



# NEWSLETTER

The big construction history event to recognize in this issue is the 4th International Congress on Construction History, especially as it only comes around every 3 years. It was held in Paris over July 3rd to 7th attended by about 350 delegates which included a decent American contingent. Among them were several members who will be helping to organize the next Congress which will be held in Chicago in 2015. The newsletter includes a report on the proceedings and some of the initial plans for Chicago.

Also included is an update on our 3rd Biennial meeting to be held at MIT, Boston on November 2nd & 3rd. We had an excellent response to the call for papers for both days, so you can expect a good program, with the first day focusing on American construction 1850-1950 and the second on the Guastavino Company's work in the US. Registration will be open in August, so hold the date!

It was good to receive from Marvin Levine a couple of book reviews about and by general contractors. This sector of the construction industry has largely ignored its history and it is the only major player without an historical society or interest group. CHSA is reaching out to this sector to encourage wider participation. The fact that we now have 6 well known contracting companies plus the AGC of America as corporate members, is a good start.

Finally, an appeal for brief articles from you our members for the October issue.

Brian Bowen, Chairman  
 College of Architecture, Georgia Tech,  
 Atlanta GA 404-378-3779  
 brian.bowen@coa.gatech.edu

## THANKS TO OUR INSTITUTIONAL AND CORPORATE MEMBERS

- \* A. Ottavino Corp.
- \* Associated General Contractors of America
- \* Auburn University
- \* Canadian Centre for Architecture
- \* ConstellationCenter
- \* Construction Management Association of America
- \* Fluor Group
- \* Georgia Institute of Technology
- \* Gilbane, Inc.
- \* Gleeds USA, Inc.
- \* Hoover Treated Wood Products, Inc.

CONTENTS	
4TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CONSTRUCTION HISTORY, PARIS ..	2
BOOK REVIEWS .....	4
NOTICES.....	6
WHO WE ARE .....	7



*The magnificent Salon des Etudes of the Ecole des Beaux Arts served as HQ Central during most of the Congress*

- \* Kaese & Lynch
- \* Levine Construction Company
- \* Limeworks.us
- \* Minnesota State University, Mankato
- \* National Center for Preservation Technology and Training
- \* Paces Construction Co.
- \* The Pepper Companies
- \* The Whiting Turner Contracting Company
- \* University of Oklahoma
- \* University of Pennsylvania
- \* Vertical Access LLC

## 4TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CONSTRUCTION HISTORY, PARIS

This fourth gathering of construction historians followed Congresses in Madrid, Spain (2003), Cambridge, England (2006) and Cottbus, Germany (2009). It was held over 5 days from July 3rd to the 8th and was spread over 3 venues being the three main architectural schools in Paris – ENSA Paris-Malaquais (the old Ecole des Beaux Arts), ENSA La Villette and ENSA Versailles. This made for a fair amount of moving around from place to place, but the organizers laid it out well and it certainly introduced some variety.

Thus the Paris program followed those of previous Congresses in covering a wide range of subjects which were collected by the organizers into 55 different classifications. Once again most of these dealt with 'objects' (buildings, bridges & infrastructure, materials, design issues, etc.) as distinct from subjects devoted to organization, economics, contracts, regulation and the like.



*The magnificent Salon des Etudes of the Ecole des Beaux Arts served as HQ Central during most of the Congress*



*ENSA Versailles hosted some of the sessions. The school is housed in the Petite Ecurie or stables of the palace built in 1682*

We await statistics on attendance, but the estimate was for 350 registered delegates representing many countries, with about 25 – 30 from the USA and close to an equal number from Central and South America. 237 papers were listed in the program which were delivered in groups assigned to 66 sessions with seven or eight being run concurrently giving a wide, but sometimes frustrating, set of choices.

Construction History is of course a relatively new field of study which is still in the process of defining

All the papers are included in the proceedings – three weighty tomes that will be available from the organizers for purchase. When we receive ordering details we will pass these along to you.

There were seven keynote speeches of, in this writer's opinion, mixed quality in terms of delivery and subject matter. Given that the Congress ran over the July 4th holiday, we had asked that the keynote that day be presented by an American which was graciously accepted. Ledlie Klosky from the civil engineering school at West Point, gave a splendid and very suitable talk on "Men of Action – French Influence on the Founding of American Civil and Military Engineering". We are sure Ledlie would be pleased to e-mail you a copy if you ask him politely at Ledlie.Klosky@usma.edu

Listed below are the 14 papers delivered by CHSA members and we imagine most of them will be willing to forward you a copy, although we do not have confirmation of that. Please direct all paper request to chs@coa.gatech.edu and we will forward to the speakers.

