

Summary of the History of the ASCE Austin Branch

The Beginning:

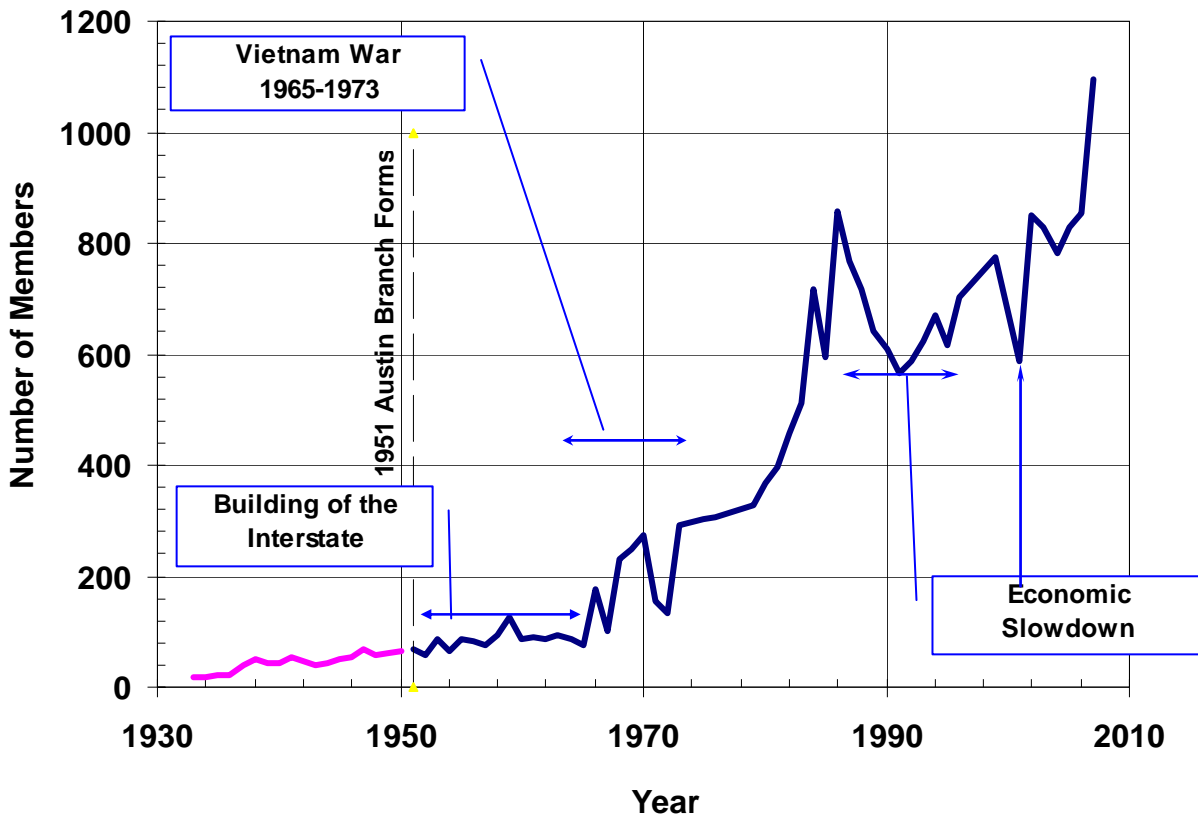
Since the start of the Texas Section in 1913, counties or areas did not specifically define branches. After World War II, Texas was transformed from a rural agricultural state to an urban industrial state. This was the catalyst for the need for engineering services. The National ASCE granted the right for branches to form among the sections. In 1950, several branches formed and this included the Austin Branch. Twenty-Two engineers led by John Focht, Sr. and Randle B. Alexander formed the Austin Branch. In the beginning most of the engineers joining the Austin Branch were from Williamson and Travis counties. The Austin Branch now includes: Bastrop, Blanco, Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lampasas, Lavaca, Lee, Llano.

In gathering the information for the History of the Austin ASCE branch, it was challenging finding written information on the first 50 years. In 1951, the Austin Branch was founded with the support of twenty-two members. The only written documentation found about the formation of the Austin Branch was in the Texas section board meeting notes of that year. During the research for the Austin Branch History, several of the early members of the Austin Branch were interviewed as to the leaders of this movement. Most cited John Focht, Sr. and Randle Alexander as the leaders for the formation of the branches. The Texas Civil Engineer lists about seventy members, which included eight Life members (indicated on the table below with an *). This list reads like a Who's Who in Civil Engineering at the time and are shown in the table below. This list was taken from the Texas Civil Engineer Magazine for the year, 1951. The Austin Branch was made up of several leaders of the different segments of the Civil Engineering profession as well as active members of the Austin branch as well as the Texas Section and the local community. Most of the members were engineers who worked for the government or professors at the University of Texas.

