

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SUGAR BEET TECHNOLOGISTS

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When the program for the 1997 General Session of the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists (ASSBT) was planned, focusing on the broad topic of history of the beet sugar industry in North America, it also seemed appropriate to review the history of our Society. It has been the Society's custom for the outgoing President to give a short address at the General Session; thus, it fell to me to make the Society's history the topic of my remarks. Dr. Zielke reviewed some of this history in his presidential address two years ago, so I will build on that and fill in with additional detail.

Although the history of our Society certainly does not go back to the beginnings of the beet sugar industry in North America, you may be surprised to realize that ASSBT's origins lie in a series of "Sugar Beet Round Tables," gatherings organized by T. G. Stewart of Colorado State College, Fort Collins, in cooperation with the USDA's Division of Sugar Plant Investigations. I have special interest in this because Mr. Stewart's institution, now known as Colorado State University, is where I am located today. "Round Tables" were held in 1935, 1936, and 1937 to bring together persons interested in any aspect of sugar beet growing, processing, or research. These gatherings must have filled a need for improved communication among the various facets of the sugar beet industry, for the record of the 1937 meeting states: "At the closing session of the Round Table it was decided to organize the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists to carry on the work started by the Round Table, and to extend its scope and influence throughout America. A unanimous opinion was expressed in favor of such an organization" (Anonymous, 1937). A list of the groups represented at this founding decision was provided; we may note that the list includes many companies, state and federal research organizations, and grower groups that are still familiar to us and still support and participate in the Society today (Table 1). Also, we must note that two persons from Canada participated in the founding of ASSBT, which expressly was named the "American" Society, not the "U.S." Society.

The first officers were elected for the fledgling ASSBT: A. W. Skuderna, President (American Beet Seed Co., Rocky Ford, Colorado); N. R. McCreery, Vice President (Great Western Sugar Company, Denver); and H. E. Brewbaker, Secretary-Treasurer (USDA, Fort Collins, Colorado). A committee was appointed to prepare a constitution and by-laws, and the place for the first General Meeting was determined. Thus, we can date our Society's beginnings to 1937 when the crucial steps in its formation occurred.

The "First Annual Meeting" of ASSBT was held in January, 1938, at Salt Lake City, Utah. The constitution and by-laws were adopted, and dues were set at \$1.00, with the provision that "Members paying this fee shall be entitled to receive all of the official communications of the Society and to

Table 1. Groups whose representatives participated in the founding of the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists (present at the founding decision in 1937). (Presented alphabetically)

Amalgamated Sugar Company	Gunnison Sugar Co.
American Beet Seed Co.	Holly Sugar Corp.
American Crystal Sugar Co.	Lake Shore Sugar Co.
Anaconda Copper Mining Co.	Michigan Sugar Co.
Beet Seed Committee	National Seed Co.
California Beet Growers Assoc.	The National Sugar Mfg. Co.
Univ. of California Experiment Station	Ohio Sugar Co.
Canada & Dominion Sugar Co.	Spreckels Sugar Co.
Colorado State College	U.S. Department of Agriculture
F. & M. Beet Sugar Assoc.	Utah-Idaho Sugar Co.
Great Lakes & Lake Shore Sugar Co.	West Coast Beet Seed Co.
The Great Western Sugar Co.	[and several sugar beet growers]

participate in all its activities.” Two sections were established: (1) Sugar Beet Agronomy, and (2) Sugar Beet Breeding. The purpose of the Society was stated: “The object of this Society shall be to foster all phases of sugar beet and beet sugar research, and to act as a clearing house for the exchange of ideas resulting from such work.” Although our purpose has been restated several times since, I believe we all would agree that this original statement still reflects rather accurately the goals of ASSBT.

At the first annual meeting, a cablegram was sent to the International Institute for Sugarbeet Research (IIRB) in Brussels, Belgium:

AMERICAN SOCIETY SUGAR BEET TECHNOLOGISTS IN SESSION SEND
GREETINGS AND WISH YOUR CONFERENCE SUCCESS
H E BREWBAKER SECRETARY

Communications not being as rapid then as now, IIRB’s friendly reply was not received until after the ASSBT meeting had ended, but this exchange of telegrams began a cordial relationship between the two groups that continues today, as we shall see later. In that spirit we welcome to this 1997 ASSBT meeting a number of IIRB members who have joined us. Their group includes IIRB Vice President Mr. Ib Clausen; Dr. Eric Choppin de Janvry, Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee; and Secretary General Dr. Ralph Beckers. Similarly, we welcome many others attending from outside North America. Our meetings are enriched by your presence.

