

The SMPTE Hollywood Section — A Profile

By Joyce R. Hurwitz

The idea for a West Coast Section of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers was put forth formally at the 1923 fall meeting in Ottawa. In his final address before handing over the gavel, SMPE President L. C. Porter announced: "We are forming a section of the Society on the Pacific Coast. This I believe to be the forerunner of several sections in various parts of the country. The time will undoubtedly come when it will be desirable for these various sections to hold their local meetings several times a year, and then all gather together annually for a big convention."

According to the records, as of November 1923 there were 15 members of the Society living on the West Coast at the time the Pacific Coast Section was established. As the number of members increased, the section was divided and a subsection formed in San Francisco to serve the membership in northern California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. In August 1956 the section underwent another change, and the Pacific Coast Section was transformed into the Los Angeles Section, covering Arizona, New Mexico, southern California, southern Nevada, and southern Utah. In December of that year the name was changed once more, and the Hollywood Section came into being.

Now the largest of the SMPTE sections, the Hollywood Section is in a unique position geographically. Owing to its location in the center of the motion-picture and television industries, the members are fortunate in having many manufacturers, sales organizations, television and film studios, and both production and post-production facilities represented in the area. From this large cross-section of the industry, the section can draw upon many top engineers, scientists, and management executives, who contribute much of their time and expertise to various seminars, meetings, and committees. Members in other sections have been known to say somewhat enviously that the people in Hollywood never get tired of talking about the industry, and that there's never a problem getting members to attend a meeting there — it's more of a problem getting them to go home!

For many years, the Hollywood Section has had the responsibility of hosting the Society's West Coast technical conference. Since 1977, the Society has held a conference in Los Angeles every other year. Prior to that date, two major conferences were held each year, with the meeting in Los Angeles held every year and a half. The members of the section handled the many details involved in running an event of this size, which included providing the technical program and handling myriad conference arrangements. Over the years, the section has built up a body of expertise that is handed down to each new group of chairmen.

Los Angeles has consistently been one of the favorite sites for the technical conferences, drawing a strong national attendance. The Society held its 50th anniversary celebration in L.A., and it is planning to hold the festivities there again to mark its 75th year. A large proportion of the local section members have been involved in the national technical conferences throughout the years.

The section is also fortunate in having many locations available that are ideally suited for its monthly meetings. The American Film Institute, the Directors Guild, the Academy Theater, motion-picture studio theaters, universities, and local television stations usually donate their facilities. In addition, most of the major manufacturers furnish engineers and members of their technical sales force as guest speakers, as well as providing equipment to demonstrate new products and technologies.

Since its inception, the principal strength of the Hollywood Section has been in the area of education, with special emphasis on the dissemination of information on the latest technology. This has been accomplished by the presentation of a wide variety of informative programs, including the regularly scheduled section meetings, educational seminars, and formal courses held in conjunction with such institutions of learning as UCLA, USC, and Pasadena City College. Some of the seminars were sent by satellite to the university satellite network, allowing other interested sec-

tions to participate.

Dr. Robert Ryan, consultant, has been involved in section affairs for many years. He remembers that in the years following World War II, the Hollywood Section and the USC student chapter worked closely together in monthly meetings and at the national conferences. This was due mainly to the fact that many of those teaching classes at the university were also active in SMPE affairs, and also that many students enrolled had been associated with motion-picture artists and engineers during the war. Active participants included such industry leaders as Sidney Solow, president of Consolidated Film Industries, teaching a course on color laboratory theory; Herbert Farmer, of USC, and Loren Ryder, head of Paramount Sound, teaching basic and advanced sound; William Cameron Menzies, the originator of the storyboard, on cinematic design; John Norwood, formerly of the National Film Board of Canada, on photography and cameras; in addition to Slavki Vorkapich, former head of special effects at Fox, and many others with similar backgrounds and affiliations who gave freely of their time and expertise.

Working closely with the section, the USC student chapter supplied audio-visual equipment and manpower for the weekly meetings and for special events such as the conferences. Attendance was high at all of the section events, as an ever-increasing variety of new equipment and procedures was introduced as the industry developed rapidly in the postwar years.