Richard A. Etlin, University of Maryland  
*Toward an Iconography of Stereotomy*

Benjamin Ibarra-Sevilla, University of Minnesota  
*Transmission of Building Technology from Europe to the Americas*

Sara Wermiel, Boston, MA  
*Against Replication: Carved Brick at the Dawn of the Terracotta Age*

Jennifer Zessin, John Ochsendorf, MIT, Boston, MA  
*Efficiency in Form: Thomas Jefferson's Serpentine Walls at the University of Virginia*

Stephen Buonpane, Bucknell University, PA; Sarah Ebright, University of Wyoming; Alex Smith, Arup, NYC  
*The Timber Trusses of R. W. Smith: History, Design and Behavior*

Katherine McDonough, Stanford University & Anne Conchon, Universite de Paris  
*Road Construction Sites in 18th Century France: Labor and Administration in Action*

Dario A. Gasparini, Case Western Reserve University, OH

*Sunderland, Birdsall and the Roebling Company: Development and Diffusion of Construction Technologies for Suspension Bridges*

Richard Ryan, University of Oklahoma  
*Development and Use of Mechanized Heavy Construction Equipment in the United States*

Timothy Cooke, MIT & John Ochsendorf, MIT  
*The Temple of Diana at Baiae: History and Structure of an Imperial Roman Dome*

Kenneth Robson, University of Oklahoma  
*Managing the Design and Construction of the Empire State Building: Are there Lessons for Today's Projects?*

Lynne C. Lancaster, Ohio University  
*Heated Vaulting in Roman Britain and the Invention of Hollow Terracotta Voussoirs*

Mariachiara Faliva, Thornton Tomasetti  
*Integrated Methods for the Study of Construction Techniques*

Elizabeth Cook, College of William and Mary, VA  
*Building Culture and Competence: Demonstrating Knowledge on Construction Sites in 18th Century Virginia*

Donald Friedman, Old Structures Engineering, NYC & Brian Bowen, Georgia Institute of Technology  
*Two Crystal Palaces: Constructive Technology and Practice: Great Britain 1851 – United States 1853*

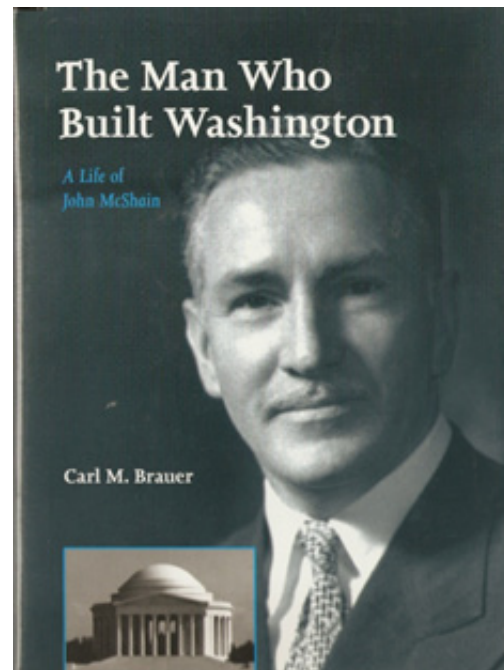
In the closing session, we were given the floor to preview the next Congress in Chicago in 2015. Tom Leslie, who is heading up the organizing committee, did an excellent job of promoting this location, to the extent that we were somewhat overwhelmed by the enthusiasm expressed. The French organizers have been very generous in sharing their experience and passing along lessons learned which gives us a good starting point. More about 2015 elsewhere in this newsletter.

## BOOK REVIEW - THE MAN WHO BUILT WASHINGTON: A LIFE OF JOHN MCSHAIN

by Carl M. Brauer, Hagley Museum and Library, 1996, 305 pages.

I always believed that most of the major buildings in Washington D.C. were built by The George A. Fuller Company, Thompson-Starrett, or Turner Construction. However, while reading an interesting book called "The Pentagon A History" written by Steve Vogel. I came across a section which described in detail the contractor selection process which included Fuller, Turner, and John McShain inc. of Philadelphia. I was well aware of both Turner and Fuller but had never heard of McShain. I decided to check the footnotes and found Carl M. Brauer's book "The Man Who Built Washington: a life of John McShain" listed as a reference. I contacted the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware who are the publishers of the book in conjunction with their exhibition "The Man Who Built Washington: John McShain and the American Construction Industry". The book traces McShain's life from early childhood, his family and father's construction business in Philadelphia and his expansion to become one of the largest builders in the United States. From the 1920's until his retirement in 1976, his general contracting firm worked throughout the Middle Atlantic States, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, but his greatest impact was on the nation's capital, where he constructed many of the monuments and public buildings that symbolized both our history and growth of the modern federal government: the Jefferson Memorial, the Pentagon, the National Airport, the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the rebuilding of the White House, the Kennedy Center, and many others. The book describes the many hurdles a contractor must overcome to survive and be successful.

