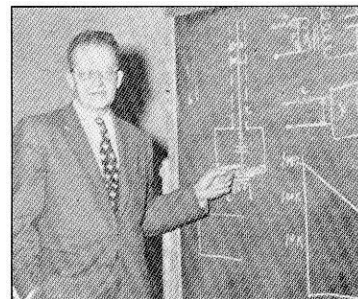


Reminiscences on the Founding and Development of the Society*

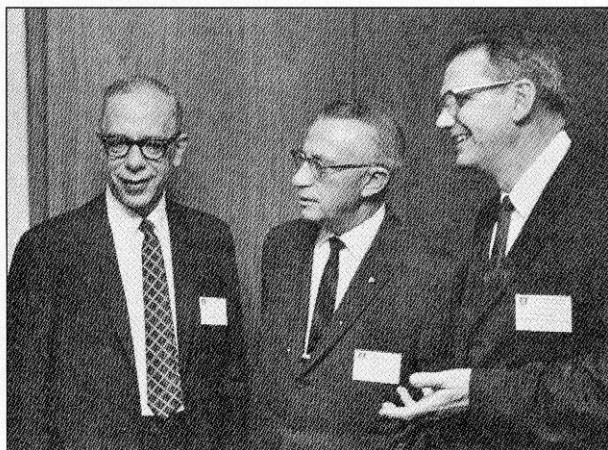


**Donald J. Plunkett, AES Fellow
Chairman, Historical Committee**



(Above from left) Don Plunkett, Harry F. Olson, and Fletcher Harvey at early New York Section dinner. Founding members include Norman Pickering (right) and C. J. LeBel (below at left).

(Above) Ted Lindenberg, a founding member, speaks at 1956 section meeting. (Below from left) H. H. Scott, H. G. Henriks, Daniel von Recklinghausen, and Sherman Fairchild.



One hundred is a wonderful number whether it be applied to money, age, or longevity of business. This convention in wonderful Copenhagen marks the 100th time the AES has met internationally as a group of dedicated individuals concerned with the field of engineering sound—often called audio. In fact, when a few engineers interested in radio and sound met in early 1948 in New York, they met to discuss starting an organization that would be concerned with the rapid developments in the field of audio that had resulted from World War II research and engineering. The group was worried that audio was not receiving the proper recognition because the U.S. organization IRE (now known as IEEE) concentrated on radio and the emerging field of electronics. Audio, or sound, had occupied the minds of many engineers in the performing arts going as far back as the invention of the phonograph at the Edison Laboratories in Orange, New Jersey, or the earlier work of Leon Scott in France, resulting in the Phonoautograph, which made the visual recording of sound possible. The perfection of sound recording and playback opened the floodgates of possibilities and created the potential of a worldwide business.

However the emergence of radio transmission preoccu-

pied companies and diverted them from working on improving sound recording and reproduction. Radio had far greater profit potential. Broadcasters saw the gold mine that was at hand. Recording became an also ran, despite the emergence of electrical recording. Actually, this improvement in quality of the late 1920s did little to help the advance of popularity of recording. In fact audio almost killed recording and records.

World War II of course produced advances of a technical nature that could be applied to sound recording but the war impeded their application.

It was this delay, this lack of advancement, that concerned the founders of the AES when they gathered to lament the slow progress and discuss how improvements could be effected. These individuals included Norman Pickering, C. J. LeBel, Chester Rackey of NBC, and Ted Lindenberg of Fairchild. They formed a steering committee to establish a technical audio society. Through their hard work, the AES was formed.

Why were they concerned and how did they get together? World War II actually brought a small group of engineers actively involved in recording together for the salvation of their businesses during the war. Supplies were short—very short—and for the first time these individuals joined together to form an organization called the Sapphire Group, named for the recording stylus. They

*Presented at the 100th Convention of the Audio Engineering Society, Copenhagen, 1996 May

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met monthly to commiserate in New York City, or to find out if one of them had a surplus of lacquer recording disks, or vacuum tubes, or any of the important (and rationed) supplies needed for the recording industry.

It might be well to note that up until these hard times of dwindling supplies, there was very little communication between company managements. Audio recording was a corporate closed shop. Macy's did not tell Gimbels. Victor did not tell Columbia. Secrecy prevailed...until rationing and shortages forced cooperation. Necessity became the true mother of invention. This corporate camaraderie worked and the Sapphire Group concept spread to another major recording center—Hollywood, California. The nucleus of a new communication network was established and maintained. It really served as the foundation stone for the AES. The Society emerged from those meetings of the Sapphire Group during the war years.

To see if there was an industry interest, the first AES meeting was held in March, 1948. It was a great success with about 150 recording industry members attending to listen to a lecture on a new loudspeaker system, the RCA LC-1A, by Harry F. Olson.

