THE BEGINNING OF PCS

BY RUDY JOENK

In May 1957, the forerunner to the Professional Communication Society was formed by a group of IRE members.

This year—1997—marks the 40th anniversary of the founding of the predecessor of the Professional Communication Society. Each issue of the *Newsletter* will present information about and excerpts from our history. The March issue of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* will include some of our history as it pertains to the *Transactions*.

Our Start

In May 1957, the forerunner to the Professional Communication Society, the Institute of Radio Engineers (IRE) Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech (PGEWS), was formed by a group of IRE members working in the field of technical publications for engineering and scientific organizations and technical publishers. In 1963, the IRE merged with the American Institute of Electrical Engineers (AIEE) to form the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). PGEWS remained as an IEEE Group until 1972 when the name was changed from EWS to Professional Communication, and then to Professional Communication Society in 1978.

The following is adapted, nearly verbatim, from a "Report on Meeting of Committee for New IRE Professional Group." The report is dated March 22, 1957, and was filed in the IRE office on March 25, 1957. Its author was Eleanor M. McElwee, who later became the Group's first secretary.

Celebrating 40 Years 1957-1997

Founders' Meeting

On Tuesday morning, March 19, a preliminary meeting was held at IRE Headquarters [One East 79th Street in New York City, the former Brokaw Mansion, razed some time before 1977] to discuss the advisability of petitioning the Executive Committee to approve the formation of a Professional Group in the field tentatively designated as Engineering Writing (see page 12 for a list of those in attendance).

The meeting was opened at 10:15 a.m. with some brief introductory remarks by Miss McElwee. She welcomed the attendees and introduced the acting chairman, Mr. Charles A. Meyer.

Aims of the Meeting

Mr. Meyer called the attention of the members to the aims of the meeting.

1. To decide whether to petition the IRE for establishment of a new Professional Group.

2. To determine a proper name for the new Group and suitable wording for the petition.

3. To get signatures on the petition, or to set up mechanics for getting agreement on wording and circulating petitions for signatures.

COMMUNICATING THROUGH THE WEB

BY PAUL SEESING

The PCS AdCom has been looking for a means of electronic communication that would reach the largest proportion of the membership. Because the PCS newsgroups are not available by many Internet service providers, PCS decided to establish a mailing list of e-mail addresses.

The list is for disseminating the occasional time-sensitive, quick-turnaround information that is not possible with the *Newsletter*. In addition to Society news, such communications may also include short commentaries and announcements of interest to members. Subscription to this service is strictly voluntary.

The list is maintained on the IEEE server, and is called pcs-members. To subscribe to the list, just send an e-mail message to *majordomo@majordomo.ieee.org* that contains the following two lines in the body (not the subject) of the message:

> subscribe pcs-members
> j.doe@somewhere.com (John Doe) end

Of course, you will replace John's e-mail address with your own.

Note: Do not put leading blank lines in the message. Majordomo is a computer program, not a person, so niceties like a salutation only confuse it. No subject is required unless your e-mail program demands it (Majordomo will ignore it).

Because e-mail addresses tend to be cryptic, putting your name in parentheses after the address helps in cross-reference with the membership database.

After you subscribe, you will receive a message from Majordomo that tells you more about mailing lists in general, including how to unsubscribe. If your e-mail address changes, you need to tell Majordomo by sending it the following message:

> unsubscribe pcs-members
> j.doe@old.address.com (John Doe)
> subscribe pcs-members
> j.doe@new.address.com (John Doe) end

An introduction to Internet mailing lists can be found in Bob Alden's *"Traveling the Information Highway"* column in the April 1996 issue of *The Institute*. This article may also be found on the World-Wide Web at:

> http://www.institute.ieee.org/
> INST/apr96/inf_hwy.html

If you have information that you would like to communicate to the PCS at large (including things you've found helpful in performing your work or solving problems in technical and professional communication), please send them to *p.seesing @ieee.org* (a real person). I'm also happy to answer any questions you may have about the mailing list.

The list is for disseminating the occasional time-sensitive, quick-turnaround information that is not possible with the Newsletter

WHERE WILL VALUE LIE IN THE INFORMATION INDUSTRY OF THE FUTURE?

MARK HASELKORN

What makes one provider's access to information more valuable than another's? Many see the answer lying in the layer where content meets end user.

The information and computer industry moves at an incredibly rapid pace. Decisions made today are based on perceptions of where we will be three to five years from now. During the last year, a major decision was made by "leaders" in the world of information and computers—they decided it is time to serve a mass market. This means they can no longer be primarily in the software and technology business. Rather, they are committed to selling information, entertainment, and products directly to the mass market.

Software, like hardware and operating systems, will join the infrastructure that makes the information industry possible; software will no longer be the visible product. Instead, companies like Microsoft will sell "television" or whatever metaphor they decide best works for putting customers directly in touch with products and services.

Industry leaders see a future where communication technologies merge and are available at home as well as the workplace. Instead of a TV, phone, VCR, stereo, and personal computer, there will be "the screen" with "channels" for library searches, stock market purchases, personal communication, videos, education, and government information.

But in this world of ubiquitous information, where is value and how will it be created? What makes one provider's access to information more valuable than another's? Many see the answer lying in the layer where content meets end user.

The other day, Judy Ramey (Associate Professor of Technical Communication at the University of Washington) told me she had been looking up "Hazardous Waste Disposal" in the phone book. She was smart enough to start with the blue government pages, but there was nothing under "H" for hazardous waste. Everything was organized by jurisdiction.