The book also describes McShain's close relationship with Franklin Delano Roosevelt. His projects for Roosevelt included Roosevelt's library in Hyde Park, New York. Although McShain was a staunch republican he had a remarkably close relationship with Roosevelt, a democrat.



John McShain and President Franklin D. Roosevelt at Hyde Park, New York, 1939.

I am sure anyone interested in construction history during the early to mid part of the 20th century will find this book fascinating.

by Marvin J. Levine P.E., F.ASCE  
 President of the Levine Companies  
 mlevine@levineconstructioninc.com

## BOOK REVIEW - GOOD GUYS, WISEGUYS, AND PUTTING UP BUILDINGS: A LIFE IN CONSTRUCTION

By Samuel C. Florman, Thomas Dunne Books, New York, 2012, 342 PAGES

Over the years, I have read a number of books written by Samuel Florman including "The Civilized Engineer" and "The Existential Pleasures of Engineering" and was impressed by the fact that engineers can actually write about engineering from an intellectual and academic point of view without all the technical facts, figures, and diagrams. Mr. Florman writes about his profession with flowery prose like many of our great fiction writers. Some engineers like Henry Petrowski and Samuel Florman have also become accomplished writers while achieving great success in the engineering field.

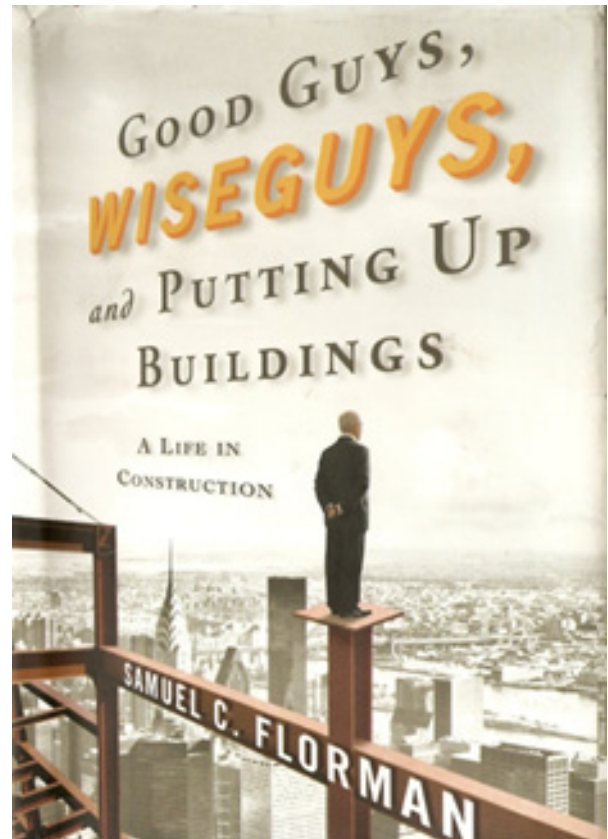
Mr. Florman's memoir tells us about his 50 years of experiences in the construction industry beginning in the middle of the 20th century. His story, like most memoirs, describes Mr. Florman's background, upbringing, family, education, military service in the Navy Seabees, and how he got into, and gained a foothold in the construction business.

In addition to telling us about the projects he worked on and the people who trained and taught him how the "game" is played; we learn about the "business" of construction in the New York City area. We learn about technologies, building systems (the 3 day concrete pour cycle) and how these means and methods were developed during his career.

We also get an interesting look at the rise of notorious Mafia families he came in contact with, the stormy evolution of the Civil Rights movement, the memorable personalities he met including politicians, civil servants, developers, architects and other technocrats, saintly do-gooders, and unscrupulous knaves.

This easy read charms us with the sights and sounds of the general construction industry and the people, stories, and buildings Florman put up along the way.

by Marvin J. Levine P.E., F.ASCE  
President of the Levine Companies  
mlevine@levineconstructioninc.com



*The only other book we are aware of that covers the story of a contractor (general or trade) is:*

*60 Years a Builder: The Autobiography of Henry Ericsson, by Henry Ericsson, A. Kroch & Son, Chicago, 1942*

*If you are aware of others, please let us know so we can share this with our members.*

### 3RD CHSA BIENNIAL MEETING, MIT, BOSTON, MA NOVEMBER 2ND & 3RD, 2012

We will gather for our third biennial meeting in Boston at MIT in November, following previous meetings at the University of Pennsylvania (2010) and at Georgia Tech (2008).

This will be a two day meeting with the first day devoted to American Construction History 1850-1950. Abstract submittals are being evaluated and a program assembled of 20 to 25 presentations. On that evening there will be a reception with a keynote address by Bob Sillman of Sillman Associates, prominent in historic preservation.

