

# Thinking tall: twenty years

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### 3. Thinking Tall: Twenty Years

Why the cake? Well, George Beezer, director of Lehigh's publications efforts, was interviewing me for an article in our alumni magazine. In the course of the discussion he asked, «When did the Tall Building Council start?»

It's not often that one can remember the start of something...right back to the moment he had the idea. But in the case of the Tall Building Council, I can: Friday the 13th, September, 1968 at the 8th Congress of the IABSE, just being concluded in New York.

Prof. H. Beer of Austria was summarizing the theme, «Tall Steel Buildings», and I was struck with the fact that all of this research was underway and yet was not being coordinated or evaluated or brought together in a form useful for the designer. Some kind of international effort should get started.

George was interviewing me a couple of weeks before the 20th anniversary of that idea, and he said, «You're going to celebrate the event, aren't you? What about a tall building cake?»

Being one prone to historical references, I'd been thinking of some kind of event to mark the anniversary, but nothing had jelled. Even to his question, I didn't respond immediately. Celebrate an idea?

Well of course. Ideas are what universities are all about. Perhaps it's the most important date of all. The only trouble is that most ideas develop slowly, are made up of many parts of which no one thought is especially outstanding.

Even this one had its preliminaries. I was at an Engineering Foundation conference in New Hampshire. During one of the afternoon breaks, Ted Galambos, Ivan Viest, and I were hiking in the mountains back of the conference center and we were remembering the recent rich experience of working on the *Commentary on Plastic Design*. It wasn't just an American effort. We had input from all over the world, input that had required us to meet occasionally with our counterparts from other

countries. I remember saying, «I hope there can be other opportunities like that.» At the IABSE Congress along that opportunity came.

Back to the cake. George: «I'll contact the university baker if you'll give the word.» I did, he did, and you see the result in the photograph. A marvel. We all had a good time.

What happened with the idea? Acting on it, I wrote to Prof Beer. In due course he responded that some kind of international exchange would be a good idea.

By that time, February, 1969, had rolled around; and at a meeting of the US Group of IABSE in New Orleans chairman Elmer Timby asked us to think about some topic that we could «gather around» as a basis for more frequent exchanges with our professional colleagues overseas. Wow! Here was the opportunity.

When we went around the table the next day (Feb 5, 1969) and it came my turn, I suggested tall buildings ...and not just getting together. There should be a document on which we would work, a Monograph, the preparation and updating of which would provide a focus for continuing exchange...and for the benefit of the profession. It would be joint activity between the IABSE and ASCE.

The idea was one of those that seemed right. Elmer Timby asked Jewell Garrelts to make the presentation to IABSE at their following meeting in Britain in September of 1969. I talked to Mike Gaus the next day (Feb 6, 1969) about the possibility of NSF support of such an effort. And we were on our way.

Much has been accomplished in the Council, but most important are the relationships that have been established with friends all over the world. We thank Elmer Timby for asking the right question.

Maybe we should have another cake in 1989!

Lynn Beedle