She looked under "Seattle" but no hazardous waste. She looked under Washington State but still no hazardous waste. Finally, she looked under "King County" and found it. Why was it so difficult? Why did her interactions with the government leave her feeling that they just don't care? It was difficult because it was organized by how the information source thought of itself, not how someone needing that information would think.

Any organization that fails to design its information based on the needs of its users will be unable to establish the image necessary for success in a mass market.

In the future information industry, important aspects of value will be in the ease of access and ease of use of information. In other words, the browsing mechanism and the information itself will need to be designed from the user's perspective.

User-based information design is the essential skill that technical communicators have studied and practiced since the field was born during World War II. This is why technical communicators will play key roles in the creation of value for the information industry of the future.

IBM is making top corporate positions hereditary. The sweeping change is designed to take advantage of new estate tax laws and stimulate child production among the right people.

—Off the Wall Street Journal, 1982

IPCC 97 — LOOKING AHEAD

The IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS) is hosting its annual conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, at Snowbird Conference Center and Resort. This year's International Professional Communication Conference (IPPC 97) will be a linked conference with ACM's SIGDOC 97. The conferences, with the shared theme of *Crossroads in Communication*, will offer a forum for individuals with varied backgrounds and interests to explore issues related to technical communication.

As we near the 21st century, we face many important crossroads that affect what we do and how we do it.

- Downsizing is causing many people to leave full-time jobs for a life of contracting.

- Online documentation is challenging print as the dominant documentation media.

- The increasing popularity of the Internet is encouraging WWW distribution of documentation.

- New technology and corporate re-engineering are changing how we and others define and view technical communication.

- Changing job roles provide technical communicators with the opportunity to develop new skills in areas such as interface design, usability testing, and programming.

Meet with us at Snowbird Conference Center and Resort, set in the pristine Wasatch Mountains east of Salt Lake City, Utah, to talk about these crossroads (and others) we face as technical communicators. Plan now to attend.

IPCC 97 (October 22-24, 1997)

Check out the IPCC 97 web page at *http://www.ieee.org/pcs/pscindex.html*

As we near the 21st century, we face many important crossroads that affect what we do and how we do it.

IPCC 97 Contact

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1809 Montrose Parkway
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Phone: (770) 623-7241

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An Added Bonus — Linked Conferences

An exciting dimension of IPCC 97 will be a linked day of conference program with SIGDOC 97. At previous IPCC conferences in Banff and Savannah, the two organizations had back-to-back conferences held in succeeding weeks. This year both conferences will be held the week of October 20-25, with a shared day of sessions on October 22.

Set in the majestic mountains east of Salt Lake City, Utah, Snowbird Conference Center and Resort provides an ideal location to hold the conferences. Surrounded by 11,000-foot mountains, the spectacular beauty of granite rock, pine trees, and aspens provide ample opportunites for recreation in addition to the conference. Also, Salt Lake City is a short drive down the canyon with interesting attractions (including the world-renowned Mormon Tabernacle Choir), superb restaurants, great night spots, and friendly people.

We have negotiated a great hotel room rate ($79 per night single/double occupancy). In addition, several family-style condominium units with a kitchenette and fireplace are also available. Look for more details about IPCC 97, Snowbird Resort, and Salt Lake City in forthcoming newsletters. IPCC 97 will be a conference you won't want to miss.

COMMUNIST BANDITS AND PROFESSIONAL RESPECT

JOAN G. NAGLE

Joan Nagle has been active in PCS since 1985. She has edited the Society's Transactions and has served on the Editorial Board of the IEEE Press. She is currently working on her second book.

Calling one's presumed customers bandits is not good business, in any language.

On September 29, 1996, National Public Radio reported that Microsoft was having problems with its Windows 95 program in mainland China. It seems that, in the translation process, the words "Communist bandits" had appeared in the manual, along with reference to the imperative to convert the Communist government to something like that in Taiwan. Or just give it to the Taiwanese themselves.

Calling one's presumed customers *bandits* is not good business, in any language.

Which reminded me of PCS President Mark Haselkorn's "Last Lecture" at our recent International Communication Conference (IPCC 96) in Saratoga Springs. (Stay with me; there is a connection here.) Mark's analysis of the state of the technical writing profession had a pessimistic aspect. "We don't get no respect," he said, in effect, from our engineer coworkers or (most important, I suppose) from management. "What are we going to do about this?" he asked.

I submitted, in that session, and I submit now that one of the most significant avenues for response to this issue is through the customer. This is where we can, and often do, get respect.

It can be said that the profession really came into its own (out of the closet?) when IBM began selling personal computers. Before then, product documentation (instruction manuals and the like) was written by and for insiders.

Take computers, for example. Mainframes they were, largely. Hardware engineers wrote the hardware documentation, and software programmers wrote the software manuals, in their own arcane language. Mostly, this worked, since the customers— those who set up and used the stuff— spoke the same language.

When the new product, the personal computer, went on the general population market, this changed everything. The PC's customers were generally not engineers or programmers. They were, increasingly, ordinary people. "What are these guys talking about?" customers asked. Loudly!

And the manufacturers heard. They usually do when customers speak. This was the beginning of research, often industry-supported, into what makes a good computer manual. What format, what rhetorical conventions, what kind of and how many illustrations? Usability testing. Studies of how people (customers, or people representative of the customer population) actually use these books, what they need to find therein, where the various components should be located, ways to link them together. The profession, those who study the subject and those who practice it, took a great leap forward, thanks to the manufacturers' customers.

