Donald C. Stone and the American Public Works Association

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1937

While APWA was officially founded in 1937, it was the culmination of a long series of developments going back to at least the 1890s. In 1894, the American Society of Municipal Improvements was formed. It would eventually become the American Society of Municipal Engineering (ASME). In 1935, this organization asked Donald C. Stone to become their Executive Director. At the same time, the International Association of Public Works Officials (IAPWO) made a similar request to Stone. Both organizations had come to know of Stone, who was a leading figure in the development of modern public administration. As the Director of Research for the International City Management Association (ICMA) Stone began a project in 1931 to develop “an objective method of measuring, reporting and evaluating sanitation services.” This effort was sponsored by the National Committee of Municipal Standards. This committee included representatives of APWA's two predecessor organizations, along with others. The studies conducted as part of this process led to a series of demonstrations in various communities. Their success led to the creation of the Public Administration Service (PAS), which provided public works consulting services. The PAS produced *The Management of Municipal Public Works* with Donald Stone as the author of this key book. He was also the Executive Director of the PAS. For all these reasons, Stone was the most logical choice to head an association of public works officials.

Stone understood that these two organizations lacked the resources to support a full-time paid staff. At this time, these organizations together only had 750 members, many of whom were delinquent in paying their dues. Working part-time as the Interim Executive Director, Stone introduced initiatives to increase membership, develop programs and generate resources. He organized a joint meeting in 1935 of the two organizations, which was the first Congress of Public Works Engineers. He then started the *Public Works Engineers Newsletter*, as well as new services for members. Thanks to these efforts, by the time of its creation in 1937, APWA had the resources to hire an Executive Director and take its place among the many public services associations that would come together in the new building dedicated to public administration. The 1313 building opened on the campus of the University of Chicago in 1938. Known officially as the Public Administration Building (until 1979 when it was named the Merriam Center in honor of Charles E. Merriam), 1313 was home to the headquarters of APWA, along with organizations focused on city management, planning, government finance, housing, public welfare, municipal leagues, state governments and many others.

1313 was the physical embodiment of the vision of Merriam, a political science professor at the University of Chicago, along with Beardsley Ruml and Louis Brownlow. These individuals believed it was possible to use research and education to introduce methods and practices of public administration to improve the efficiency of government services and that could be best accomplished through voluntary professional associations rather than by a political process. This is a key reason why they explicitly wanted the building that would serve as the headquarters of so many state and local government technical professionals *not* be in Washington, DC.
Stone Reflections 1962

Twenty-five years after the creation of APWA, Stone gave a presentation at the 1962 annual Public Works Congress. In addition to expressing the high hopes he had for APWA in the beginning, and his confidence that it would play an important role in the future, Stone used the occasion to express two main disappointments. Specifically, Stone had hoped there would be greater cooperation with universities to prepare public works professionals and he had expected the Federal Government to pay more attention to what we today would call “urban infrastructure.”

This is some of what Stone said fifty years ago:

Back there in the mid-30s, I envisioned that this Association would work closely with universities to advance the art and science of the public works profession. …I had seen how the growth of each major profession…had come about because it was solidly grounded on an adequate educational and research foundation….there is (now) an inadequate supply of properly trained public works engineers flowing from the universities into public works agencies.

Stone’s words regarding the underfunding of urban public works were even more pointed:

Congress has always favored farmers in its appropriations, including those for roads and other public works…. The fact that we are in an urban society makes urban development and redevelopment a national problem just as much as agriculture. It is high time that the Federal Government stopped treating city people as second class citizens…. Most state governments are rurally oriented and have created a vast maze of obstacles in the way of rationalizing urban government and services.

Stone viewed the lack of an academic underpinning along with the lack of adequate government and foundation financial support as key reasons holding back the professionalization of public works. A few years later, he would attempt to overcome these challenges. With the extensive support of APWA’s Board of Directors and its Executive Director, Robert D. Bugher, the first graduate program dedicated to public works engineering and administration was established in 1967 at the University of Pittsburgh.

Pitt Program

In 1967, the University of Pittsburgh established the Graduate Center for Public Works Engineering and Administration. This so-called Pitt Program represented the most ambitious effort ever undertaken to provide graduate education in public works. Stone considered a working understanding of the physical systems that were to be managed to be a prerequisite for effective public works administration.

