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The 1950s – An Era of Firsts

The 1950s began what would be a quickly evolving period of organization and development for the new Association. Much time was spent on debating the merits of hiring staff and opening an office. Most importantly, county commissioners were meeting regularly as a structured group, beginning with the first annual conference in 1951.

The first Annual Conference of the State Association of County Commissioners of Maryland (SACCOM) was held at the George Washington Hotel in Ocean City, September 7-9, 1951. The conference was held again in September the following year at the same hotel in Ocean City. Thereafter, the Summer Conference would be held in September only three more times, the Board instead choosing either July or August in Ocean City. Attendance at these conferences was first reported for the fourth annual convention August 27-28, 1954 in which 11 counties were present for the Business Meeting roll call; however, "it may be noted that several of the counties [commissioners] appeared [later] during the meeting." *Conferences are discussed in Chapter 5.*

The minutes from the first Summer Meeting reflect that Somerset County Commissioner W. Clyde Ford, Jr. presided as temporary chairman until the slate of officers was approved. Appropriately enough, the first order of business was the presentation of the very first Nominating Committee's report. The proposed candidates included U. Grant Hooper of Frederick County as President, Paul M. Widdowson of Wicomico County as Vice-President, and Kathryn J. Lawlor of Montgomery County as Secretary-Treasurer. The Board of Directors would include an equal number of Eastern and Western Shore representatives. Eastern Shore commissioners elected were Thomas N. Kay of Cecil County, W. Clyde Ford, Jr. of Somerset County, and Julian Hurtt of Kent County. Western Shore commissioners elected were William H. Lemmert of Allegany County, Clarence E. Tyler of Anne Arundel County, and Walter V. Bennett of Carroll County. The slate of officers and board members was unanimously adopted by the membership.

It was reported at that first meeting that Paul Kuhns of Carroll County and Kathryn Lawlor had attended the National Association of County Officials (NACo) Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in July, perhaps in anticipation of the establishment of the new organization of Maryland counties.

A great asset to the new organization was the completion of the first span of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952. When the bridge opened that year, it unified the Eastern and Western Shore counties. Former Governor Marvin Mandel remembers riding in one of the cars in a celebratory parade of antique automobiles that were the first across the bridge, a fitting symbol of the access that counties now had to each other. During that 1951 conference, newly elected President U. Grant Hooper said he was "assured that the merged forces would become a great State organization, and that the Chesapeake Bay was no longer a barrier to inter-county activities." Further, he declared, "we [have] bridged our differences and are united for mutual benefit... 'Our task has just begun.'"

First Constitution and Bylaws

The original Constitution and Bylaws of the Association were drafted and adopted sometime prior to that first conference. They stated that the purpose and objective of the Association was "the promotion and advancement of the general welfare of the people of the State of Maryland, the efficient and economical administration of county government," and "to accomplish these objectives as an independent organization and/or by affiliation or cooperation with other official state or national organizations having similar purposes and objectives."

Membership included three categories: active (county commissioners), honorary, and sustaining. Only active members were qualified to hold office and vote. Officers included the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. The position of secretary and that of treasurer could be held by the same person and the treasurer was bonded for \$2,000. Board members consisted of three members of the Eastern Shore of Maryland and three from the Western Shore of Maryland. "No county shall be permitted to have more than one director hold office at a given time."

Board of Directors minutes indicate that at least two MACo life memberships have been awarded, in 1968 to Association President Evan Crossley and again in 1992 to Association President C. Vernon Gray. Photo archives indicate that Association President Ray F. Redden of Worcester County was similarly honored in 1969 or 1970 and Baltimore County Executive Christian Kahl was also honored. Although no provision exists in the bylaws, it is presumed that others were awarded life memberships, but records were inconclusive. However, a type of life membership is granted to MACo Past Presidents in that they may attend winter and summer conferences as guests of the Association for life, after leaving public office.

First Legislative Committee

The first Legislative Committee was mentioned in the 1951 Summer Conference Business Meeting minutes. The Bylaws specified that the Committee Chairman be the current Vice-President of the organization, so it can be assumed that Paul Widdowson was the first Chairman. However, Committee members are not mentioned by name until 1952, when temporary Chairman Lathrop Smith provided an oral report of his Committee's work at that summer's conference. He proposed improving County Commissioner-State Delegation relationships, assessment laws, and county authority for setting speed limits on county roads as topics for the next December meeting. Chairman Smith further reported that the Committee suggested the need for a full time Executive Secretary. The entire 1953 Legislative Committee is listed in the minutes: Chairman Ralph L. Lowman, U. Grant Hooper, Calvin Kompton, and future Baltimore County Executive, Dale Anderson.