On a smaller and more personal level, I once got a phone call from the leader of an engineering research project. "You don't know me," he began, "but people tell me you're the person I should talk to about my problem." The problem was major; the project's sponsor (his customer) had refused to accept the team's concluding report.

"What's wrong with it?" asked the nonplused team. After all, it was long and detailed, which they saw as primary criteria. Must have weighed three or four pounds. Isn't that a good report?

"It's garbage," the customer replied. (Actually the customer used somewhat more graphic language.) And that's all.

No wonder there was a major problem. You tell engineers how something doesn't work, and they'll fix it. But even the customer probably didn't know what was wrong with this report; it just didn't work for them.

It only took a little tinkering, mostly reorganization, to turn the thing into an effective document, one that the customer was

THE GIFT OF THE GAB

The 20th century has had some masters of rhetoric who were outstandingly bad men. Hitler and Mussolini leap to mind. Arms beat to the rhythm of the ascending tricolor; voices are hoarse with invective; lecterns are gripped in passion. There is a sea of upturned faces caressed, aroused, enthralled and above all, misled by the cunning mixture of sound and sense which is rhetoric.

Perhaps these recent associations explain why, in 1995, the ancient art of speaking persuasively is so widely mistrusted. But then it is also true, as George Kennedy shows in *The New History of Classical Rhetoric*, that mankind has been ambivalent about rhetoric. Who invented the art? Why, says Aristotle, a chap called Corax, who supposedly lived in Sicily in the fifth century BC. Corax means a crow, a symbol of squawking mendacity. Rhetoric, according to Georgias the Sophist, induces belief as opposed to knowledge; and for the ancient Greeks in general, speechifying was to be contrasted to the purities of philosophy.

And yet, for all the disparagement, this discipline of rhetoric, as Mr. Kennedy shows meticulously, was central to ancient life. It was part of every civilized man's education to know, for instance, that three short syllables followed by a long (like the first bar of Beethoven's Fifth) was called a paean, and had been discovered by Thrasymachus. Aristotle gave afternoon classes in the theory and practice of public speaking.

According to Isocrates, an oration could, indeed, be morally improving: "I do think people can become better and worthier if they are ambitious about speaking well, and they are enamoured with being able to persuade their hearers." Cicero fully agreed. Speech-making in itself was morally neutral, the Roman barrister said, even if the best orators had often done the most damage.

But he added: "I recognize that many cities were founded, numerous wars extinguished, the strongest alliances, the most sacred friendships were brought about more easily by eloquence than by the reasoning power of the mind." And there, surely, Cicero spoke the truth.

Hitler was, indeed, an orator. But then so was Churchill. So was Martin Luther King. Rhetoric as Aristotle defined it—"an ability in each case to see the available means of persuasion"—is no less than a tool for helping us to understanding. An eloquent speech may sharpen the experience of insight, just as it may, in the wrong mouth, intensify prejudice.

So it is all the more regrettable that, these days, no one seems capable of practicing the art. Few lawyers now twang their brace and harangue the jury. There is barely a rhetorical "m'lud." Westminster is verbally poorer since the vintage days even of Michael Foot and Enoch Powell, let alone F.E. Smith.

Partly, this may be because, in our fact-grubbing age, forensic and political speeches could not tolerate the digressions and *ad hominem* arguments, the abuse and hyperbole, which were thought appropriate for making a case in ancient times. One cannot imagine a modern QC employing a servant with a pitch pipe, as Gaius Gracchus did, to tell him when he was going over the top.

Perhaps it is because modern audiences, apart from those who like television evangelists, regard speech-making as vaguely suspect. Perhaps public speaking is being killed by the sound-bite. Or perhaps, and more probably, people have simply forgotten the art. In which case, they might wrap a towel around their heads and begin by reading Mr. Kennedy's primer.

An eloquent speech may sharpen the experience of insight, just as it may, in the wrong mouth, intensify prejudice.

Perhaps public speaking is being killed by the sound-bite. Or perhaps, and more probably, people have simply forgotten the art.

PREPARING OUTSTANDING PRESENTATIONS

CHERYL REIMOLD

Cheryl teaches courses and workshops for PCS on this and other communication topics. For information, c.reimold@ieee.org.

However, if you give them one interesting image, they often can reconstruct your message from it.

Part 7: Making Visuals Memorable

Last time, we saw how to create clean visuals that support your points. In essence, this involves 1) keeping text big (at least 18-point) so it can be read easily from the back of the room and 2) minimizing clutter (grids, numbers, legends, and unnecessary details). If you do that, your visuals will work *for* you rather than compete *against* you.

This time, we will discuss how to make some of your visuals not just effective but *memorable*.

Why create memorable visuals?

A strong visual can help your listeners *remember a key point*. This is especially important when you want to persuade them to do something. By the time they are in a position to act, they may well have forgotten everything you said! However, if you give them one interesting image, they often can reconstruct your message from it.

Sometimes, you can also use a visual to *introduce humor* without diluting your credibility—a great benefit especially when you're presenting to a nontechnical audience. Most audiences are secretly hoping for relief from boredom or tension. Even the gentlest touch of humor in a visual will immediately improve their receptiveness to you.

