

## AAPA: The First Eighty-Five Years

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AAPA's beginnings can be traced to the fall of 1912, when an invitation was extended to public port officials throughout the country to attend a conference of U.S. port authorities in New York the following December. The purpose, said the letter, would be to "exchange ideas relative to port organization, to promote the exchange of information and the development of uniform methods of administration and possibly to provide for some permanent organization between the principal port authorities."

Inspiration for the meeting came from Calvin Tompkins, New York City's Commissioner of Docks. [Founded in 1870 as the Department of Docks, Tompkins' agency later became the New York City Department of Ports, International Trade and Commerce. Under the 1991 reorganization of New York City's economic development and business service agencies, the functions of the Department of Ports, International Trade and Commerce were shifted to the newly-created New York City Economic Development Corporation. EDC is a New York State-incorporated local development corporation exclusively under contract with the City to perform various economic development functions, which include the management of City-owned port commerce and rail freight facilities. The agency is an AAPA Corporate member.] Mr. Tompkins was one of the co-signers of the invitation letter along with George W. Norris, Director of the Philadelphia Department of Wharves, Docks and Ferries, and Hugh Bancroft, Chairman of the Directors of the Port of Boston.

The meeting, hosted by Calvin Tompkins, convened December 10 in the rooms of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York.

Present were representatives from Mobile, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Jacksonville, Baltimore, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Providence, Norfolk, New Jersey, and, of course, New York City. Also represented were various New York City-area commercial associations and interests, as well as several federal agencies. Among the latter was the Isthmian Canal Commission, a reminder that the Panama Canal was under construction at that time.

Following a welcoming address by New York Mayor William J. Gaynor, who wondered aloud how such bitter rivals could agree to meet and work cooperatively, the assembled delegates got down to business.

A constitution was drafted and ratified for what would be known as the National Association of Port Authorities. Two classes of membership were established. The first was reserved for public port administrators, and for representatives of the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Isthmian Canal Commission, and the U.S. departments of Treasury, War, Navy, and Commerce & Labor. Others with port-related interests were classified as "associate members." Annual dues were set at \$50 each for Class One members and \$25 each for Associate members. Procedures were established for the selection of officers, calling meetings, and conducting other business of the new association.

A slate of officers was elected, with Mr. Tompkins as president and Col. George W. Goethels, the Army engineer in charge of building the Isthmian Canal, as first vice president. The others selected included four more vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, and a board of directors.

The meeting concluded the following day, after which the delegates departed by train for successive, day-long inspection tours of the ports of Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Norfolk.

By the end of the month, 11 ports had paid their dues and were enrolled as members. The 11 were: Baltimore, Philadelphia, Norfolk, Mobile, Rhode Island, Boston, Los Angeles, New Orleans,

New York City, San Francisco, and the New Jersey State Board of Commerce and Navigation. All of them or their administrative descendants are still active members of AAPA.

When AAPA was formed, public port administration was in its infancy. Though public port agencies existed in a number of states and port cities, few, if any, actually owned or operated marine terminals. Commercial ports were for the most part dominated by powerful railroad corporations, which owned the terminals and controlled access to harbor areas.

During the period when AAPA was formed--the so-called Progressive Era of American politics--vigorous protest to the railroad monopoly arose and crystallized in the form of "free harbor" movements around the country. These sentiments underlay the decision to call the meeting in New York, where they were articulated in a particularly forceful manner by Calvin Tompkins, who declared that ports were too important to be left to the unfettered whim of powerful corporations. Instead, he said, seaport terminals should be built with public funds and operated under public control to assure equal access to all carriers and shippers. The public, not unbridled private enterprise, should have the upper hand.

In striving to achieve these goals, it was recognized that public port agencies should be efficiently managed by competent, well-trained professionals of unimpeachable moral character. Given the need, it was essential that port authorities work together to further the science of support administration, to develop professionalism among its members, and, in all, work together for the common good.

Thus it was Calvin Tompkins, who provided the inspiration and the leadership, that brought the association into being and gave it a sense of purpose. Years later, long after Tompkins' death in 1920, the official AAPA historian, J. Spencer Smith, wrote:

"If we have accomplished anything by way of better harbor administration....then our first acknowledgment must be to Calvin Tompkins, who conciliated our prejudices and pointed the way for each of us to help the other."

