

ASCE Orange County Branch Member Biographies and Oral History Program
Prepared by William E. Lawson, P.E. and Carl R. Nelson, P.E.
For the September 2012 Edition of the OC Branch Newsletter

The History and Heritage Committee of the ASCE Orange County Branch has, over the years, made an effort to prepare biographies of its Past Presidents and other prominent members, and when possible, Oral History interviews have been recorded and transcribed into permanent reference documents. This article gives an overview of the OC Branch Member Biographies that have been documented and the Branch's Oral History Program. Excerpts are included in this article that have been taken from the Oral History recorded for Past President H. George Osborne, P.E., and from a summary of that interview prepared by Carl R. Nelson, P.E. Links to the complete documents are also included.

The best compilation of biographies for historic, local Orange County Branch members and prominent National Civil Engineers was included in the book entitled [Civil Engineers Building a Better World](#), edited by the late Fred Meier and published by the Branch in 2002 for ASCE's 150th Anniversary celebration. The list is a bit long, but here are the names of those Civil Engineers who's biographies were included in that book:

Paul Bailey; Arthur A. Beard; Robert W. Bein; J. R. Lester Boyle (1908-1990); C. Roy Browning; James B. Eads (1820-1887); Jack T. Eagen; John B. Jervis (1795-1885); H. Clay Kellogg, Sr.; Young C. Kim; Allen S. Koch; George Madsen; William R. Mason; Ralph McLean; George Morison (1842-1903); Nat Neff; Carl R. Nelson; Lewis L. Oriard; H. George Osborne; John A. Roebling (1806-1869); John J. Vasconcelos; Squire Whipple (1804-1888); George Williams; and Benjamin Wright (1770-1842).

It's obvious that some of these Civil Engineers pre-date the origin of the Orange County Branch and in some cases even pre-date the origin of ASCE, but they were considered by the book's authors to have made historic contributions to the field of Civil Engineering and deserved mention in the book. All of these biographies are relatively brief, but still provide interesting reading. It is a goal of the Branch's History and Heritage Committee to scan or transcribe these biographies and make them available on the History and Heritage webpage at some future date; for now, they are only available in a hard copy of the above referenced book.

It should be noted that links to a number of biographies of older or deceased members of the Los Angeles Section can be found on the Section's History and Heritage web-page. However, the most recent entry to that file seems to have been made in 2000 for Section Past President Irving Sherman. There may be other, more recent L. A. Section biographical resources that we are not yet aware of.

Back in 1996 and 1997, an attempt was made by the Orange County Branch to begin recording oral histories of prominent Civil Engineers in the Branch and Los Angeles Section. Only two such oral histories were completed at that time: 1) H. George Osborne (recorded by Ms. Lisa Vandorpe on October 18 and November 15, 1996); and 2) Trent Dames (recorded on April 4, 1997). Later, in 1996, a third oral history was recorded and that was for Robert W. Bein (recorded on November 13, 2006). The transcript of the oral history of George Osborne (63 pages) will be scanned and placed on the Branch's History and Heritage webpage in the near future.

It is a current goal of the Branch History and Heritage Committee to conduct additional oral history interviews of Past Presidents and other prominent members of the Orange County Branch. In 2011,

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Bill Lawson (HHC Chairman) attended a seminar at California State University, Fullerton, on how to conduct oral history interviews and he hopes to apply the knowledge that he obtained from that seminar in conducting the Branch interviews. Primarily the audio portion of these interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed into a written, verbatim document; however, video recordings may also be made of these interviews and would eventually be edited for viewing on the History and Heritage Webpage.