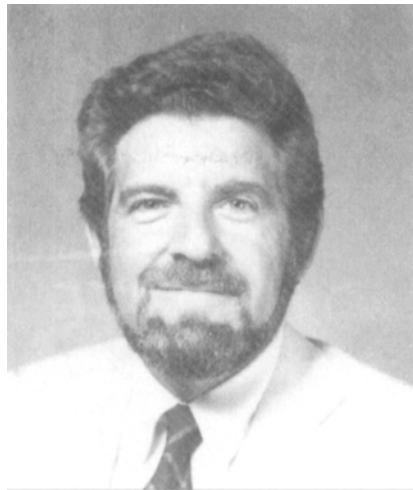
In the 1950s, the section continued to expand its educational programs and to sponsor many tutorial presentations. Several were held in conjunction with USC, such as the session on editing led by Craig Curtis of NBC; some were given as special services by a company such as Eastman Kodak, with Dr. Rod Ryan and/or Bob Huford teaching a course on color film basics and the state of the art. In most cases, the seminars were held jointly with USC, where Professor Herbert Farmer made equipment and classrooms available.

Over the years the Hollywood Section has presented a number of out-

standing programs. One of the highlights was the June 17, 1954, section meeting at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, which drew a record audience of 625 people. The program, covering the problems connected with motion-picture films for television, featured speakers such as actor/director/producer Jack Webb, Cameron Pierce of ABC-TV, and ASC cinematographers Hal Mohr, Walter Strange, Norwood Brodien, and Edward Coleman. Following the presentation, the meeting was open for questions from the audience for both the speakers and a panel of experts associated with television.

In September 1955, under the Society's sponsorship, and with the active support and cooperation of union locals, three 18-week courses on motion-picture laboratory practice, color duplication, and illumination optics were initiated at the Engineering Extension of UCLA. These were followed in the spring of 1956 by a course in the theory and practice of sound recording at the University of Southern California. This initial course at USC was the first in a long series of motion-picture and television courses presented jointly by the Society and the university. Indicating its importance, the Education Committee of the Hollywood Section is made up of 22 professionals who donate their time, along with a great deal of the material and services required to make this program a success.

A series of SMPTE/USC joint seminars has been held each spring since 1983. The series was off to a flying start with the first lighting seminar, an all-day event held at Universal Studios. The course, which was completely sold out, was attended by 500 people, ranging from students to



Section Chairman Milton R. Shefter

industry professionals. Top lighting directors from the motion-picture and television industries demonstrated various lighting techniques, and film lighting was compared to lighting for videotape. A full report on this event was published in the September 1983 issue of the *Journal*, and videocassettes of the seminar are available from the Society in Beta, VHS, and 3/4-in. U-matic formats.

A second highlight of the spring seminars was the symposium on "Image Manipulation — Matching New Technology to Video and Film Production." Approximately 300 students and industry professionals attended the symposium, held at USC on May 10, 1986. For the first time in Society history, the eight-hour, one-day program was transmitted live via closed-circuit satellite across the nation. The transmission was a joint venture of USC and local station KTLA, which arranged the transmission of the program via SYNSAT. Teri Shannon, director of the Continuing Education Division of the



Secretary/Treasurer John L. Mason

USC School of Cinema-Television, handled the coordination of the colleges in the National University Teleconference Network. Videocassettes of this seminar are available from the Society in Beta and VHS.

In 1988, USC and Pasadena City College, in cooperation with SMPTE, conducted short courses for students and working professionals. The course, entitled "Sound Mixing and Recording in the Production Environment," was held on May 14 and 15 at USC. The workshop covered a range of topics including electronic acoustics, synchronization, and the impact of sound on post-production equipment. Presenters included specialists in the sound mixing and recording industry. Ray Dolby was the keynote speaker.

A workshop on "Getting Started in Film and Video" was offered on May 7, 1988, at Pasadena City College. This was designed to provide graduating film and video engineering students with practical help in finding jobs in the industry.

In 1989, the SMPTE co-sponsored three production classes with California colleges. The first, "Toward the Ultimate Sound System for Post-Production: An SMPTE Forum," was held May 6 through the joint efforts of the UCLA Extension and the Hollywood Section. The all-day program featured presentations on post-production sound techniques by Ioan Allen, Dolby Laboratories; Chris David, Solid State Logic; Brian Kelly, Lucasfilm Ltd.; J.A. Morrer, Sonic Solutions; Ed Zwaneveld, National Film Board of Canada; David Haynes, Integrated Media Systems; and Lee Bartolomei, Digital Audio Research.

The SMPTE/USC 1989 spring



Donald McCroskey, chairman of Hollywood Section Education Committee, welcoming attendees at 1990 spring seminar.



(L) Jan Yarbrough, AME, explaining features of the rack of D-1 equipment set up for high-quality video display at 1990 seminar; (C) Herb Farmer, USC, at blackboard during 1983 SMPTE/USC seminar; (R) Teri Shannon, USC, at 1986 joint seminar.

seminar, "Film for Television," was held May 20 and 21, and was designed to update craftsmen and technicians on the latest techniques of shooting film for video. SMPTE Education Committee Chairman Gus Dato, ABC, delivered a welcoming address, followed by SMTE/USC Program Chairman Don McCroskey, who made the opening remarks. Six sessions were held on Sunday discussing transfer methods, proper video viewing conditions, and the case history of a television series, including cinematography, editing, transfer, and color correction of the finished film for the videotape master.