How to do it

Creating the kinds of visuals I am talking about requires two skills: 1) symbolization and 2) graphic execution. Neither is difficult.

Symbolization is the skill of finding symbolic images for the concepts you want to express. For instance, I wanted to illustrate the idea that "the key to powerful delivery is *connection* with the audience." A natural

For power...

...**connect!**

image for "connection" was that of a plug connected to an extension cord so that power could flow.

I arrived at this image simply through the *cliche* "plugged in." You will find similar cliches useful in many cases.

Sports, everyday life, and nature are other good sources. For example, two runners easily express "competition"; a scale can illustrate "balance"; and a dog and a cat exemplify "natural enemies." If you have trouble with this, study ads in technical and business journals; you can learn a lot about effective symbolization from them. You may even want to save some ads in a file to spark ideas later.

Executing such graphic ideas has become possible even for nonartists, thanks to improved graphics software that includes plenty of "electronic clip art." The figure above was drawn in Harvard Graphics. Unfortunately, I could not find suitable pictures of plugs and extension cords, so I had to draw things from scratch. With a little luck, though, you can simply combine and adapt readymade clip art.

Customizing clip art basically involves "ungrouping" the image, then changing those elements that aren't right. I wish I could say that it can be done in a few minutes. The truth is, it's still tedious and takes some practice (you may have to study that manual after all!)—but if your idea is strong, it's worth the extra effort.
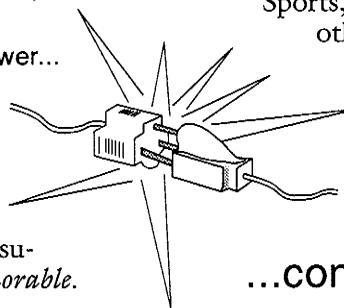
A caveat

By definition, a memorable visual draws attention to itself—and therefore away from you. Isn't that just the sort of competition I urged you to avoid?

Yes—and that's why you should be careful not to overdo this. Besides losing your

GOLDSMITH AND SCHELSINGER AWARD WINNERS

A nnual awards recognizing outstanding technical communicators were presented during IPCC 96 at Saratoga Springs. The Goldsmith Award was given to David Nadziejka and the Schelsinger Award was given to Stephanie Rosenbaum.

Nadziejka is a past editor of the PCS Newsletter and has written a column for the Society of Technical Communicator's

journal *Technical Communication*, helped develop the latest edition of the CBE Manual "Scientific Style and Format" and is an editor at Argonne National Laboratory.

Rosenbaum is a technical editor and serves on the PCS Administrative Council. She was active in planning IPCC 96.

Profiles of these two award winners will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter.

CURMUDGEON'S CORNER

happy to accept as a contract requirement. And I had won a friend for life. Boy, did I get respect. I had pulled their, and their customer's, chestnuts out of the fire. And I got lots more work from that quarter. Later, when management, in its infinite wisdom, abolished my job, this team hired me on a contract basis to do the rest of their work.

What we do can make the product/service, or break it, as in the case of Windows 95 in China? Was the Microsoft translator incompetent, or was deliberate sabotage

involved? Sounds like the latter; in any case it goes to show how much of an effect the information development team can have, at the customer level.

You want respect? Make sure the people for whom you are creating documentation know the extent of what you've done for them (presuming you've done good work, which of course we all do). And if you can, try to reach beyond them to the ultimate (paying) customer.

Management hears these people.

> *Mostly, this worked, since the customers — those who set up and used the stuff — spoke the same language.*

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

audience to your graphics, you risk getting a reputation as someone who "likes to play on his computer" instead of working on the real problems. I would consider a special visual only for my main message or the

most important key point — and even then only if the ideas naturally lend themselves to strong symbolic representation.

So build the skill — but use it sparingly!

FICTION VS. FACT — OR DO THE TWAIN MEET?

BY MICHAEL BRADY

I have an ongoing argument with my sister. It's not the normal sort of sibling strife. It's about writing. She's a novelist. And she is successful at her pursuit: her *"Theory of War"* won the 1993 Whitbread Prize for the best book of the year in England, and last year, 1996, her *"Death Comes for Peter Pan"* was short listed for several prizes.

Non-fiction is my bailiwick. My works aren't eligible for literary prizes. With few exceptions, they are not in bookstores. I'm an IEEE PCS member.

The gist of our argument echoes Kipling: can the "what and why and where and how and when and who" of written communication be defined, and, if so, which medium is best, fiction or fact? We are drifting toward the realization that we are arguing for argument's sake, as we agree that the demarcation between fiction and fact is not as sharp as is popularly believed.

One might say that fiction comprises documentation of feelings and emotions, whilst non-fiction comprises documentation of everything else.

One might say that fiction comprises documentation of feelings and emotions, whilst non-fiction comprises documentation of everything else. That thought is not original. I ascribe it to Georg Bentze, the Hungarian-born doctor who was among the first to introduce acupuncture in everyday Western European medical practice. He was a literary man, a penchant that had led him to acupuncture, as well as to the belief that pre-med studies should not focus on biochemistry, biology and other sciences, but rather on literature.

He argued that view convincingly by remarking that "95% of a doctor's diagnosis of a patient's ill comes from understanding how the patient feels. And how can a doctor learn how to feel what other people feel? Only through literature..."

