

## History of the Board 1908 - 1950

The purpose of this document is to present a comprehensive record of the Louisiana State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors and how it evolved so that the reader can have an appreciation for the contributions Louisiana engineers have made in the protection of the public in the State of Louisiana and in these United States. The Louisiana Board has been in the forefront in the development of the registration law for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors in the nation. The Statutes (La R.S. 37:681 General Provisions) states the purpose of the Louisiana Registration Law.

In order to safeguard life, health, and property, and to promote the public welfare, any person in either public or private capacity, or foreign or domestic corporation, practicing or offering to practice professional engineering or professional land surveying, shall be required to submit evidence that he is qualified to so practice and shall be registered as hereinafter provided; and it shall be unlawful for any person to practice or to offer to practice in this state, engineering or land surveying, as defined in this Chapter, or to use in connection with his name or otherwise assume, use, or advertise any title or description tending to convey the impression that he is a professional engineer or a professional land surveyor, unless such person has been duly registered under the provisions of this Chapter."

One should note that the purpose of the law is for the protection of the public and not for the advancement of or the economic well being of the individual engineer or of the profession. Societies, both technical and professional, exist for the advancement of the individuals within that society, although they too also propose to "safeguard life, health, and property--etc." Professional and technical societies serve the interest of their professions, and they should, whereas the registration boards throughout these United States exist solely for the protection of the public.

At the March 27, 1983 regular meeting of the Louisiana State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors the following resolution was passed:

"On a motion by Mr. Roy and seconded by Mr. Culpepper, the Board resolved that the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with Dr. Vliet and Dr. MacDonald, Past Executive Secretaries, prepare and publish a comprehensive history of the Board."

A number of engineers assisted and made contributions in the preparation of this history. Major contributors were: Mr. Leo M. Odom, P.E., for the early history (1908 1950); Dr. Daniel H. Vliet, P.E. and Dr. Frank W. MacDonald, P.E., for the next 30 years (1950 1980); and Mr. Waldemar S. Nelson, P.E. and Mr. James S. Janssen, F.E., for their assistance and their contribution in the organization and editing of the document.

This document is organized in such a way that a revision would be made in the future without a major rewrite by adding to the annexes and the text. It is suggested that the history be updated periodically, say every five or ten years, so that a relatively current history be available to the younger engineers who are entering the engineering profession.

All of the states of the United States, the District of Columbia, and three of the other regions administered by the United States now have laws requiring registration of professional engineers. This score was not achieved overnight but is the victorious result of a long period of striving on the part of the engineering profession for protection of the public and recognition. We as Louisianans can be justly proud of the fact that the movement to

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achieve this goal began in Louisiana and owes its inception to the Louisiana Engineering Society and its founding fathers.

Although the first State Act in this country governing the practice of professional engineers is said to have been passed in Wyoming in 1907, only 17 years after that state was created, the first successful movement toward regulation of engineering practice by law is conceded to have originated with the small group of engineers who founded the Louisiana Engineering Society in New Orleans in 1898. These men were striving toward the development of legislation for the regulation of the practice of Civil Engineering and Land Surveying before the turn of the century. Although they suffered rebuffs at several sessions of the Legislature, they were successful in bringing about the passage of Louisiana's first Registration Act in 1908. Their success in this objective truly marked the beginning of an era.

State registration of engineers and land surveyors and the regulation of their practice did not catch on immediately. It was 1917 before the third state, Florida, came into the fold. However, by 1920 seven of the states had laws requiring registration of engineers. In that year representatives from these seven states, under the table leadership of one of Louisiana's most universally renowned engineers, Colonel Marcel Garsaud, formed the National Council of State Boards of Engineering Examiners (NCSBEE). With a short time after the founding of this organization a committee of its members drafted a "Model Registration Law," and within a few years most of the states had passed laws based on this Model Law. After this rush of conformers the remainder of the states came in one by one until finally Montana, Wyoming's next door neighbor, made the count 100% in 1947.

Louisiana's 1908 Act providing for regulation of the practice of Civil Engineers and Land Surveyors was amended by an Act passed in 1914 and further amended by an Act passed in 1920. The 1920 Act was amended in 1946. In 1950 the previous statute was repealed, and a new statute, increasing the scope of registration to include all branches of professional engineers, was passed.

The principal provisions of the 1908 Act were as follows:

1. "any person before entering upon the practice of Civil Engineering or Surveying shall present to the Board of Engineering Examiners -a diploma from an engineering college of good standing, said standing to be determined by the Board, or shall pass a satisfactory examination before the Board.";
2. the Board should consist of 5 members appointed by the Governor for 6 year terms from a list submitted by the Louisiana Engineering Societal;
3. temporary permits for practice could be issued between Board meetings pending review by the Board;
4. certificates issued by the Board must be filed in the office of the Clerk of Court in the Parish in which the applicant resides;
5. a list of qualified practitioners should be published annually in a New Orleans daily paper;
6. the Board should receive \$10.00 per day and traveling expenses during sessions;
7. that unregistered persons who attempt to practice would be subject to fines of not less than \$25.00 nor more than \$100.00 or imprisoned not less than 30 nor more than 90 days; and
8. the Act was not to apply to the "Engineering Department of the United States."

The Act was amended in 1914 but was changed very little from the 1908 Act except that provisions were made for the assessment of annual license fees and fees for the examination and the issuance of a certificate, thus providing a source of income for the Board.