The second day will be devoted to the Guastavino Company's work and history. Multiple presentations are planned including several by Spanish experts.

In addition the event will be an opportunity to meet with colleagues, make new connections and enjoy a New England fall!

A detailed program is forthcoming and should be posted at the CHSA website shortly with registration to open in August. We will advise you directly the posting is in place.

We received the following meeting notice from the Hagley Museum & Library:  
October 11, 2012 - Thursday - 6:30 p.m.  
Research Seminar: Francesca Ammon, American Academy of Arts & Sciences  
“‘A Dirt Moving War’: How World War II Advanced the Business of Construction Equipment Manufacturers”  
The seminar is open to the public and is based on a paper that is circulated in advance. Those planning to attend are encouraged to read the paper before coming to the seminar. Copies may be obtained by contacting Carol Lockman at [clockman@hagley.org](mailto:clockman@hagley.org). The seminar begins promptly at 6:30 p.m., and takes place in the Copeland Room of Hagley's library building.

### 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CONSTRUCTION HISTORY, CHICAGO, IL, 2015

While this seems a long way off, one of the lessons learned from previous events is the need to get organized in plenty of time. Three main committees are in formation: Organizing (Tom Leslie), Scientific (John Ochsendorf) and Fund-raising (Brian Bowen). Don Friedman has volunteered to help John with Editorial issues, which were something of a problem for Paris. Tom plans to organize a local meeting in Chicago in September. Anyone in or near that city who has not been approached and who would be willing to serve, should contact Tom at [tleslie@iastate.edu](mailto:tleslie@iastate.edu).

Currently we are talking to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to hold the event in their facilities which are all downtown. Ideas and suggestions for local tours, people and institutions to contact and potential sponsors will be very welcome.

#### GILBANE, INC.

We welcome Gilbane, Inc. as our newest corporate supporting member.

It is one of the nation's oldest design and build companies founded in 1873 by William Gilbane and his brother Thomas as a family-run carpentry and general contracting shop in Providence, Rhode Island. Their firm quickly developed a reputation for building high-quality homes, mansions and public buildings such as the President's House at Brown University and the Casino in Roger Williams Park. Today the company is run by the fifth generation of the family and operates from 25 offices nation-wide. Other significant projects include the Vietnam Memorial and the Air and Space Museum, both in Washington, DC.

## WHO WE ARE

The Society is dedicated to the study of the history and evolution of all aspects of the built environment—its creation, maintenance and management. It is a forum for scholars and professionals in the field to share, meet and exchange ideas and research.

Membership is open to a wide range of construction related disciplines involved in the planning, development, design and construction of buildings and engineering infrastructure, in addition to those concerned with their operation and preservation.

Members share a passion for examining how our existing structures were planned, designed and built, with the purpose of using this knowledge to better preserve what we have and to guide us in determining future directions.

The US branch of the Construction History Society is a distinct entity catering to the historical studies and interests of its members here in America. Membership in the US branch includes full benefits in CHS at large, including receipt of the Society's Journal and newsletter and links to scholars in the field worldwide.

## CORRESPONDING SOCIETIES

Public Works Historical Society, [www.pwhs.net](http://www.pwhs.net)

Historical Construction Equipment Association, [www.hcea.net](http://www.hcea.net)

Society of Architectural Historians, [www.sah.org](http://www.sah.org)

## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Brian Bowen (Chairman), GA Tech, Atlanta, GA

Tom Leslie (Secretary), Iowa State University, Ames, IA

Jeff Beard, ACEC, Washington, DC

Jenn Cappeto: Higgins Quasebarth & Partners, New York, NY

Meghan Elliott, Meyer Borgman Johnson, Minneapolis, MN

Lee Gray, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC

Peter Hilger: University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

Donald Friedman, Old Structures Engineering, New York, NY

Marvin Levine: Levine Companies, Deerfield, IL

Sara Wermiel, Independent Scholar/Historic Preservation Consultant, Boston, MA

Construction History Society Representative  
James Campbell, Cambridge, UK

## COMMITTEE ADVISORS

Frank Matero, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

John Ochsendorf, MIT, Cambridge, MA

THIS IS YOUR NEWSLETTER AND THE ONLY VEHICLE WE HAVE TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH ONE ANOTHER.  
SO PLEASE USE THIS TO LET US KNOW:

- \* your interests in construction history, your current research, précis of recent lectures, etc.
- \* books, texts & articles that your fellow readers should know about
- \* names and e-addresses of colleagues and friends that we can include on our mailing list
- \* if you are willing to write a brief article for us.

**Construction History Society of America**  
Post Office Box 93461  
Atlanta, GA 30377-0461  
Email: [chs@coa.gatech.edu](mailto:chs@coa.gatech.edu)  
[www.constructionhistorysociety.org](http://www.constructionhistorysociety.org)