Where, I ask Joan, would *"Theory of War"* be without its clear foundation in history, as it is based on the life of our paternal grand-

So we factual word-smiths ply almost the same trade as do novelists; only our places in rhetoric time differ.

father, who was sold into bondage (read slavery) just after the US Civil War. Its title, taken from the major work of 19th century Prussian military theoretician Karl von Clausewitz. It's a stunningly accurate description of the building and early running of railroads in the US west, based on numerous vintage texts and references.

She admits that I am right. But then we ask the crucial question: is there such a thing as pure fiction? Pure non-fiction? Is there any sharp demarcation between the two that, say, could "stand up in court?"

Do novels comprise facts strung together with rhetorical glue? If so, by that definition, the manuals I write for satellite ground stations are novels. But the operators that read them know that novels they are not. Perhaps the key lies in the time frame.

As biochemist turned science fiction writer Isaac Asimov is reported to have remarked, "tomorrow's technology is today's science fiction."

The truth of that observation is at hand. If you could travel back in time by 60 years, to well before the invention of pulse code modulation (PCM) in the late 1930s and the Bell T1 digital carrier of 1962, you would find an analog world. If you could take a 1996 vintage PC operator's handbook with you, in the world of 1936 it would seem to be a work of science fiction. The gap is narrowing. Satellite communication would have been science fiction in 1946 (it was in October 1945, when Arthur C. Clarke's now famous article appeared in *Wireless World*. Likewise laser printers and CD readers in 1956.

So we factual wordsmiths ply almost the same trade as do novelists; only our places in rhetoric time differ. And the litmus test of our product is the same as that of a novel: does the reader get the message?

MASTERS OF STYLE
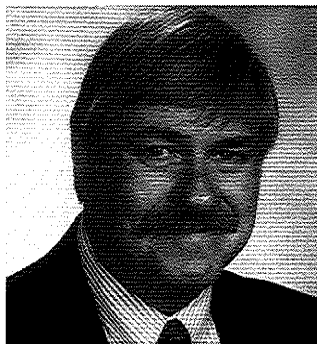
THE NATURE WRITING OF SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS

The purpose of this column is to bring before readers of the Newsletter the work of various professional communicators from the worlds of technical, medical, nature, science, government, and business writing. We can learn much from the writing strategies and stylistic subtleties of the masters, and, in the spirit of generosity fostered by Benjamin Franklin, we can share those perspectives with our colleagues in industry and academe.

The sole consideration for inclusion in this column is that the writer's work must contain a rich blend of form and content, i.e., it must have genuine substance. Each column follows the lines of two earlier pieces: "Robert Louis Stevenson's Father, the Technical Writer" (40.1) and "Pulling Out All the Stops: Richard Selzer's Medical Writing" (40.5).

If you know of particularly worthy writers from whom we might all benefit, please consider contributing a column to Donna Wicks at dwicks@odo.gmi.edu.

RONALD J. NELSON

A sense of place and an appreciation of the natural world pervade his work.

Scott Russell Sanders, professor of English at Indiana University (Bloomington), has graced the world with books from which people of all ages can profit. His work, which falls into three general categories—children's literature, fiction, and nonfiction—articulates a sophisticated yet perfectly accessible vision of who we are as fellow inhabitants of the planet. A sense of place and an appreciation of the natural world pervade his work.

His children's books include *The Floating House, Here Comes the Mystery Man, Warm as Wool, Aurora Means Dawn*, and *Hear the Wind Blow*. The first two of these titles are gently realistic stories that pass down the tradition of shared family values, history, love of the land, traveling to a new place, anticipation, and gratification—embellished by tasteful illustrations. Although I have not read the last three children's stories, I assume they are as uplifting and refreshing as the first two.

Sanders' fiction includes imaginative, poignant novels and collections of short stories like *The Invisible Company, The Engineer of Beasts, Bad Man Ballad, Terrarium, Wonders Hidden, Fetching the Dead*, and *Wilderness Plots. Wilderness Plots* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983), for example, is a collection of tales, "stories provoked by germs of fact, rather than history," about the obscure people who settled the Ohio Valley from the end of

the Revolution in 1781 to the coming of the Civil War in 1861.

As Sanders states, "When, in my reading, I turned up a character whose exploits or sufferings touched me, I wrote a narrative about him or her. Often I had no more than a sentence to work from, rarely more than a paragraph...."

In this collection, he has chosen to write about "the unmemorialized common folks, the carpenters and farmers, the fierce parents and moonstruck lovers, the sort of people who, in all ages, have actually made human history." Like others of his books, this one bears the conviction "that if one studies carefully the settlement of any region in America, one will discover the lineaments of our national character."

His nonfiction— *Writing from the Center, Staying Put, Secrets of the Universe, The Paradise of Bombs, In Limestone Country, Audubon Reader* (editor), and *D.H. Lawrence*—has much to teach the professional communicator. Perhaps the main point to assimilate from Sanders' nonfiction is his narrative voice. It is the trustworthy voice of a person who has thought long and deeply about matters.

His reflections come across naturally and unpretentiously. Moreover, his style is a welcome change from that of writers whose work seems more the product of a mind intent on impressing the reader than

on honestly dealing with the human condition and other issues.

The cleanness and aptness of Sanders' wording, the pace of his phrases and sentences, the unobtrusive parallelism, the linking of related words to ensure coherence and cohesion, the qualifying of statements to make them less threatening and hence more acceptable, the absolute absence of gobbledygook and other detractions from genuine content, and the sense of affirmation that we can affect the world around us, all suggest the reliable judgment of a person who has his values in order. Professional communicators, I believe, ought to convey that same sense of reliability to their readers or auditors.

