

Celebrating 75 Years of PSA

Dedicated to the memory of longtime
PSA Historian, Tony Patti, Hon PSA, FPSA

The History of the Presidents and Management of the Photographic Society of America

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In September 1933 a small group of men had dinner in Newark, New Jersey and from their dinner discussion came about the idea that an organization was needed for individual photographers. The available national photographic organization, *The Associated Camera Clubs of America*, as the name suggests, only accepted camera club memberships. By December 1st, 200 letters were sent to likely interested parties to be part of an organizing committee and nearly all of the solicited persons joined for one dollar per year's dues. The first one hundred members were designated as charter members.

One of the organizers of the Photographic Society of America (PSA), as it was named, was its first president, **Dr. Max Thorek**, (served 1934-1937) a renowned surgeon who was born in Hungary on March 10, 1880 and after immigrating to the United States, spent his professional life in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Thorek was the founder of the *International College of Surgeons* and the *International Museum of Surgical Science*. He was also an internationally acclaimed amateur photographer during the pictorialist movement, and author of several books on the subject, including *Creative Camera Art* (1937) and *Camera Art as a Means of Self-Expression* (1947).

The first Official Directory (present day equivalent to the Board of Directors) consisted of five Society officers: the Honorary President, **Louis Bucher**; President, **Dr. Thorek** (later FPSA); Vice President, **RL Van Oosting**; Secretary, **BH Chatto** and Treasurer, **Chester Wheeler** (later APSA). In addition, there was a group of six Directors and a group of Contributing Members.

By 1946 in accordance with the By-laws, "the management of PSA was vested in a Board of 22 Directors (BOD), which was aided by the General Assembly, an advisory body of 194 members which represented all branches of the Society. The BOD included six officers, seven

Division Chairman, eight other Directors and the Past President." (*March 1946, PSA Journal*.) The full BOD met semi-annually and an Executive Committee of 10 members met once a month. The nominating committee was expected to produce three candidates for each elected position.

By 1962 a move was started to reorganize the management of PSA. A plan was passed and in 1963 the Executive Committee (ExCom) came into being. The ExCom consisted of the 4 officers and the Vice Presidents and there was also a Board of Directors, which was made up of the ExCom, division chairmen, chairmen of all board standing committees and zone directors. This amounted to a large unwieldy number of people, which made it difficult to get approval on items that needed Board approval. Sometimes all had to vote by regular mail, as there was no email at that time. The Board proved to be too big to function efficiently.

Under President **Albert Sieg, Hon. PSA, FPSA, EPSA** (1999-2003), the management of PSA was streamlined to the present day form of a smaller Board of Directors. (For more details, read below under Albert Sieg.)

Presently, PSA is fortunate in having 5 living Ex-Presidents: **Paul Luebke, Hon. FPSA** (served 1985-1987); **Dr. Ralph Venk, Hon. FPSA** (1987- 1991); **Pauline Swezey Fredrickson, Hon. PSA, FPSA** (1995-1999); **Albert Sieg, Hon. PSA, FPSA, EPSA** (1999-2003) and **Richard Frieders, Hon. PSA, FPSA** (2003-2007). This well respected group was asked, "What do you consider to be your most important accomplishment as President of PSA?" Three responses were received:



Dr. Ralph Venk: (1987 – 1991)
"By far the most important event during my presidency was the move of PSA to Oklahoma City! The argument could be made that that decision saved PSA and at least I think so. After the move, the years of auditors' conclusions

that the Society was in danger of not being able to continue were immediately ended. We went from an outdated and outmoded operation to an efficiently run one. It was a decision that ultimately fell onto my shoulders, and thanks to a lot of support and help from numerous dedicated members it worked out.”



Albert Sieg, Hon PSA, FPSA, EPSA (1999-2003): “During my last year as Executive Vice President and then as President we changed the entire structure of PSA to modernize and streamline it. We did away with the old Area Representatives/ District Representatives

(etc.) organization and put in place the Region Directors, as we know them today. This gave the Board a much more direct contact with the members in the many regions. We also established the International Representatives program (first known as “country representatives”), which has proven to be invaluable to us, as so many of our members are from overseas. In addition to all this we totally modified the Board of Directors from an unwieldy 30 or so members to the present structure providing a much more nimble group who could get things done. The name of the officer’s group was changed from Executive Committee (ExCom) to the present Board of Directors (with an executive committee within consisting of the four executive officers plus the Operations Manager). However, perhaps the thing that made the most difference was the establishment of the Electronics Imaging Division. This came about at a time when digital photography was still in its infancy but did and still does provide the engine for the growth that PSA is now enjoying.”



Richard Frieders, Hon. PSA, FPSA (2003-2007): “I think my biggest accomplishment as President was the creation of the current PSA Web site. Prior to that we had separate sites for each division as well as the conference and the *PSA Journal*. Each site looked different and it

was really confusing for members to find things. The site now combines all PSA activities in one location with easy navigation between them. There are over 500 pages of information and we have between 600 & 700 visitors to the site each day. New features continue to be added to make the site the main source of information for all PSA members. Also, one of the things I did when I

became President was to do some cleaning at PSA Headquarters. Several days were spent replacing some of the 30-year-old office furniture with new desks, chairs and filing cabinets, having the walls re-painted and carpeting cleaned. The addition of a photo of each past president was added to the main hallway. It resulted in a much nicer work environment for our staff.”

Today a 14- member Board of Directors manage the affairs of the Society and all officers and their contact information are listed monthly on page 4 of the *PSA Journal*. Five of the members make up the Executive Committee (President, Executive Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Operations Manager.) The groups meet twice a year: once at Headquarters in Oklahoma City and again at the Annual International Conference. In between meetings, the officers are in frequent email contact with each other.

While we celebrate the 75th Anniversary of PSA, all Society officers are working hard to ensure the future success of the Photographic Society of America. ■

Historical Vignette:

The following is a list of PSA Presidents and dates of office:

1934-37	Max Thorek
1937-41	Col. Frank Liuni
1941-45	John S. Rowan
1945-49	Charles B. Phelps, Jr.
1949-51	John G. Mulder
1951-55	Norris Harkness
1955-59	Melvin M. Phegley
1959-63	Robert J. Goldman
1963-67	Nester Barrett
1967-71	Col. Joe E. Kennedy
1971-75	DeWitt Bishop
1975-79	Arthur P. Hendricks, Jr.
1979-83	Henry W. Greenhood
1983-85	Frank S. Pallo
1985-85	Harold D. Lorimor
1985-87	Paul T. Luebke
1987-91	Ralph E. Venk
1991-95	James H. Turnbull
1995-99	Pauline Sweezey
1999-2003	Albert L. Sieg
2003-2007	Richard M. Frieders
2007-	Fred Greene

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