At the first annual meeting there were paper sessions much like those of today, divided into groups under headings including General Agronomy; Genetics; Chemistry; Diseases and Insects; Sugar Beet Machinery; Seed and Seed Production; and Soils, Fertilizers, and Beet By-products. In a format perhaps carried over from the predecessor group, there also was a “Round Table on Methods.” Thus,

although meeting topics have changed somewhat through the years, we all recognize these subjects as continuing areas of interest. Some things never change!

The original plan for ASSBT was to meet as a national society every two years, with regional meetings to be held in the alternating years. Having geographic divisions and regional meetings was logical at a time when travel was more difficult, and for a time there were regional meetings in several areas of the U.S. However, only the Eastern U.S. and Eastern Canada region truly thrived, continuing to hold regional meetings well into the 1970s. Eventually, as communications and travel became easier, the biennial national meeting became the Society's focus and regional meetings were discontinued.

After this strong beginning, ASSBT national meetings were held almost biennially for many years (Table 2). No meeting was held in 1944, when momentous events elsewhere in the world held center stage. Due to severe economic problems in the industry, the ASSBT meeting originally scheduled for 1980 was postponed for a year, putting us on the now familiar odd-year meeting schedule of today. Although time does not permit a detailed discussion, many interesting facts can be gleaned from the Society's records of meetings through the years.

In Table 2 only the ASSBT president is listed, but of course many, many others have been deeply and critically involved in leadership of the Society. In addition to the vital roles played by the other officers, the person serving as Program Chair for the biennial meeting was vital to our success, for without a well-organized and interesting meeting program, there would have been no impetus to continue as an organized group. Following in the tradition of excellent Program Chairs through the years is this year's Chair, Pamela S. Thomas, who has done a superb job in organizing our program.

Let me share with you just a few interesting notes I jotted down while reviewing the Society's records of past biennial meetings. The first banquet was held in 1940 at the Shirley-Savoy Hotel in Denver, at a cost of \$4.00. The Society records contain the program from each meeting, and sometimes other items such as registration cards, banquet tickets, and so forth. Beginning with the 1954 meeting in Denver there was a "Ladies' Program." The first one included a visit to the U.S. Mint, a trip to the Denver Museum of Natural History, and a luncheon and fashion show. Through time, such programs have evolved into varied activities intended for "accompanying persons." We hope this year's offerings included something for everyone who cared to participate.

The Society's records contain a wonderful collection of photographs of machinery and of beet cultivation, harvest, and processing, but we are woefully short on photographs of people who have been important to the Society and the beet sugar industry. No doubt many such photographs still exist, perhaps in company archives or in university or town libraries where beets historically were important, but we do not have immediate access to these. I will return to this subject later.

An important event in our history is noted in the 1952 meeting program: the Secretary-Treasurer is listed as one James H. Fischer. Surely there is no one in our Society who does not know or know of Jim Fischer. As a young engineer, Jim was employed by the Beet Sugar Development Foundation (BSDF), first as a student, then beginning in 1948 as a full-time employee. A few years later Jim was

Table 2. ASSBT biennial meetings and presiding officer.

YEAR	LOCATION	PRESIDENT
1938	Salt Lake City	A. W. Skuderna
1940	Denver	N. R. McCreery
1942	Salt Lake City	J. E. Coke
1946	Denver	W. Y. Cannon
1948	San Francisco	H. E. Brewbaker
1950	Detroit	W. W. Robbins
1952	Salt Lake City	P. A. Reeve
1954	Denver	C. E. Cormany
1956	San Francisco	P. B. Smith
1958	Detroit	Austin Armer
1960	Salt Lake City	Harvey P. H. Johnson
1962	Denver	Dewey Stewart
1964	San Francisco	Guy Rorabaugh
1966	Minneapolis	B. E. Easton
1968	Phoenix	Lloyd T. Jensen
1970	Denver	George E. Rush
1972	Phoenix	Lloyd W. Norman
1974	San Diego	R. T. Johnson
1976	Phoenix	Hugh G. Rounds
1978	San Diego	Glen W. Yeager
1981	San Diego	M. A. Woods
1983	Phoenix	Stewart Bass
1985	San Diego	Robert E. Munroe
1987*	Phoenix	Donald L. Oldemeyer
1989	New Orleans	Lloyd L. Neville
1991	Monterey	Roger W. Hill
1993	Anaheim	Alan Dexter
1995	New Orleans	Richard C. Zielke
1997	Phoenix	Susan S. Martin
1999	Orlando	John A. Richmond

*50th Anniversary Meeting

appointed Secretary of BSDF, and the Foundation graciously consented to allow the ASSBT office to be managed in conjunction with that of BSDF. Jim continued in this role, managing both BSDF and ASSBT, until his retirement in 1987. Many important events in ASSBT history occurred under his charge. One of these was the establishment of reciprocal exchanges between ASSBT and IIRB. The first of these occurred in 1963 when a dozen or so ASSBT members crossed the Atlantic in a propeller aircraft (J. Fischer, pers. comm.). Their tour of European sugar beet production and processing was judged a big success. In 1965 a group of IIRB members made a similar visit to observe North American sugar beet technology in a tour that encompassed the District of Columbia, Michigan, Ontario, Colorado, the Imperial Valley and Salinas, California, and Arizona. In 1969 a second ASSBT group visited Denmark and Sweden, and in 1973 an IIRB group toured sugar beet areas in California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and North Dakota. Jim Fischer coordinated all of these interactions with our European colleagues.