Consider how magnificently Sanders starts *Writing from the Center* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995): "How can one live a meaningful, gathered life in a world that seems broken and scattered?" His answer involves the idea of locating one's values.

"To be centered, as I understand it, means to have a home territory, to be attached in a web of relationships with other people, to value common experience, and to recognize that one's life rises constantly from inward depths. This book is about glimpsing and seeking and longing for that center, that condition of wholeness."

It is an affirmative book (without being pollyannish) in which Sanders finds "hope in the land's resilience and the mind's reach." He refers to the essays in the book as "expeditions in search of that unifying, vivifying source." Perhaps the reader will sense something of that elusive center when reading the works of this Midwesterner, who writes from his inner center.

Limestone Country (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) celebrates the region of Indiana known for its limestone, chiefly Lawrence and Monroe Counties. As Sanders says in the essay *"Hunting for What Endures"*: "In this neighborhood the reigning rock is limestone, one of the commonest on earth and the one that wears the shapes of time most handsomely."

The reader hardly notices the subtle alliteration and personification; one does, however, sense the author's deep appreciation of this stone. In singing its utility, Sanders catalogs some of the many famous buildings erected with limestone, among them the Lincoln Monument: "...Abraham Lincoln's statue is surrounded by walls of it, and his weighty words are carved into it."

In *"Stone Towns and the Country Between"* he mentions that "water-carved chunks of limestone flank driveways and rise from flower beds, pale and knuckled like the vertebrae of dinosaurs. Landscape architects send trucks long distances to fetch them from quarries and creekbeds, but the local people drag them home behind tractors or in sagging pickups." Here is the heft of palpable writing that one can see and feel with the mind's eye.

Sanders enables the reader to perceive this old Earth with new eyes that are capable of discerning not only the actual and potential damage we have caused and may cause, but also the beauty and value of what we have. In the process of reading Sanders, the reader may be fortunate enough to sense the need for and the elegance of authenticity, rather than be deceived by the allure of the bogus.

He also offers countless examples of what might almost be called "pure writing"—models of the genuine from which we may all profit.

The brain is a wonderful organ. It starts working the moment you get up in the morning, and does not stop until you get into the office.

—Robert Frost

THE BEGINNING OF PCS

As the first step on the agenda, he called for statements from those attending regarding the objectives of the proposed Group.

Objectives of the Group

Several members observed that the name of the proposed Group should be broadened to include more than just engineering writing. The term "Engineering Communications" was suggested to cover the broad field of activities such a Group could encompass.

The various types of written communications in this field include standards, specifications, bids, bulletins, reports, papers, transcripts, and translations. It was suggested that a possible function of a Professional Group on Engineering Communications might be to select the best technical papers published in foreign journals and to translate them for publication in the *Proceedings of the IRE* or in various Group *Transactions*.

Purpose of the Group

A question was raised as to the necessity of starting a Professional Group in this field because three existing organizations of technical writers and editors were in the process of merging into one national professional society. However, the committee felt that the proposed Group need not be unduly concerned about the possibility of overlapping activities of non-IRE groups.

The main purpose of an IRE Professional Group was to serve the needs of the more than 50,000 IRE members. It was agreed that there was a definite need for an organization in the writing and editing field that specializes in electronics.

> *The term "Engineering Communications" was suggested to cover the broad field of activities such a Group could encompass.*

> *The committee envisioned such activities as the training of engineers to be better writers and speakers, as well as the handling of such special material as recordings, facsimiles, photographic reproduction, and televisual information.*

FOUNDERS' MEETING ATTENDEES

Dr. Walter R. G. Baker
General Electric Company,
Syracuse, NY

Mr. Joseph D. Chapline
Philco Corporation,
Philadelphia, PA

Mr. Laurence G. Cumming
Technical Secretary, IRE,
New York, NY

Mr. Charles DeVore
Naval Research Laboratory,
Washington, DC

Mr. Charles C. Foster, Jr.
RCA Review,
Princeton, NJ

Dr. Arthur N. Goldsmith
Editor Emeritus, IRE,
New York, NY

Mr. George P. Graham
National Broadcasting
Company, New York, NY

Mr. Edward E. Grazda
Hayden Publishing
Company, New York, NY

Mr. Edward E. Hine
Sperry Engineering Review,
Great Neck, NY

Mr. John M. Kinn, Jr.
Electronics Magazine,
New York, NY

Mr. Allan H. Lytel
General Electric Company,
Syracuse, NY

Miss Eleanor M. McElwee
Radio Corporation of
America, Harrison, NJ

Mr. Alexander A. McKenzie
Electronic Magazine,
New York, NY

Mr. Daniel J. McNamara
Sperry Gyroscope Company,
Great Neck, NY

Mr. Charles A. Meyer
Radio Corporation of
America, Harrison, NJ

Mr. Theodore T. Patterson, Jr.
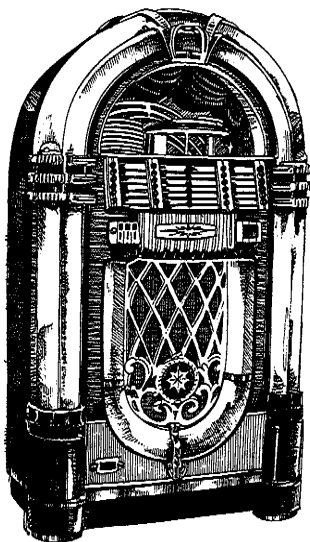*Radio Corporation of*
America, Camden, NJ