A sturdy foundation had been laid in New York. One year later, the convention was held in New Orleans. The Association's second meeting was attended by 50 member representatives as well as observer delegations from the ports of Beaumont, Galveston, Oakland, Orange, Pensacola, Port Arthur, Seattle, and significantly, the Montreal Harbour Commission.

The 1914 convention, in Baltimore, which coincided with the centennial observance of the Star Spangled Banner, came just months after the opening of the Panama Canal, and, more ominously, the outbreak in Europe of the First World War. For the Association, too, it was a major milestone. Here it was decided to extend membership eligibility to ports throughout the Western Hemisphere, and accordingly, the organization was renamed "The American Association of Port Authorities." Within a year, AAPA had welcomed its first Canadian port members--Montreal, Hamilton, and Toronto. At its first Canadian convention, held in Montreal in 1916, AAPA also elected its first Canadian president -- W.G. Ross of Montreal.

The Association's first Latin American member ports (Para, Brazil, and Arica, Chile) joined in 1921 and its first Caribbean member (Ciudad Trujillo, Dominican Republic) in 1949.

While World War I was the overshadowing event of that era, AAPA concerned itself with a variety of other issues--not just the questions of peace and neutrality, but such things as free port, the standardization of port administration, the need for accurate port statistics, water pollution, fire prevention, and above all, the rate and service practices of the railroads. After the United States entered the War, a particularly contentious problem arose in the form of massive congestion at the major embarkation ports, which led to harsh criticism of the federal government's management of wartime traffic movements.

The 1918 convention in Boston, which preceded by about two months the signing of the Armistice, was notable in a number of respects. First was the fact that the welcoming address was delivered by none other than Calvin Coolidge, the then Lt. Governor of Massachusetts and a future president of the United States. Moreover, it was in Boston that the Association established its first standing committees. The three were the committees on Glossary; Handling Facilities and General Port Facilities; and on Pilotage, Local Port and Stevedore policies. During that convention, a bitter debate erupted over whether the U.S. merchant marine and particularly the railroads should be permanently nationalized. During the war, the carriers had been taken over and managed by a federal agency. The issue seriously divided the members. A resolution supporting nationalization was defeated, but only after a rancorous parliamentary maneuver.

Spreading indifference and perhaps the after tone of the bitter meeting in Boston made 1919 a year of crisis for the Association. Evidence of that came at the Galveston convention, the following year, which attracted just 29 registrants, including the minister who pronounced the invocation. Fearing that the Association was facing extinction, the leadership decided on a plan of action to restore its health. That included a decision to publish a monthly bulletin, with the AAPA secretary, Michael P. Fennell, Jr., of Montreal as editor.

The first issue of the Monthly Bulletin, dated January 1920, was devoted mainly to the proceedings of the Galveston Convention. Subsequent issues were filled with news about AAPA, analyses of technical matters and reports on port developments around the world. The May 1920 issue, for example, featured articles on dredging on the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the unification of ports, and the use of motor trucks in marine terminal operations. Included too was a list of papers to be delivered at the upcoming Chicago convention, and news about the planned widening and deepening of the Houston Ship Channel; the new State Pier in Portland, Maine; and a prospective \$50 million loan for harbor development in Baltimore.

The Bulletin proved to be an almost instant success. Readership and advertising grew at a gratifying pace. The following spring, beginning with the March 1921 issue, it was renamed World Ports.

In the meantime, Mr. Fennell traveled extensively on AAPA's behalf. His travels and the magazine's popularity appear to have had the desired affect. Membership increased by 90 percent in 1920, and the Chicago convention of that year drew 136 registrants, or more than four times the number that attended the convention of 1919.

The Association flourished through the remainder of the decade under a succession of gifted presidents, including Mr. Fennell, who served in 1923/24. Others were Benjamin Thomson of Tampa, John H. Walsh of New Orleans, George B. Hegardt of Oakland, Brigadier General T.L. Tremblay of Quebec, and Major General W.L. Sibert of Mobile, and J. Spencer Smith, president of the New Jersey State Board of Commerce and Navigation. Mr. Smith, AAPA's president from 1925-27, was among those attending the New York meeting of 1912 and was also the Association's first official historian.

In that era, too, another individual began a long, distinguished career in the service of AAPA. Tiley S. McChesney, assistant general manager of the Port of New Orleans, an active participant in AAPA affairs since the New Orleans Convention of 1913, in 1922 succeeded Mr. Fennell as AAPA secretary, a position he would retain until his death in 1949. In 1936, he assumed the additional duties of AAPA treasurer.