Biennial ASSBT meetings continued to be held in midwinter through the 50s and 60s, always in or near sugar beet producing areas. At the 1966 meeting in Minneapolis, the temperature reportedly never got above zero, and considerable sentiment was expressed for moving the meeting to a warmer location! At the time, there was a significant sugar beet seed operation in Arizona...thus, Phoenix was selected as the site of the 1968 meeting. It was 29 years ago, therefore, that ASSBT first met in Phoenix, where we again find ourselves in 1997 (with several other visits in the interim). Notice that all meetings since 1970 have been held in warm climates!

As we continue to review meeting sites and ASSBT presidents through the years, one item is worthy of mention. In 1972, Lloyd Norman concluded his term as ASSBT's president. Lloyd remains an active participant in the sugar beet industry, and we are delighted that he is again with us at our 1997 meeting, 25 years later. We are grateful for his long and dedicated service to the Society.

In 1987, once again meeting in Phoenix, the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists celebrated its 50th Anniversary. Shortly thereafter, James Fischer retired from his position with BSDF and ASSBT, although, as we know, he continues to be very active in our Society and industry. Stephen Reynolds was hired in 1986 to overlap with Jim for a time, then to succeed him as Secretary-Treasurer. Steve served until 1988, when he departed for another opportunity. Thomas K. Schwartz assumed the reins of BSDF and ASSBT in September, 1988. Soon thereafter his title was changed to Executive Vice-President to reflect more accurately the duties and executive nature of the position. We also should recognize the current staff, office manager Janet Barday, who began when Jim Fischer was still the executive officer, and business manager Rebecca Lucy, who was hired a few years after Tom Schwartz took over. We have been unbelievably fortunate that all the people employed by BSDF through the years also have been interested in and devoted to the success of ASSBT. Our Society could not have survived without them.

Along with the "changing of the guard" when Tom Schwartz arrived in 1988 came other changes. The Society's journal received a facelift, incorporating a new logo and a new name, **Journal of Sugar Beet Research (JSBR)**. Jim Fischer had served as editor of the **Journal of the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists** for many years. I assumed the editorship of JSBR after Jim retired, and Alan Dexter was appointed editor after I was elected to ASSBT office. Throughout the

JSBR years, 1988 until the present, we have been fortunate to have a dedicated group of Associate Editors. Thanks to all of them for their hard work on our behalf.

Other changes also followed: we broke the Phoenix-or-San Diego pattern and held a highly successful meeting in New Orleans in 1989, then met in Monterey, in Anaheim, back to New Orleans, and here once again in Phoenix. Future meetings are scheduled for Orlando, Vancouver, and San Antonio.

No formal exchanges with IIRB had occurred since their 1973 visit to the U.S., although individual ASSBT or IIRB members attended meetings of the corresponding organization. Thus, when Tom Schwartz proposed that ASSBT sponsor a trip to the 1991 IIRB summer meeting in Bologna, Italy, followed by a tour of sugar beet areas in Germany and The Netherlands, his suggestion was accepted with great enthusiasm by the Society's board of directors. The success of that trip led to two others since then: in 1995 to the IIRB meeting in Beaune, France, followed by a tour of Morocco and Spain; and in 1997 to the IIRB meeting in Cambridge, England, and a tour of sugar beet facilities in Sweden and Denmark. We have been welcomed with incredible generosity and sharing of information by IIRB and by our hosts in each country visited. Our participants agree these trips have been especially beneficial in increasing contacts with our European colleagues, and in giving us a better perspective of problems and advances in sugar beet research, production, and processing world-wide. As a result of the success of these trips and the participation of ASSBT members in IIRB meetings and *vice versa*, IIRB Secretary General Dr. Ralph Beckers recently proposed that ASSBT and IIRB hold a true joint meeting. Executive committees of the two organizations are developing plans for such a meeting, which is expected to supplant the scheduled ASSBT meeting of 2003 in San Antonio, Texas. This will open a new chapter in the relationship between ASSBT and IIRB, and we may expect still more cooperation and more joint ventures in the future.