Mr. Chester W. Sall
RCA Industry
Service Laboratories,
New York, NY

Mr. Roger M. Stern
Publication Engineering
Consultants, New York, NY

Mr. Henry R. Wilsey
Bell Telephone Laboratories,
Whippany, NJ

Mr. Lewis Winner
Bryan Davis Publishing
Company, New York, NY

Dr. Arthur N. Goldsmith estimated that the membership of the IRE would grow to 75,000-100,000 within the next few years, and that the need for the proposed Group would likewise increase. The aim of such a Group, so far as other organizations were concerned, would be mutual service and cooperation. A plan of accrediting affiliate societies in the various Professional Groups fostered this spirit of cooperation.

Scope of the Group

The scope of the proposed Group would be broader than that of the non-IRE organizations in that it would handle spoken and visual, as well as written, communications. The committee envisioned such activities as the training of engineers to be better writers and speakers, as well as the handling of such special material as recordings, facsimiles, photographic reproduction, and televisual information.

Two of the committee members passed on comments received from people in the Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE) [one of the three organizations that merged to form what is now the Society for Technical Communication]. TWE was interested in an affiliate relationship if they could be sure that the activities of the proposed Group would not overlap those of TWE.

TWE believed that the establishment of the proposed Group would be helpful in advancing the professional level of technical writing, and hoped that the Group would help to establish standards for the profession. However, since TWE embraced the electronics field as well as various other fields, there was some feeling that the proposed Group might drain off membership of those otherwise active in TWE.

Dr. Walter R. G. Baker explained that the aim of each Professional Group is to serve the IRE members, and that each Group had the backing of the Institute. Twenty-four Groups existed in the IRE. Dr. Baker said a new Group established to meet a definite need in the Institute should have no undue fears about getting started and that the problem of finding qualified members who have the time and the interest to serve as officers is inherent in any profes-

The Group would reach IRE members who were not primarily concerned with writing or speaking, but who did some of both at various times.

sional organization, but it should not be a serious problem in a vital and active group.

The statement was made that the proposed Group should not attempt to set standards for other fields outside its scope. It was agreed that the activities of the proposed Group would be exclusively within the limits of IRE, and any standards developed would pertain only to IRE members. The affiliate plan would permit cooperation with other societies in the event of an overlapping of fields.

It was pointed out that organizations such as TWE were undoubtedly serving an important purpose, but that they could not reach the people in the IRE whom the proposed Group could serve. The Group would reach IRE members who were not primarily concerned with writing or speaking, but who did some of both at various times. The committee felt the Group would not overlap existing organizations because these other organizations could not perform the same functions for the bulk of the IRE membership.

Composition of the Group

A question was raised as to whether the proposed Group would be composed of engineers who had chosen the writing field as their profession, or of those who merely wrote occasionally or incidentally. It was agreed that the nucleus of the Group would undoubtedly consist of writing specialists, but that many others would join according to the services the Group could offer them.

Mr. Allan Lytel informed the committee that the editors of the IRE Section publications were meeting at a luncheon on Wednesday, March 20. He suggested that these editors be informed of the proposed Group since many would undoubtedly be interested. The committee agreed to designate Mr. Lytel as its representative to inform the Section editors of progress on the proposed Group. Dr. Goldsmith predicted that the Group would have a membership between 1,500 and 3,000 within three years.

The suggestion was made that the original proposed name, "Engineering Writing," be

retained and that the scope of the Group be broadened to include other means of communication. It was further suggested that the scope be changed from "The writing of all types of engineering information for publication and/or oral presentation, together with the preparation of accessory material such as graphs, slides, films, and the like" to "The encouragement and improvement of technical communications —written, oral, and visual."

To remain viable and relevant, we are continually revisiting the subjects of purpose, scope, membership, and even name.

Conclusion

At this point, Mr. Meyer commented that the meeting seemed to have reached the conclusion that the proposed Group was desirable, and asked for a motion to that effect. A motion was made by Mr. Theodore [Tom] Patterson, seconded by Mr. Roger Stern, and adopted unanimously.

Mr. Meyer then referred to the statement of the aims of the meeting, and pointed out that the next task was to select a name and a statement of the scope of the proposed Group. Since many of the members had commitments for the afternoon, he suggested that this task be referred to a subcommittee for action at an early date.

Most of the members expressed a desire to serve on the subcommittee, and it was agreed to arrange a dinner meeting for Monday, March 25. Mr. Lewis Winner agreed to make reservations for the meeting at the Grand Central Station restaurant (on the lower level) at 6:30 p.m. Approximately 12 members said they would be present at the dinner meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

Author's Comment: This is *déjà vu* all over again. This meeting report would not be out of place describing many meetings in our 40-year history. To remain viable and relevant, we are continually revisiting the subjects of purpose, scope, membership, and even name.

Note: The meeting at Grand Central Station apparently resulted in expansion of the Group's name from merely Engineering Writing to Engineering Writing and Speech, which was on the petition submitted soon thereafter to the IRE Executive Committee. There'll be more about our early days in the next *Newsletter*.