A course entitled "Film and Video: Integration of New Technologies" was held in cooperation with California State University at Northridge on four evenings from June 1 to June 22, 1989. The program was designed to help working professionals and students to broaden their knowledge of the integration of film and video; to explore film production, electronic production, image manipulation, and the latest trends and technologies, and to meet with leading film and video experts.

The most recent SMPTE/USC spring seminar was held May 10-20, 1990, on "Digital Technology for Motion Picture and Television Production." The meeting, held in the Norris Theater on the USC campus, was opened by Don McCroskey, chairman of the Hollywood Section Education Committee, who welcomed the attendees and delivered a few remarks to an audience of about 85 people. Bob Ringer, Multimedia Services, started the program with a presentation on the basics of digital signals called "Digital 101." The seminar featured

well-known speakers from the industry on various topics relating to digital technology. Speakers included Bill Kovacs, Wavefront Technologies, talking about off-the-shelf animation products; an overview of D-1 recorders and equipment; Ray Feeney, Rhythm & Hues, on how computer graphics and digital video fit together; Bill Feightner, Composite Image Systems, on digital technology for television commercials; Rich Thorne, The Post Group, on a digital video facility; Gavin Schutz, Image Transform, giving a digital video tutorial; and Bernie Laramie, an independent post-production supervisor, discussing the pros and cons of digital and analog video. A rack of D-1 equipment was set up by AME, Inc., so that attendees could have a high-quality video display. Jan Yarbrough of AME was on hand to answer questions relating to the equipment.

The Hollywood Section is not resting on its laurels, however. While the major emphasis is still on disseminating technological information, they plan to offer a wide range of topics to cover the varied interests of their membership. A special retrospective of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Oscars for Scientific and Technical Achievements is planned, to be produced in cooperation with the Academy and held in their newly refurbished theater. Also in the works is a joint meeting with the Audio Engineering Society. Some programs will be shared with the San Francisco Section, since they have many of the same interests. Preservation is on everyone's agenda now, and a seminar or a meeting on that topic will be held in the near future.

A teleconferencing program, in

conjunction with UCLA Extension, is also in the planning stages. The Educational Committee of the section is scheduling several seminars in conjunction with local colleges. They are hoping to take the Job Fair originated at the Pasadena City College Chapter to several other colleges. This is a one-day session focusing on the career opportunities that currently exist and how to get them. The committee feels that this is an extremely practical course on a subject not yet taught, even at the top schools. The section continues to expand the student chapters and to assure good programs for those already in existence. In the coming year, new membership will be expanded with a program of publicity for SMPTE activities in Hollywood and on Los Angeles area campuses.

A pilot Hollywood Section College Curriculum Advisory Committee is now being studied. The goals of the committee will be to advise on the content of basic courses to be included in the different requirements for a community college degree, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree; to coordinate with faculty and industry representatives for the establishment of the required educational components; and to communicate and establish support from the industry for active participation in presentations and intern placements. After interviewing hundreds of graduates of schools throughout the U.S., Canada, and the British Commonwealth, Hollywood Governor Craig Curtis is convinced that this pilot project can well be one of the most important programs that the Society can produce.

The section continues to elect strong officers and managers. Five members currently serve on the Board

of Governors: Craig Curtis, consultant; T. Russell McMurtray, Eastman Kodak Co.; Louis F. Wolf, Jr., Universal City Studios; and Nelson E. Meacham, Walt Disney Imagineering, are regional Governors, and Howard T. La Zare, Deluxe Laboratories, Inc., serves as Governor-at-Large. Many section members have gone on to contribute their time and effort on a national level. Currently serving as SMPTE officers are Editorial Vice-President Frank J. Haney, Capital Cities/ABC, Inc.; Editorial Director, Motion Pictures, John L. Baptista, Consolidated Film Industries; and Engineering Director, Motion Pictures, Rami Mina, Eastman Kodak Co. The current Section Chairman is Milton R. Shefter, Paramount Pictures Corp., who succeeded Past Chairman Michael V. Chewey III on July 1, 1990. John L. Mason, Eastman Kodak Co., serves as Secretary/Treasurer. Managers include Roy Brubaker, Jess Daily, Joseph J. Kane, Paul Carey, Tom Kuhn, and Ron Little.

