

# *The Birth of Regional AAACE*

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REGIONAL MEETINGS are routine AAACE happenings that are generally taken for granted by today's members. But the regional-meeting concept didn't just happen. It was brought about by the pioneering efforts of some forward looking editors who grabbed the ball and ran with it down an unmarked field. To these explorers we owe a debt of gratitude.

My former boss, Life Member Ken Roy (retired Experiment Station editor at Auburn University), was one of the guiding lights in establishing regional meetings. We talked about this on several occasions, but I had never gone after the full story until I began work on this piece. Ken shared correspondence from his personal files to supplement his memory in helping me dig out this bit of AAACE history, which gives me a better understanding of the organization and more appreciation of some of our trail-blazing, senior members. The names mentioned are readily recognizable as some of AAACE's greats.

## *Beginning Dates to 1936*

Our story begins back in 1936, with a group of editors in Arkansas, Missouri, and surrounding states deciding to get together for a workshop type meeting on practical solutions to common problems – the type discussions that were not included at AAACE national meetings. Of course this meeting had no official connection with AAACE, but those attending were so enthusiastic that they proposed, and AAACE authorized, the beginning of regional meetings that are still going strong.

A. A. Jeffrey (Missouri) and Mr. Roy (then editor at University of Arkansas) were co-chairmen for setting up the unofficial 1936 get-together. Ken and his family made week-end outings seeking a restful, out-of-the-way place that had charm and served good

food. Big Spring Inn in the Ozark town of Neosho, Missouri, was the choice. Off the main stream of traffic, the Inn faced a mountain out of which flowed a cold, clear stream abounding with rainbow trout. In fact, the stream ran under part of the hotel. As would be expected, rainbow trout was a specialty of the Inn's dining room. (*Editor's Note:* Returning from the 1969 annual meeting in Columbia, Missouri, I made it a point to go through Neosho. Although the Inn was destroyed in a 1966 fire, the town still has its charm.)

### *Program Topics Have Familiar Ring*

With ideas gathered from their fellow editors, Roy and Jeffrey came up with a program covering these topics (most of which, somehow, sound up-to-date):

Informational relationships between Extension Service and Soil Conservation Service.

Informational needs in the National Agricultural Conservation Program.

Fitting Agricultural Conservation information and the regular Extension agriculture and home demonstration information program together.

Press service problems — production, distribution, contacts with editors (each state requested to bring samples).

Bulletin problems — originating subjects, production, format, printing, distribution (sample publications and system from each state requested).

Training agents and local leaders in information work, reporters' schools, news writing schools.

Editorial problem roundtable and question box (billed as an exchange of ideas in such areas as movies, film strips, loudspeaker equipment, exhibits, editorial administration, assistants, budgets, radio program management).

In addition to the state editors involved in the program, the section on the National Agricultural Conservation Program had Reuben Brigham, W. H. Darrow, Guy Bush, and John Dexter, information workers for the AAA (Agricultural Adjustment Administration).

### *Eight States Represented at Sessions*

When the group finally convened May 29-30, 1936, at Neosho, it had swelled to an eight-state gathering as more distant editors

had heard about the program and asked to be included. The attendance list furnished by Mr. Roy (with our apologies for any omissions) shows participants from the states and Washington, D.C., and sounds like a roll call of AAACE giants.

Arkansas — Frances Stanley, B. H. Mewis, Kenneth C. Lynch, and Ken Roy.

Iowa — Les R. Combs and Gertrude Dieken.

Kansas — Lisle Longsdorf, Gene Warner, and Jean Scheel.

Louisiana — Bentley Mackey and Marjorie Arbour.

Missouri — A. A. Jeffrey and L. R. Grinstead.

Nebraska — George Round, Robert Holland, and Sam Reck.

Oklahoma — Duncan Wall.

Texas — Minnie Fisher Cunningham.

Washington, D.C. — Morris Salisbury, Wayne Darrow, Lester Schlup, Reuben Brigham, Guy Bush, John Dexter, and George Ackerman.

Many of these went on to fame at other locations, but no attempt will be made to update the list of addresses. The group is well known to many of you. (Some of the folks in this account are no longer with us, of course, but they still live in Mr. Roy's memory.)

Despite being a hard working meeting, it proved pleasant for wives and families who accompanied several of the editors for an outing in the Ozarks. Family dinners were a feature, and a diversion at one such function had wives telling how they "latched on" to their husbands.

### *Practical Program Made Hit*

The down-to-earth discussions of specific editorial problems made quite a hit with the group, and they made two important decisions: (1) to meet again in 1937, with Roy and Jeffrey again to serve as co-chairmen, and (2) to share the idea with other states by proposing at the 1936 annual AAACE meeting (Madison, Wisconsin, August 18-20) that the organization authorize and establish such meetings in the several regions of the Nation.

Lisle Longsdorf (Kansas) began a June 8, 1936, letter to Mr. Roy by saying, "Faint heart never. . . . This is my reaction to presenting before the National AAACE group the prospect of regional meetings for editors. You should do it, and through what

media and voices is a question for us who were at Neosho to decide. It would be difficult for anyone who had not attended the Neosho meeting to see the benefit that each of us derived from getting together."

Continuing, Longsdorf suggested that Roy act as spokesman for the regional group and that all at Madison who were at Neosho to support the recommendation. He concurred with Roy's proposal for regional sessions for "New England editor, Eastern editor, Southeastern editor, and Western editor groups, etc."

### *Proposal Well Received by AAACE*

With firm support from his region and from such stalwarts as Reuben Brigham in Washington, Roy made his proposal at the Madison meeting. Apparently the members recognized a need for such meetings, and the proposal was accepted and approved at the 1936 business meeting.

With AAACE approval, the same group that met at Neosho in 1936 looked forward to another session the following year. As Longsdorf put it, "We can go ahead without feeling that we are out on a limb with the possibility of having the national organization sawing off the limb." As in 1936, Roy and Jeffrey made arrangements for the program, and Neosho again was the location choice.

Thus, the 1937 meeting at Neosho, Missouri, became the first official regional AAACE meeting. And the pattern has generally been followed to the present, with down-to-earth, workshop type programs — with a little fun and frolic thrown in — being the standard bill of fare in all regional sessions.