A very important part of ASSBT is its recognition of people who have been important to the Society or to the sugar beet industry. It is important, in any review of ASSBT history, also to review our awards. To begin, ASSBT presents the **Forty-Year Veteran Award** "...to a Society member at the time of completing forty years of service to the beet sugar industry." Those who have served so long and well truly deserve our gratitude and recognition.

The **Meritorious Service Award** is presented "...to a member who has been outstanding in promoting the objectives of the Society, or has made significant contributions to the beet sugar industry." Forty nine persons have received this award since 1981, and five additional awards will be presented at the banquet concluding this meeting.

The Society also may elect to **Honorary Membership** a person "...who has rendered outstanding service to the beet sugar industry or has by virtue of scientific accomplishments acquired the admiration and respect of this Society..." Since this award was instituted in 1954 there have been only 34 individuals so honored, six of whom are from outside North America. Four additional honorary members, including two from outside North America, have been elected in 1997, and will be announced at our concluding banquet.

Finally, the Society's highest honor is the **Savitsky Memorial Award**, named for Viacheslav and Helen Savitsky, who courageously escaped from communism during World War II and became

prominent figures in the annals of U.S. sugar beet research scientists (McFarlane, 1993). No doubt they are best known for the discovery of monogerm sugar beet seed. Recipients of the Savitsky Award "have excelled in either scientific advancement in the field of sugar technology, or service and dedication to the sugar industry." To date, only two persons have received this award: Dr. R. A. McGinnis in 1991, and Mr. James H. Fischer in 1995. Clearly, these two awardees have established a high standard for this award. I should point out, too, that Jim Fischer is the only person to have received every possible ASSBT award. We are pleased and honored that Jim is here with us at this meeting.

I have tried to recap our Society's history, 1937 to 1997, but obviously in a short presentation it is impossible to do other than "hit the high points." As I commented earlier, many people have held office or served on committees and have been instrumental in our work and success. Also, our meeting General Program Chairs have been very important; the success of our meetings depends on their work, together with that of their Agricultural and Factory Operations Chairs and our Section and Session Leaders. Thus, many people have worked to make ASSBT what it is today. I am reminded of something Dr. Martin Luther King once said: "We don't make history. History makes us." Our Society has been shaped by those who have gone before, and in turn, it shapes us.

To conclude this historical review, I am pleased to tell you that the ASSBT board of directors in 1996 approved a major initiative with the goal of developing a comprehensive history of the sugar beet industry in North America. Recent decades have seen major changes in the industry. Plants have closed and companies have gone out of business or been absorbed by others. Records have disappeared or been placed in storage, usually uncataloged and often in locations unknown to subsequent workers. In addition, as the generations that established our industry and our research network retire and pass on, much knowledge departs with them. The Sugar Beet Industry History Project committee, headed by Charles Schmalz of The Amalgamated Sugar Company and John Richmond of Holly Sugar Corporation, is charged with developing the history project concept into a functional plan. One approach being considered is to support an ongoing series of graduate students through a relationship with a project director at an appropriate university history department. The committee also is gathering initial information on sources and locations of information, and determining the focus and desired outcomes of the project. There is much to be done, but the first steps have been taken. This project is an effort to preserve our industry's heritage, and it deserves cooperation and help from each of us. If you have photographs (especially of people), company histories, or other historical information pertinent to our industry, please let us know via the Society office. Perhaps at future ASSBT meetings or in our journal we will have papers on historical topics, or oral histories from retired persons important to the industry.

This brief review brings us to the present, and inevitably our thoughts turn to the future. Many challenges face agriculture in the near term. We may think, for example, of changes that may be associated with the increasingly global marketing of agricultural products; of pressures arising from population growth and urban-agriculture conflicts; and of the need to address environmental quality and natural resource issues. I have no doubt that our industry will face and overcome these and other challenges. More immediately and more specifically, our challenge for the future is just what it has always been: to improve sugar beet production, and to improve storage and processing technology. We will develop and apply new research-based knowledge toward these ends, and we will continue

to exchange such information with one another at our biennial ASSBT meetings. This is what our Society is about. Our current constitution states:

The objectives of this Society shall be to foster all phases of sugar beet and beet sugar research, to promote the dissemination of resultant scientific knowledge, to strive to maintain high standards of ethics, and to cooperate with other organizations having objectives beneficial to the beet sugar industry.

Our history tells that this is what we have done in the past, and I am confident it is what we will do in the future. At almost every meeting we express our pleasure that in ASSBT we unite all facets of our industry. This is our Society's history, and that history is indeed prologue to the future. I have every confidence that the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists will continue to be a vital link among sugar beet researchers, growers, and processors.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to James H. Fischer for sharing his vast knowledge of ASSBT with me. Tom Schwartz and Janet Barday provided access and help in locating historical documents in the Society's files. Earl Ruppel, our unofficial ASSBT photographer, helped me prepare slides from old black-and-white photos in the Society's archives.

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