About two years ago Carl R. Nelson prepared [A Biography of H. G. Osborne, P.E.](#) which was based on his personal recollections combined with the 1996 oral history recorded by Ms. Vandorpe. A copy of that document (9 pages) has been placed on the Branch's History and Heritage webpage for reference, and can be read in full by clicking [HERE](#). This biography is summarized in the "Forward" paragraphs of the document, as follows:

"Forward

In 1996 the American Society of Civil Engineers History and Heritage Committee initiated an Oral History project for H. G. Osborne. Better known as George, he was interviewed by Lisa Vandorpe, a young member of ASCE to document Osborne's highly renowned engineering career. The recorded question and answer interview has been refined as a third person narrative by Carl Nelson. Carl, as an entry level engineer, first met Osborne during a flood control office Christmas Party in December of 1960. Within County office circles Osborne was known as "HGO". Seated at his desk in the modest, linoleum-floored office (of the former St. Ann's Inn), HGO was enjoying a cigar, while staffers somewhat reticently accepted his invitation for a politically incorrect libation. Among his ex-Navy pals, and the Orange County Engineers Club he was popularly known as "the Gray Fox". The narrative that follows reflects Nelson's recollections of a working friendship of nearly 40 years.

George was appointed by the Orange County Board of Supervisors to the position of Chief Engineer of the Orange County Flood Control District (OCFCD) in 1955. He was known as a disciplined engineer, a demanding mentor, and a politically astute administrator. As Chief Engineer, he spearheaded the successful 1956 flood control bond election, a \$43 million financing program. This bond issue was the financial backbone under which the countywide system of flood control channels was constructed. Implementation of the program allowed residential and commercial development of otherwise flood-prone areas of Orange County.

In 1974 Osborne was selected by the Board of Supervisors as the first Director of the new Environmental Management Agency(EMA) which consolidated the former departments of Planning, Building, Flood Control, Roads, Surveyor, Solid Waste, Water Pollution, Harbors, Beaches and Parks into a single unit of management reporting directly to the Board. George retired from the County in 1980, but was never inactive during his retirement. He served from 1981 to 1999 as Executive Director of the Santa Ana River Flood Protection Agency (a consortium of public agencies dedicated to securing political support for completion of the Army Corps of Engineers Santa Ana River Mainstem Project as authorized by the Congress in 1988). He

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was appointed to the Orange County Planning Commission by the third district supervisor and eventually served as commission Chairman. Later he was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Orange County Water District (OCWD) representing the City of Fullerton. Eventually, he served as the OCWD's Chairman."

Additional biographical information for Herbert George Osborne as obtained from the ASCE Orange County Branch History and Heritage Committee Archives:

George Osborne was born on December 7, 1915, in Penticton, British Columbia, Canada (just north of the U.S./Washington State border). His family moved to the United States and settled in the Fullerton, California area where George attended elementary and high school. He obtained a B.S. degree in Civil and Mechanical Engineering in 1942 from California Institute of Technology. He studied Naval Science at Harvard University in 1942 and studied Diesel Engineering at Cornell University in 1943. He served on active duty in the U. S. Navy from 1942 - 1946 and retired with the rank of Commander. After World War II ended, he remained as an reserve Naval officer in the Civil Engineering Corps and served as Commanding Officer, Construction Battalion, Division 11-7, in Santa Ana, California from 1957-60.

George Osborne was a Registered Civil Engineer in the State of California and held Registration Certificate No. 7188.

George Osborne served as the third President of the newly formed Orange County Branch of ASCE in 1954-55, and also served as Vice President of the Los Angeles Section in 1963-64 and was President in 1981-82. In the mid-1980's, George served as Chairman of the Branch's History and Heritage Committee. He also served as President of the Orange County Engineers Club in 1966.

In 1994, H. George Osborne was nominated for the ASCE Civil Government Award and received the Zone IV, 1994 Government Civil Engineer of the Year Award later that year. In the Nomination Documents it was stated that: "Probably his three greatest accomplishments have been the organizing of the Environmental Management Agency of the County of Orange, and then managing that Agency, and leading the efforts of the Counties of Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino, California in securing from Congress of the United States the funds to create major flood control facilities along the Santa Ana River within those Counties."

George Osborne passed away on January 12, 1999, in Fullerton, California.

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George Osborne