Alexander, R. B.	Grasso, W.A.	Rollins, A. P. *
Altfillisch, M.D.	Greer, D.C.	Roundtree S.R. Jr
Austin, V.L.	Holland, H.F.	Spence E.V.
Bantel, E.C.H. *	Homeyer, M.P.V.	Standovsky J.J
Benish A.A.	Jones, J.B.	Staubach A.
Breeding, S.D.	Koppleman, W.P.	Stebbins W.R., Sr.
Burgin, M.D.	Kuehm, H.G.	Steel E.W.
Clark, C.A.	Ledbetter, J.J. Jr.	Stiles, A.A.*
Cooper, H.P.	Levander C.G.	Streiff A. *
Creighton, E.J.	McLaurin, B	Sudstrom, R.W.
Dawson, R.F.	Matlock H.	Thompson, J.N.
Dougherty, J.P.	Mayfield I.N.	Turpin, R.D.
Edwards, G.G.*	Montgomery J	Twichell T.
Cholka, L.M.	Morgan C.L	Vartia, K.O.
Ehlers, V.M.	Oehler, L. T.	Von Rosenburg, E.J.
Ellsworth, C.E.	Norris, J.A. *	Wagner, K.N.
Ewing, B.B.	Page, J.M.	Welty P.A. *
Farley, W.F.	Piper, J.D.	Welty W.R.
Fenske, C.W.	Pollard, A. H.	Wilkes, W.J.
Ferguson, P.M.	Pritchett J.W.	Williams, G.D.
Finch, S.P. *	Prichett H.C.	Wilson W.M.
Focht, J.A.	Ramey, W.D.	Woolveron, A.H.
Freebourough, B.B.	Robinson, J.N.	Waukash. J.E.

Perhaps the biggest indications of the changes in the Branch are reflected in the membership. The following graph tells the story of the changes in membership of the ASCE members in the area of Austin before and after the branch formed. Also included is a summary of each decade.

Changes in the ASCE Austin Branch Membership



1951-1959: The First Decade

The abundance of petroleum in Texas encouraged the construction and the defense industries. The population of the Austin Area soared to 200,000. The membership of the Austin Branch climbed steadily. The branch met at the Austin Engineers & Associated Club. The technical talks consisted of such topics as the Seven Wonders of Texas, The Record Flood of 1957, The Interstate Program and the Use of Pre-Stressed concrete in the Highway Department along with a talk of the Departments IBM 650 Digital Computer. Among the items in this decade, the Austin Branch hosted its first Texas Section meeting in 1956. Much of the membership consisted of the Governmental agencies because some of the leaders of the group such as Randle B. Alexander worked for the Texas Highway Department. The branch membership increased almost by a factor of two.

1960-1969: Holding the Line

The Austin Branch membership saw a slow increase in membership. The branch experienced the formation of the technical committees, publicity, telephone, hospitality and program committees. Each committee had several members and functions. The technical committee helped with technical presentations, both at the branch and at the Texas Section meetings; the telephone committee contacted members to remind them of the meetings, the publicity committee publicized the activities of the

branch and the programs committee made arrangements for the branch meetings. The Technical talks of this decade included: Highway Design Problems with the Interstate Program, Mapping past Present and Future and Civil Engineers are they prepared for the Challenges. The membership fluctuated and finished the decade with an increase in membership.

1970-1979: The Seventies

The seventies saw the peak in the petroleum industry, which caused a level off in the economy. The annual reports for this decade described almost each year as static. However, other areas that grew were the neighborhood organizations growing stronger environmental and historical preservations groups with a stronger voice in the design process. The technical talks included: Highways-Where Do We Go from Here, Changing Tides in Engineering Education, Utilities One Call for Construction Underground-A New Concept. The first few years of the seventies saw a dip in membership but again saw an increase in membership at the end of the decade to start the eighties at almost 400 hundred members.

1980-1989: Major changes to Membership

The eighties had the most significant changes to membership in the history of the branch. While the membership saw a steady growth in the early eighties, only to peak in 1986 at about 890 members and then steadily fall. The primary reason for the decline was the economic slow down in the land development area. There were few jobs and even fewer Civil Engineering Jobs. The population of Austin peaked at about half a million and steadily declined. Even with the changes in the economy, the eighties saw the Branch grow in different aspects. The first leadership conference was held and the Branch Constitution and bylaws were revised. The Technical committee invested over 300 man-hours for the review of the City of Austin's Drainage Criteria Manual while the Minority Affairs group made efforts to participate in Engineers Week and other student Activities. The History and Heritage Committee helped celebrate the 50th anniversary of Buchanan Dam and the Dam was dedicated as a Texas Civil Engineering Landmark.

1990-1999: A New Start

The nineties saw a steady increase in membership to a high of 773 members. This was a result of the emphasis of the branch trying to expand membership. Some members attributed this increase to the change in meeting times from dinner to Lunch time. The technical presentations included: Water Pollution Abatement Plans and Enforcement Procedures, the New Airport, Austin's Early Warning System, The US 183 Elevated Structure. Participation in technical committees was strong. Several first for this decade included the start of the golf tournament and the past presidents luncheon.

2000-present: The Start of the New Millennium

The Austin Branch began the new millennium by hosting the first Texas Section Meeting. The branch off to a good start by again focusing on increased membership and participation. The year two thousand (2000) marked the 150th Anniversary of the National ASCE. The History and Heritage Committee started the New Year by dedicating the Highland Lakes a Texas Historical Landmark. The continuing Education Committee in response to the new requirements of continuing education served the branch by providing various continuing education activities and still continues today. The interaction between UT student Chapter and the Branch increased. September 11, 2001 would bring changes to facilities such as Camp Mabry, the dams and other facilities that would concern national

security. Adding the issue of security was a big change to engineers in the area. In spring 2005, the branch hosted their second Texas Section meeting of the decade.

The branch continues to grow and in 2006 was about at the same size as its previous peak in 1986. In 2007, the branch has surpassed 1000 member mark and its one thousand ninety seven members are looking forward to the events and changes to come.

Selected Reference:

The Handbook of Texas Online
The First 50 Years, ASCE Texas Section History
1950-2000 Austin Branch Reports.