Mr. McChesney managed AAPA's affairs from his home in New Orleans. There, he kept its books, conducted extensive correspondence, and oversaw the management of World Ports. For his services, Mr. McChesney was paid a small salary and expenses. Thus, Mr. McChesney became AAPA's first staff member and his home its first headquarters. He provided the Association with a sense of continuity, a link with its founders. Presidents came and went, but McChesney remained.

Well-attended conventions followed in Chicago, Seattle, Toronto, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Norfolk, St. Louis, Houston, Quebec, and New York. This was the era of Prohibition, which helps explain the particular popularity of Canadian conventions and Canadian delegations in that period. At the Houston-Galveston convention of 1928, our Canadian friends arrived carrying what the official AAPA history describes as "elephant-edition thermos bottles." At the opportune time, the Canadian delegation's hotel suite was packed with eager conventioners. Unfortunately, somewhere between the lobby and their suite, someone lacking a sense of humor had discovered the contents of the baggage, and when it came time to fill the glasses, there was nothing to pour over the ice cubes but water. Such are life's little disappointments.

Signs of vigor were evident in a well-nourished treasury and continuing increase in membership. Evidently, corporate membership was not strictly limited to ports of the Western Hemisphere. Among those inducted into the Association in 1925, for example, in addition to the ports of Albany, Coos Bay, Oswego and San Juan, were the Port of Manila, and the Chief, Direction of Sea Transport of the Soviet Union. For a time, too, the Bombay Port Trust and various British and European ports were also AAPA members.

Committee work, which had lapsed earlier in the decade, rebounded. Nine standing committees were established in 1920; more were added in the years ahead; and by 1930, there were 16 including, for example, the committees on National Defense, Fire Prevention, Port Research, Oil Pollution, Uniform Port Practices and Terminal Rates, Foreign Trade Zones, and Public Ownership of Rail-Water Terminal Facilities.

AAPA conventions received regular reports on legislative developments affecting ports in both the United States and Canada, but did not maintain a Washington office, and appears to have done little if any lobbying.

Examples of AAPA concerns in that era, based on a sampling of papers delivered at conventions or published in *World Ports*, were the fire hazards created by oil pollution of waters, coordination of rail and water facilities; ship and cargo salvage operations, the science of port planning, the importance of commercial ports to the U.S. Navy, and recreational waterfront area development.

During this period, AAPA produced a number of important documents. An annual directory to the ports of North America was featured annually in *World Ports*. In addition, AAPA published a glossary of port terminology, a survey of port financial practices, and a comprehensive bibliography of books and articles dealing with ports and related subjects.

The thirties were difficult times for both the country and its ports. The depression cut deeply into port traffic, making it difficult for port authorities to continue their membership in the Association.

Nonetheless, AAPA held its own. In 1930, the Association was incorporated in Delaware, thus giving it a permanent legal structure. Thirties-Era conventions were held in Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Toronto, New York, Houston-Galveston, San Francisco, Wilmington (Delaware), St. John-Halifax, and again in Milwaukee. During these years, the Association lobbied successfully for the enactment of legislation permitting the creation of foreign trade zones, worked to secure some degree of uniformity in port rates and practices, produced a Canon of Ethics for governing public port entities, cooperated with the National Fire Protection Association in the development of an acceptable fire code for ports, and succeeded, with the help of some Congressional pressure, in persuading the Interstate Commerce Commission to provide for more effective regulation of common carriers transporting hazardous commodities on U.S. waterways.

When the decade came to a close, war had again broken out in Europe. During the next couple of years, the mobilization of the national economy and national defense preparedness were prime considerations. After the U.S. entered the conflict, major port facilities were taken over and

operated by the War Department. Shipping was subject to naval control. The coastwise trades, which had accounted for much pre-war port business, was virtually annihilated by German U-Boats.

Wartime rationing and travel restrictions crimped AAPA activities to a considerable extent. World Ports, which by then was being published under contract by the Traffic World Corporation, virtually suspended operations: only one issue a year was published in 1942, 1943 and 1944. Full monthly publication did not resume until late 1945.

When the War ended, the energies of the Association and the country turned to peace-time recovery. Immediate concerns were the return to port authorities and private sector of port facilities taken for trades, the expansion of international commerce, and particularly important to the port industry itself, the debate over federal ownership of tidelands.