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The amendments made by the 1920 Act were more extensive. The legal domicile of the Board was established in New Orleans. A registration fee of \$25.00 was specified. The Board was authorized to adopt bylaws and regulations for the conduct of business and to employ clerical and professional help, and was directed to publish annual rosters of registrants.

Another clause provided for registration by reciprocity with other states having equivalent laws. The significance of this provision has grown rapidly and during the last several years reciprocal registration has accounted for 40% of all the new professional engineer registrations in this State. In other amendments, the 1920 Act removed the requirement that a newly registered engineer must file his certificate with the Clerk of Court in the Parish of his residence and increased the penalty for illegal practice to not less than \$100.00 or more than \$500.00.

Although Louisiana's registration law marked the beginning of legislative regulation of professional practice in the United States, Louisiana got out of step with the other states very soon after the first Model Law was drafted. This situation was primarily due to the fact that Louisiana's law provided for registration of Civil Engineers while the term "Professional" Engineer was adopted by the other states in order that their laws should govern the practice of all the various branches of the profession. However, because there were very few engineers other than Civil in private practice in Louisiana and the 1920 Act made little provision for enforcement of its provisions, practically no effort was made to amend the law for many years. When, in the late '30's, practitioners in branches other than Civil started moves toward getting the law revised, they encountered some serious opposition. One bone of contention at the time was the question of adoption of the term Professional Engineer. The old timers pointed to the fact that the title "civil engineer" evolved to differentiate between the practitioners of the profession engaged in Civilian activities and the Military activities and that its meaning was broad enough to cover all "branches." However, failure of the movement to change the law, which was headed by Colonel V. J. Bedell and Dean Leo J. Lassalle, culminated in a bill being offered to the State Legislature in 1940. The bill failed due largely to lack of interest on the part of practitioners in other branches rather than to opposition from the licensed Civil Engineers.

World War II, while it resulted in halting the movement toward bringing about a new law, was also effective in ensuring its final passage. The war and subsequent years marked a tremendous surge of industrialization in Louisiana and a great increase in the numbers of mechanical, electrical, and chemical engineers employed here, while the phenomenal growth of petroleum production created many more openings for petroleum engineers. The voices of the Civils become less overwhelming and with time their attitudes became also more amenable. However the greatest impetus for change in this era came from men employed by the Highway Department who were unable to obtain registration under the old law but were performing Civil Engineering work for which they had become competent by home study and experience. The pressure was on these people because the relatively new State Civil Service system was classifying their jobs under Civil Engineer titles and even with the vague enforcement provisions of the registration law then in existence it was apparent that the title "Civil Engineer" could not legally be assumed by a non registered individual. This situation resulted in the 1946 amendment which provided that employees of the State of Louisiana or any of its political subdivisions should be permitted to continue the practice of Civil Engineering for the state of Louisiana or any of its political subdivisions so long as they were bonafide salaried employees of the State or any of its political subdivisions and that such employees should not be required to hold a certificate as a Civil Engineer.

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The passage of this law had the beneficial effect of altering the practitioners under the old Act to the problems faced by the unregistered State engineers. This fact together with the increasing pressure from the other branches resulted in a movement toward the drafting of a new bill in which every segment of the profession received consideration. At this point in time it is difficult to name all of the actual leaders in this movement in which so many took part. Suffice it to say that the prime mover was the Louisiana Engineering Society and its then president, Mr. Lionel Cucullu. However, all of the other engineering societies were brought together for the purpose of framing the bill under the aegis of a specially created organization called the Louisiana Council of Engineers. The final bill, passed as Act 73 of 1950, was the result of many compromises by which the interests of the Civil Engineers, the State employees, and the numerous branches were provided for. It is amazing that it retained such a strong degree of unity and has survived so long.

Suffice it to say that the Board of Registration has progressively upgraded the requirements of its registrants beginning with lower standards than the law authorized, in accordance with a policy that the Board felt was in the interest of the profession and of the public at the time, gradually raising them until today they compare favorably with those of the other states and territories. Louisiana registrants are now able to obtain registration on the basis of reciprocity in most of the other states. Continuous and logical progress in this development has been possible because the personnel of the Board remained largely unchanged since its inception. That the time was ripe for passage of an Act which would provide for registration in other branches of Professional Engineering than Civil is borne out by the rapidity with which practitioners in them have sought registration. In 1950 1130 Civil Engineers and 146 Land Surveyors were licensed to practice under the old Act. At the end of 1967, although registration in Civil Engineering had nearly tripled, this branch accounted for only 38% of the total registered professional engineers in the State. Besides a fair number of registrants in other branches there were 2191 Mechanical and 1361 Electrical Engineers registered at the end of 1967; both groups being larger than the Civil Engineer registration was in 1950. It goes without saying that the character of the individuals who have constituted the Board throughout the history of registration in Louisiana has been of primary importance to its success and to the respect accorded to the movement by the profession and the public. It is of interest to note that most of the early members were outstanding in their profession both in Louisiana and in the nation. The fact that Louisianans like John F. Coleman who, besides being a world renowned practitioner, served as director and later president of ASCE and Marcel Garsaud, whose national and international activities have been previously mentioned served long terms on the Board should impress Louisiana engineers with the fact that registration has been given a high place in the opinions of our most distinguished forebears. Along with these outstanding engineers from private practice, two of our state's most prominent engineering educators, Professor B. W. Pegues and Professor Donald Derickson, who were heads of the Civil Engineering schools at L.S.U. and Tulane, respectively provided, as members from the earliest years until relatively recently, the viewpoint of engineering educators in the Board's deliberations and played vital roles in the examination of applicants.