It is well to recognize that the pursuit of quality audio was spreading due to two events: one in Europe and one in the U.S. In Britain, Decca introduced a high-quality 78 rpm recording system called Decca FFRR. It was certainly full frequency range recording with enhanced dynamics. In the U.S., Norman Pickering developed a disk reproducing system based on the work of F. V. Hunt and J. A. Pierce at Harvard University.

All these developments indicated a need for the first AES convention in October 1949. This convention resulted in an attendance of about 3500 people.

Another important milestone in the formation of an international AES was during the 1950s. Capital Records Chief Engineer Warren Birkenhead moved to Japan. In his business activities he established contact

with Japanese manufacturers in the emerging audio industry. He moved to form the first offshore AES section. That section played an important role in the technology of the day and the Japan Section still plays an important role through its regional conventions and section activity in co-operation with the Japan Audio Society.

The AES became known in Europe by industry networking and the limited circulation of the *AES Journal*. In 1968, sparked by the work of Joe Ooms at Philips in the Netherlands, a group of AES members and other interested individuals were organized to come to the New York convention and present a session called "Audio in Europe." This was a great success. It was the spark that ignited the enthusiasm and section organization throughout Europe that is evident here in Copenhagen today.

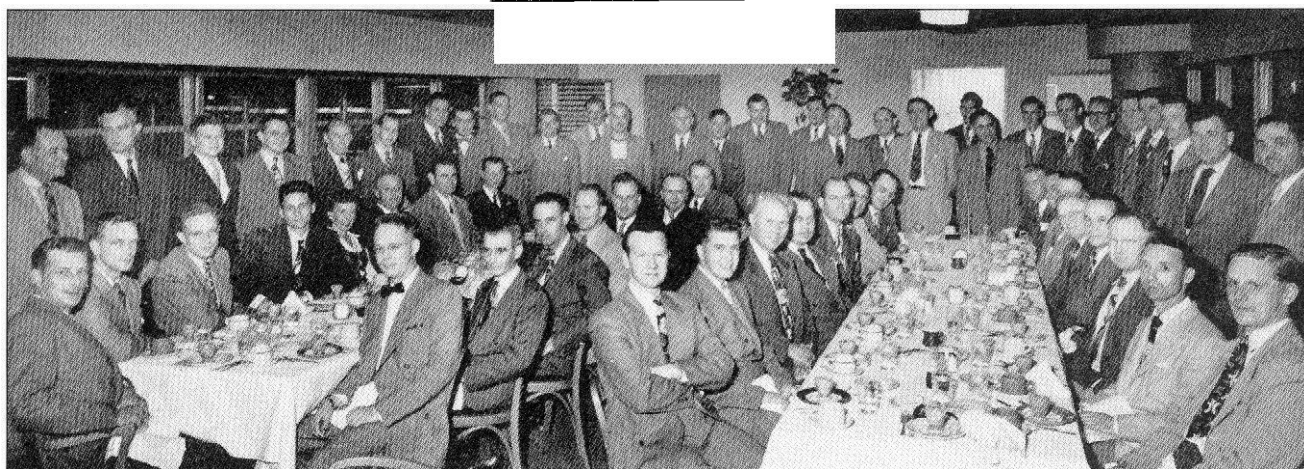
AES conclaves—mini conventions—were held in 1971 and 1972 in Cologne and Munich. An officially numbered, recognized, and sanctioned convention program was conducted in early 1973 in Rotterdam. Enthusiasm and competence were evident and the 74th Convention in Copenhagen firmly placed AES Europe conventions on the road to stability and expansion. It is well to note the hard work and dedication of Hermann Wilms and Titia Bakker during these years in Europe.

Little did that small organizing group in New York realize what their foresight and dedication to audio would produce in future years—a society that has become internationally influential in the audio profession.

The late David Packard had a philosophy that influenced his life and company, "Do something useful." He did, as have the many volunteers who have made the AES the worldwide audio organization it is today. We are grateful to all of them. All those mentioned here have done something useful, and it is now up to the young members of the Society to carry on the work of the AES in the coming years.

Charter Members

Paul M. Brubaker
Baxter E. Burris
Edward T. Canby
Richard W. Carlisle
Albert Cezar
Emory Cook
R. D. Darrell
Howard G. De Long
J. Raymond Edinger
Edward Golub
Lewis S. Goodfriend
E. L. Grayson
Jack Hartley
Jorgen H. Isaksen
John P. Jacks
Lawrence E. Knees
Robert Z. Langevin
William S. Latham
Vincent J. Liebler
Samuel F. Lybarger
Frederic D. Merrill
Stephen Nester
C. M. Norberg
Norman C. Pickering
Donald J. Plunkett
Julius Ross
Vincent Salmon
Fred F. Salomon
William A. Savory
Chester F. Scott
Fred L. Seebinger
Cyril S. Selinger
Ross H. Snyder
George A. V. Sowter
Adolf-Wolfgang Timmerman
Frederick H. Walter
Edwin M. G. Webb



Inauguration Banquet of the (then) "West Coast" Section held at Brittingham's CBS Square, Sunset and Gower, circa 1951.