The year 1947 marked a turning point in AAPA's history. That year, Traffic World Corporation decided to move the editorial offices of World Ports from Chicago to Washington. In charge of the Washington operation was a bright young editor, Paul A. Amundsen, who, on top of his journalistic activities, also established an informal AAPA headquarters with the blessing of the then AAPA president, E.O. Jewell of New Orleans. That December, the leadership decided to put the Washington presence on a more formal basis, by appointing Amundsen to the salaried position of Special Assistant to the President, while continuing his editorial responsibilities with the magazine. At the Milwaukee Convention of 1949, which followed the death of Tiley McChesney, Amundsen was named AAPA's Secretary/Treasurer. Several years afterward, the title was changed to Executive Director.

AAPA now had a full-time Washington presence. The regular spring meetings of the executive committee were expanded into more formal affairs that included what has since become the Association's "Washington Peoples' Luncheon." Other AAPA traditions, among many, that trace their beginnings to the Amundsen era are the Advisory, Puertos Amigos, the Salary Survey, the Port Management Seminars, and a slew of books on port development, port engineering, port maintenance, the history of the Association, port development overseas, port management and port planning. Most important, Paul Amundsen put AAPA into the Washington, DC directory permanently.

Mr. Amundsen retired in 1974, to be succeeded as executive director by Richard J. Schultz, a career port executive, who most recently had been port director of the port of Brownsville. After Mr. Schultz stepped down, the office was assumed by J. Ron Brinson, who came to Washington after a distinguished career in journalism and as an executive with the South Carolina State Ports Authority.

Under Mr. Brinson's leadership, AAPA took a quantum leap. A full-time government relations program was established. Frequent appearances at Congressional hearings, constant contact with key federal agencies, and, in general, a greatly expanded Washington presence characterized the era. Research and membership services were greatly expanded. The annual Spring Conference took on the form of a mini-Convention. A full-slate of seminars became a regular part of the annual AAPA activity calendar. In August 1984, AAPA relocated its headquarters to Alexandria, Virginia.

During the Brinson years, there were also important organizational changes. Previously, the cadre of top elected officers included president, president-elect, and vice president. In 1980, the titles were changed to chairman, chairman-elect and vice-chairman, respectively, and the title of president was assigned to the Association's chief executive officer.

Even more substantial changes were to follow. Early on, the board of directors was organized into regional delegations representing the Association's U.S., Canadian, and Latin American/Caribbean Corporate members. The regional delegations nominated their own

representatives to the Board of Directors but until the mid-1980s did not have their own officers. Instead, the Corporate members voted collectively at the annual conventions to elect the board of directors and a vice president (vice chairman after 1980) who automatically ascended to the positions of president-elect (chairman-elect) and president (chairman of the board).

At the Portland Convention in 1985, the bylaws were amended so as to allow broader participation in the governance of the association by each of the delegations. This was done by providing that each of the then three delegations -- U.S., Canadian and Latin American/Caribbean -- would select its own slate of officers -- a chairman, chairman-elect, and vice chairman.

From the chairmen-elect of the three delegations, the board of directors, voting at the Spring Conference, would elect a chairman of the board to serve in the ensuing activity year. The objective, among others, was to create broader opportunity for the corporate members of all three delegations to participate more directly in the governance of the association while at the same time focusing on issues of regional importance.

The new system was fully implemented in 1987-88, during the tenure of Mr. Brinson's successor, Erik Stromberg. At the Cleveland Convention in 1991, it was decided to create separate delegations for the Latin American and Caribbean Corporate members. Since then, the office of Chairman of the Board has been occupied, in succession, by port directors from Canada, Chile, the United States, and the Caribbean.

The decade of Mr. Stromberg's leadership also witnessed expansion of the Association's advocacy role at the national and international levels (with special emphasis on dredging and environmental issues), the launching of a national public awareness program, a more diversified seminar program (including its annual week-long Marine Terminal Training Conference), a vigorous re-awakening of its "Puertos Amigos" outreach to the ports of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the initiation of a Professional Port Manager (PPM™) certification program.

Mr. Stromberg was succeeded in September 1995 by Kurt Nagle, AAPA's Senior Vice President and a staff member since 1985.

AAPA has come a long way these 85 years, and so has the public port industry. Publicly owned port facilities, just a dream in Calvin Tompkins' day, are an accepted fact. And despite the doubts of those, such as Mayor Gaynor, we have indeed succeeded in establishing a permanent organization. Our founders and their successors have left a grand legacy. It is up to us and those who come afterwards to keep the flame alive.

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