Associates) interested and, I suspect that through them, Paul Gaudreau had his curiosity aroused. I say this because it was at this point in the gestation of the chapter that I became aware of the interest of these others. I know that I went to a meeting in Washington with Charlie and subsequently went to a second one with Paul Gaudreau and Alan Gershon. I took no active role in the formation of the Baltimore Chapter beyond being one of the founders. The distinction goes to Andy Koppleman with a big assist from Charlie Carroll, Alan Gershon, Jimmy Edmunds and Jim Campbell.