I am deeply grateful to Craig Curtis, Louis Wolf, Roderick T. Ryan, and Milton Shefter for their invaluable assistance in furnishing information on the background and activities of the Hollywood Section. A brief biographical sketch of some of the officers and most active participants in the section follows. Of course, there are many others involved whose work is equally important.

Hollywood Governor Louis Wolf, Jr., director of videotape operations, Universal City Studios, has been involved in the section's activities for many years. He has served as Manager, Secretary/Treasurer, Chairman, and a previous term as Governor, in addition to his work in the Education Committee. In 1960 he received an Emmy Award for outstanding achievement in electronic camera work, and in 1987 he was made a Fellow of the Society. Wolf feels that his affiliation with SMPTE has been the highlight of his career, saying: "When you are given the opportunity to know, work, and become close friends with many of the top people in the industry, where every project conference or meeting is a learning and pleasurable experience, you are motivated to contribute and become involved."

Governor Allan Craig Curtis has been an active participant in the Hollywood Section throughout the 40-

plus years of his membership. He has served the Society in many capacities, including chairman of the Hollywood Section, chairman of the SMPTE Education Committee, chairman of the College Advisory Committee, and currently as Hollywood regional Governor. In 1986 Curtis was elected a Fellow of the SMPTE, and in 1985 he was the recipient of the Society's Eastman Kodak Gold Medal Award. A consultant to the broadcast and post-production industries, Curtis holds both Emmy and Oscar awards for his work. He says that many of the members of the section have formed lifetime friendships as a result of their professional associations.

Governor Nelson Meacham was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1988. Meacham is senior project engineer, Walt Disney Imagineering, where he is responsible for the design of show presentation systems for Disney theme parks around the world. Previously Meacham was with Walt Disney Pictures, where he played a key role in the implementation of digital sound recording for motion pictures, including the first digital sound reproduction in theatrical release of the *Fantasia* soundtrack. Meacham has served on the Board of Managers, the Sub-Committee on Audio and Post Production for Motion Picture and Television Entertainment Programming, and on the Education Committee.

Roderick T. Ryan is one of the most active members of the section and was made a Life Fellow of the Society in 1989. Now a consultant in motion-picture technology, Dr. Ryan retired as regional engineering director of Eastman Kodak Co., after a long and distinguished career spanning close to 40 years. In addition to writing several books and articles on film technology and lecturing at Los Angeles area universities, he found time to serve the Society as Governor, Vice-President Photo-Science, Vice-President Motion Picture Affairs, and on various committees including the Archival Papers, Editorial Advisory, Lab Practices, and Education Committees. In 1978 he was the recipient of the Society's Herbert T. Kalmus Gold Medal Award, for his continuing substantial contributions to color film printing and processing systems. He has also been recognized with a Scientific and Engineering Academy Award and two SMPTE Special Commendations.

Governor Russell McMurtray is district electronics specialist for Eastman Kodak Co. He previously served as Chairman and Secretary/Treasurer of the section, and as Secretary/Treasurer of the Pacific Northwest Section while he was living in Seattle. He has also acted as program co-chairman, topic chairman, and sessions chairman for national conferences.

Secretary/Treasurer John L. Mason is in sales and engineering, Eastman Kodak Co., where his responsibilities include providing production and technical services to television film producers, cinematographers, and post-production groups. His service to the Hollywood Section includes membership in the Education Committee from 1986 to 1988, Manager of the Section's Theater Evaluation Committee from 1986 to 1988, and Manager of the Section in 1988. In addition, he was the Society's Display Chairman for the 126th Technical Conference in New York City and Registration Chairman for the 131st Technical Conference in Los Angeles. He is currently running for Governor of the Hollywood Region.

Section Chairman Milton R. Shefter is director of library resources, Paramount Pictures Corp., where he is responsible for asset protection, film restoration, and archival storage programs. He has been a member of the Board of Managers of the Hollywood Section and on the Local Arrangements Committee for the 127th and 129th SMPTE Technical Conventions. He also served as chairman of the SMPTE program on the 100th Anniversary of the Moving Image and as Banquet/Entertainment Co-Chairman during the 131st Conference in Los Angeles.

Milt Shefter is very enthusiastic about the future of the Hollywood Section, and is looking forward to their handling the arrangements for the 1991 conference in Los Angeles. He expects to continue and expand the section's work with student chapters and, as such key topics as HDTV and preservation become buzzwords in the industry, to address the needs of the members and get firsthand information to them quickly. He says proudly, "We have the resources to attract the most knowledgeable experts and to air even the disagreements, in the interest of information flow. We're all looking forward to an exciting, activity-filled year."