The mission of the Center was “to help train the critically needed professional engineering administrator to plan, organize, construct and operate the network of public works facilities and services required today.”

The curriculum developed by the Pitt Program was interdisciplinary. Students took a series of required courses:

- Public Management: Theory & Practice
- Public Works Management I
- Public Works Management II
- Research Methodology (Statistics)
- Systems Analysis in Public Works Engineering
In addition, students would select courses from seven different technical areas. The catalog indicated that the program would stress “the development of competence in the new managerial tools of systems analysis, operations research, decision theory, and planning, programming and budgeting systems.” APWA, through the Education Foundation, offered fellowships up to $5,000. With APWA support, the Pitt Program flourished for several years. But as an interdisciplinary program, dependent largely on outside funding, it did not long survive after the retirement of Donald Stone, who was the Dean of the Graduate School for International and Public Affairs, the home for the Graduate Center for Public Works.

Donald C. Stone Center
In his honor, APWA has dedicated the APWA Donald C. Stone Center for Leadership Excellence in Public Works (DCS Center). The DCS Center will honor Stone’s legacy and will further contribute to his body of work. The DCS Center provides a progressive system of career paths for professional development and credentialing.

The Center is a partnership of APWA chapter institutes and academies, colleges, universities, government agencies and associations, working together to provide comprehensive and integrated educational, training and professional development opportunities. A professional working within public works or considering entering this profession will be able to progress systematically along one or several paths.

APWA has created a developmental model that will require candidates to document growth and, in some instances, defend their work through oral exams. A mentoring program is part of the developmental process to provide focused support, feedback and guidance to candidates.

Conclusion
We can think of no better way to end this brief tribute to APWA on the occasion of its 75th Anniversary than to use the words of Donald C. Stone, who concluded his presentation to the 1962 APWA Congress, 25 years after the official formation of APWA thusly:

_We who are engaged in the field of public works are covering one of the largest, most significant and vital areas of the public service field. The role to be played will increase steadily in importance as the United States and other countries, too, become increasingly industrialized and urbanized._

_Whether we play that role well and fulfill the challenges will depend in large measure on whether we develop the educational and research underpinning essential to establish public works engineering and administration on a solid and enduring foundation. ...We must be no less persevering in this task than those public works leaders of the 1930s who established this Association and built solid foundations for the public works profession._
Author Bios
Dr. Howard Rosen was an APWA staff member for 15 years, serving as Managing Director of Professional Services and Director of the Public Works Historical Society (PWHS). In addition, he served as PWHS President in 2004-06. Howard has taught History of Engineering at the Illinois Institute of Technology and in the Values, Technology & Society Program at Stanford University. He can be reached at (608) 262-4341 or rosen@engr.wisc.edu.

Stephen Pudloski is a former Deputy Executive Director of APWA, Top Ten award winner, and served as Donald C. Stone’s Graduate Assistant at the University of Pittsburgh. He and Howard Rosen co-authored the Oral History Interview with Donald C. Stone that was published by the Public Works Historical Society. He can be reached at (608) 262-8707 or pudloski@engr.wisc.edu.

Suggested readings on (and by) Donald C. Stone:
Possibly the most in-depth document that currently exists regarding the career of Donald C. Stone (including the formation of APWA) is found in the oral history produced by the Public Works Historical Society: An Interview with Donald C. Stone. Public Works Historical Society. Interview Number 9, October 1992, interviewed by Howard Rosen and Stephen Pudloski (this oral history was reviewed in The Public Historian, Vol. 17, No.3 [Summer 1995], Andrew J. Dunar. “Public Works and Oral History: Three Perspectives,” pp.77-82).


Stone was the author of many publications, including the first publication to cover public works administration (hard to find): The Management of Municipal Public Works. Donald C. Stone, Chicago, Public Administration Service, 1939.


Here is a link to a short comment reflecting on Stone’s article on chairs: www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/feb/12/highereducation.research


Stone, Donald C. “The Impact of US Assistance Programs on the Political and Economic Integration of Western Europe,” American Political Science Review, 46 (December 1952): 1100–1116.

Stone’s papers are archived at Syracuse University. Here is a link to the inventory of the Donald C. Stone Papers at Syracuse University: library.syr.edu/digital/guides/s/stone_dc.htm

Finally, for more information on Donald C. Stone, visit the APWA website at: www.apwa.net/donald-c-stone/who-is.