CELEBRATING
40
YEARS
1957-1997
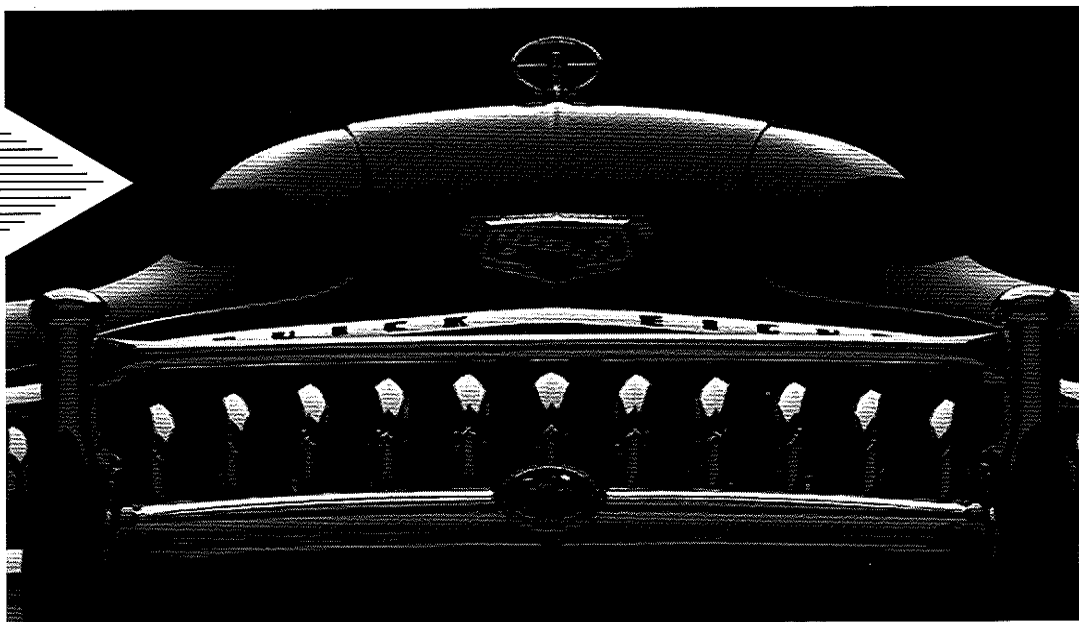
To get something done a committee should consist of no more than three men, two of whom are absent.

—*Robert Copeland*

PRE-OFFICIAL MEETING OF PGEWS

BY RUDY JOENK

This is a condensed version of another meeting report prepared by Eleanor McElwee. That report was received in the Institute of Radio Engineers (IRE) office on May 14, 1957.

An interim meeting of people interested in the proposed IRE Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech (PGEWS) was held at 7:30 p.m. on April 30 at the RCA Exhibition Hall, 40 West 49th Street, New York City.

The IRE confirmed that the proposed Group's petition had been received and distributed to the Professional Groups Committee, and that it would be acted on at the May 14 meeting of the IRE Executive Committee.

The Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE) expressed concern about the effect the new Group might have on the membership of the TWE. The proposed Group responded that they thought the respective activities would be sufficiently different for the organizations to coexist and that the primary aim of any IRE Professional Group is to serve IRE members. The PGEWS members are expected to be practicing engineers engaged part time or full time in writing or speaking and thus they constitute a group not presently covered by an organization in the field of technical writing.

Several opinions were expressed as to whether the proposed Group would be composed of experts or neophytes in the field of engineering writing and speaking, and to which level the meetings and publications would be aimed. The conclusion was that the Group should be conducted on the highest professional level of which the experts are capable, but that it would still be able to reach all the IRE members.

It was noted that the Professional Group on Engineering Management includes members at all levels of management, as well as those in pre-management positions.

Plans for drafting a detailed statement of objectives, a constitution, and a set of bylaws were agreed on, as well as planning for a general membership meeting, participation in the next IRE National Convention, and a Group publication.

The meeting was lightened by a recommendation from Victor Wouk, chair of the Professional Group on Reliability and Quality Control, that PGEWS help IRE members prepare presentations by developing guidelines such as:

1. Thou shalt not read verbatim from a prepared talk that is to be distributed or that has been distributed. (It shall be completely permissible to read excerpts. However, complete papers may not be read.)

2. Thou shalt prepare thy slides to conform to recommended specifications so that everyone in an auditorium, yea, verily, even the person in the last row of the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria, even he shall be able to distinguish all numbers in a table, all code letters on components in a wiring diagram, etc.

3. Thou shalt not mumble; neither shalt thou say "uh" more than one time in each 25 words.

Author's Comment: Even after 40 years this message hasn't reached all quarters.

Mostly we authors must repeat ourselves—that's the truth. We have two or three great moving experiences in our lives—experiences so great and moving that it doesn't seem at the time that anyone else has been caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and rewarded and humbled in just that way ever before.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

UPCOMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE...

In the March/April issue of the PCS Newsletter, there will be feature articles on...

- Technical Communication as a Core Competency
- The Dumbing of America
- PCS's 40th Anniversary
- Profile of the Goldsmith Award Winner

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

To submit articles, write:

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Contributions are welcome. Send proposals for columns to the editor.
E-mail and ASCII files are preferred.

Issue	Deadline	Issue	Deadline
May/June 1997	7 Mar. 1997	Nov./Dec. 1997	5 Sep. 1997
July/Aug. 1997	9 May 1997	Jan./Feb. 1998	7 Nov. 1997
Sep./Oct. 1997	3 July 1997	Mar./Apr. 1997	9 Jan. 1998

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