Chairman Lowman, who would become Association President in 1956, called a Special Meeting of the Legislative Committee for February 13, 1953 at the Courthouse in Annapolis to discuss several bills including "the State Roads construction and reconstruction 12 year program." A motion was made to adopt a resolution in support of a one-cent gasoline tax. "A telegram was sent to each county not attending, asking them to support the amendment to the State Roads bill, House Bill 19."

During this era, Maryland saw a huge surge in the construction of new roads, bridges, and major highways. As mentioned earlier, when the east span of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge opened in 1952, it facilitated a much faster journey between the Eastern Shore and the Western Shore. It is no coincidence that road-related issues are one of the most frequently mentioned issues throughout the MACo history. Though highway management and safety issues are commonplace today, in the 1950s they were being discussed for perhaps the first time ever in Maryland at this level. In the first half of the decade, concern focused on the highway planning and building itself. Minutes from the latter part of the decade reflect conversations centered on road safety. Schools, another common topic in these early Association meetings, were being desegregated during this time, and this may be a reason for frequent discussion of school finances and resources. These topics are also reflected in the Conference programs throughout the years.

First Office: Executive Secretary

Though now considered to be a core component of the Association, the position of Executive Secretary (now Director) underwent several years of debate and postponement within the young organization before becoming a reality.

At the 1952 Summer Conference, as mentioned above, the Legislative Committee suggested that the Association would benefit from a full-time Executive Secretary, and the Board of Directors should consider "whether or not a paid Executive Secretary was needed." The matter was referred to the Budget and Finance Committee but, for reasons unknown, the matter was tabled and was not discussed again until the August 1954 Summer Meeting.

At that time, Stella Werner of Montgomery County once again pointed out the need for an Executive Secretary "in order to protect the County's interest in legislative matters." She referenced the fact that the Maryland Municipal League's (MML) full-time Executive Secretary had "prepared numerous recommendations for the Legislative Council for action in the 1955 session." Similarly, such a Secretary for SACCOM would have the necessary time and attention to devote to researching legislative issues. The Board of Directors agreed to study the issue and report its findings during the December meeting. At that meeting, MML Executive Secretary Ed Johnson reported on the "advisability of... obtaining a full-time Secretary." Werner presented a resolution that called for the appointment of three commissioners to a Special Committee to investigate the need for an Executive Secretary and staff, develop a long-range plan, and report back to the membership at the 1955 Summer Meeting.

By September, the Special Committee had met with MML officials, but decided that a long-range program, including hiring of staff was "prohibitive" at that time. They determined that the "Legislative Council Fiscal Research Bureau" could furnish counties with "information that would be provided by a full time secretary and staff." Werner recommended that further study was needed as "many advantages other than statistical information" could be provided by a full time Executive Secretary, including keeping association records, collecting dues, and disseminating information on major legislative issues via meetings and newsletters.

At the 1956 Winter Meeting, it was again requested that the issue concerning "retention of a full time paid Executive Secretary" be placed on the agenda. Incoming President, Thomas N. Kay, was instructed to appoint a five-person committee to report the following summer on whether the Association would endorse the concept and develop "a way and means for payment." At the

September 1957 Board Meeting, President Kay suggested that the matter, once again, be tabled until a meeting in December.

No minutes or notes from such a December meeting exist. However, at the 1959 Summer Meeting the issue was discussed again. C. Burton Cannon, Jr., Clerk of the Board of Frederick County Commissioners, provided a post-meeting "summary of my recollection of the latter portion of the meeting of the Commissioner Association on August 29, 1959 in Ocean City," as requested by the President. According to Cannon's notes, the Study Committee recommended that a full time Executive Secretary be hired and the counties be apportioned for salary costs. Present county representatives approved a motion to accept the study committee's report. Several counties did not have their legislative officers present at that meeting, and were to report on their acceptance or denial of the proposal by October 1 or the next meeting of the Association. On April 26, 1960, a meeting was held "of the Executive Committee and The Committee on the Selection of an Executive Secretary."

Finally, after at least seven years of debate, the role of Executive Secretary would soon become a reality. Before the Association could hire an Executive Secretary and staff, however, it needed to address the related issues of office space and expenses.