

Celebrating 50 years of IEEE ENCS: 1965 – 2015

Part 2: IEEE in North Carolina

Last month we learned about the American Institute of Electrical Engineers (AIEE) and the Institute of Radio Engineers (IRE), the ancestors of today's Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). In this article, we will talk about how these two organizations were established in North Carolina, and how the North Carolina Section was formed.

AIEE in North Carolina

From the founding of the AIEE in 1884 until 1929, electrical engineers in North Carolina who were AIEE members were part of the Virginia section. In March 1929, a group of electrical engineers met in Charlotte to discuss forming a state section of the AIEE in North Carolina. E. P. Coles, an employee of General Electric, and Earle J. Gluck, an employee of Southern Bell Telephone Company, were among the Charlotte-area engineers who organized the meeting.

One of the first engineers to speak in support of establishing a North Carolina AIEE section was Walter J. Seeley, who began teaching electrical engineering at Duke University in 1925, and was a fellow of both the AIEE and the IRE. Another attendee from the Raleigh area was William Hand Browne, Jr., who was Head of the Physics and Electrical Engineering Department at North Carolina State College (now NCSU) from 1908 to 1916, and head of the Electrical Engineering Department from 1917 to 1944.

On March 21, 1929, the North Carolina Section of the AIEE was officially chartered. Its first meeting was held in Charlotte on May 2, 1929. E.P. Coles was elected Chairman of the new Section. The first state-wide general meeting was held in Charlotte on October 23-4, 1929, and included a tour of a Duke Power plant near Charlotte. 95 persons, including 45 AIEE members, 25 students, and 25 visitors, attended.

W.H. Browne of NC State was elected Chairman of the North Carolina Section in 1934. Professor Browne had a reputation for being a tough grader ; in January 1930, students showing up for his class found the following note on the door of the classroom: "The papers from this class are the poorest I ever got in twenty years of teaching... It would be wise not to bother me for the rest of the week, which I must pass in humiliation and prayer. "



Figure 1. Professor William H. Browne, Jr. Professor of Electrical Engineering, NC State University, 1908-1944.

Professor W. J. Seeley of Duke University was elected Chairman of the North Carolina Section in 1936. He became Dean of the Duke Engineering Department (now the Pratt School of Engineering) in 1953. The Walter J. Seeley Scholastic Award is awarded annually at Duke to the member of the graduating class of the School who has achieved the highest scholastic average in all subjects.

While the AIEE North Carolina Section covered the entire state, subsections were soon created to focus on regional activities. By the early 1950s, subsections existed in Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Eastern North Carolina, and Western North Carolina.

IRE in North Carolina

While many AIEE members were employed in the power generation and distribution industry, engineers in the radio and communications industries often joined the Institute of Radio Engineers. From 1912 until the mid-1950s, IRE members in North Carolina belonged to the North Carolina-Virginia Section.

Western Electric and Bell Laboratories opened facilities in Winston-Salem and Burlington in the 1940s and 1950s, which brought many IRE members to North Carolina. This resulted in the formation of a Piedmont Subsection of the IRE in 1955, and the formation of an IRE North Carolina Section in 1957. The IRE North Carolina Section covered the entire state, except for ten counties in the northeastern part of the state, which retained their affiliation with the Virginia Section. The first chairman of the North Carolina Section of the IRE was H. H. Arnold.

Do you have an IEEE Story to Share?

We would like to hear from ENCS members who have stories to share about their experiences as IEEE members. We'd like to know when, where, and why you joined, how IEEE membership has benefitted you, and any other stories you would like to share. If you have a story to share, please contact Tom Jepsen at tjepsen@ieee.org.

Want to learn more?

To learn more about the AIEE, IRE, and the North Carolina Section, go to <http://sites.ieee.org/charlotte/files/2013/02/ctSecHistory29to79c.pdf>

Answers to Last Month's History Question

Do you know when the first electric lights appeared in North Carolina? And do you know when electric lighting was first used in Raleigh?

The first electric lighting in the state came from the arc lamps installed in the Arista Cotton Mill in Salem in 1881. Raleigh's board of aldermen authorized an electric lighting system for the city's streets in October 1885. The Thomson-Houston Electric Light Company supplied the power for arc lights that were turned on in December of that year. Source: "Electric Power," NCPedia, <http://ncpedia.org/electric-power>

This Month's History Question

When did the first radio station begin broadcasting in North Carolina? Which of the AIEE North Carolina Section founders helped set up the station?

(Answers will appear in the next ENCS Newsletter)

Tom Jepsen 3/18/2015