History of the Tennessee Section of AIPG

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The Tennessee Section was formally organized and recognized by AIPG in 1967, four years following the founding of the national organization. The first president was John Jewell with vice-president Berlen C. Moneymaker and secretary-treasurer, Robert J. Floyd. The section membership at that time listed 19 members, eight from middle and west Tennessee and 11 from the eastern part of the state. Of the 744 Charter Members of AIPG, 11 are from Tennessee. These individuals, whose vision brought about the Tennessee Section, include: Robert A. Laurence (CPG-175), William D. Hardeman (CPG-179), John A. Hageman (CPG-264), Stuart W. Maher (CPG-269), Richard G. Stearns (CPG-298), George D. Swingle (CPG-302), Robert J. Floyd (CPG-382), Robert E. Hershey (CPG-416), Edward T. Luther (CPG-419), Portland P. Fox (CPG-544)and Robert W. Allen (CPG-706).

According to our Dr. Richard Stearns (CPG-298), the Tennessee Section of AIPG was developed in response to the suggestions and urgings of AIPG’s first national president Martin Van Couvering to our then state geologist William Hardeman. Mr. Hardeman then rounded up other prominent geologists to develop a section of AIPG whose mission was to pursue professionalism and to safeguard the professional role of geologists in society. It appears that much of the early efforts of AIPG members were directed toward the issue of professional registration. As early as 1957 a rudimentary draft of a geologist registration act was circulating among a few interested geologists in Tennessee. By 1975, AIPG had an official Committee on Registration. The idea of registration and/or licensing generated much debate and it was far from unanimous among geologists that registration by governmental authority was good for the profession. It was not until much later that any success was gained toward a registration act.

During the late 1980’s and early 1990’s meetings in middle Tennessee were typically held at the University Club on Vanderbilt University’s campus and arranged by Vanderbilt’s Geology Department Chairman, Dr. Richard Stearns. Other meetings were held in East Tennessee, often at the University of Tennessee Faculty Club. Section officers during this time frame included the following: Robert H. Barnes, Harold R. Beaver, Lawrence I. Benson, Don W. Byerly, Alan T. Dafferner, Sara B. Darrell, Roy K. Garman, Phyllis M. Garman, Kenneth H. Haislip, William T. Hill, Edward T. Luther, Robert A. Miller, Marc J. Norris, Glenn N. Pruitt, Warren R. Rehfeldt, Donald R. Smith, Gregory A. Upham, Lawrence C. Weber, Larry W. Wilbanks and Ronald P. Zurawski.

In 1988, while Robert H. Barnes was president, a motion was made to host the Annual Meeting of AIPG. The East Tennessee town of Gatlinburg was selected for the meeting to be held in the fall of 1991. Planning for the 1991 National Meeting continued through 1989 and 1990. Don Byerly was president in 1989 and did much of the local networking and planning for the east Tennessee event. Lawrence C. Weber was president in 1990 and became the General Chairman for the meeting. Early arrangements had been made for the meeting headquarters to be the Glennstone Hotel. Because of a change of hotel
ownership during late 1990, planning records for the meeting were lost by new hotel owner, and upon calling for confirmation of the pending meeting, it was discovered that the designated Hotel could not accommodate AIPG. This caused a slight panic which was only alleviated by the fortunate circumstance that The River Terrace Hotel could work with AIPG to provide most of the needed rooms and meeting space. Additional rooms were reserved at other nearby hotels. From the meeting hotel in Gatlinburg, field trips were conducted into the Smoky Mountains and Cades Cove. Guest events included visits to the Biltmore Mansion in Asheville, N C., the Museum of Appalachia in Norris, TN and to entertainment venues in Pigeon Forge, TN. The theme of the meeting was Energy vs. Environment and presentations were given by representatives of the Department of Energy, Oak Ridge National Laboratories, the National Park Service, and by other distinguished geologists and engineers. The 1991 Section President, Ronald Zurawski welcomed members and guests. Attendance was 96 members and 67 guests including speakers. The meeting was a financial success for the section bringing in gross revenues of $21,414 with expenses of $13,354 for a profit of $8,060. From the proceeds, the section made a donation of $1,000 to the AIPG Foundation. Since the annual meeting in 1991, the Tennessee section has held a significant cash balance in its treasury.

Another noteworthy event of 1991 was a revision of the Section’s Bylaws, which was suggested by Don Byerly the year before. With this revision, the Section was structured into 2 sub-sections, a Middle-West Tennessee sub-section and an East Tennessee sub-section. The revision required section officers to be elected alternately from the two sub-sections so that when the president was from the middle-west sub-section the president-elect (or vice-president) would have to be from the east sub-section. This arrangement allowed each sub-section to function somewhat independently and with leadership geared toward successful meetings in the two different geographic areas.

The Tennessee Section of AIPG was instrumental in obtaining legislation for the licensing of professional geologists in Tennessee. Efforts to pursue some form of legal definition or licensing of geologists go back to early days of AIPG, but there was at that time strong opposition in some circles. Geologists themselves were divided in their opinion of the merits of licensing and, for a season, AIPG would promote the CPG as a credential preferred to state licensing. However, in 1988, at the urging of some section members, a bill for the licensure of professional geologists was introduced and was quickly passed and signed into law. The geologist registration act of 1988 was brief and simple, but lacked meaningful language regarding credentials and demonstrations of competence. Subsequent efforts to strengthen the law met with resistance by engineering groups, but these concerns were eventually put to rest through much effort by various members of AIPG and by tweaking the language. Therefore, in 1999, a bill was introduced to amend the registration act to include provisions for examination (ASBOG national exam) and for an advisory board to review applications for licensure. However, the bill was never passed and the 1988 law remained in effect.

After a period of extended apathy, the Tennessee Section learned that the section’s treasury had reverted to the national organization of AIPG. As a means of renewing activity and recapturing the considerable funds of the Tennessee Section that were being held at the AIPG headquarters, a rebuilding meeting was held, hosted by Larry Weber, at the offices of Geosciences Design Group, LLC in Nashville. Also, during this period, the 2003 national president, Rick Powers, scheduled a meeting of the
national executive committee to be held in Nashville. This event included a meeting with the state section membership, dinner at a catfish restaurant and a visit to a dinosaur exhibit at Opryland Hotel. With the sections treasury restored and a concerted effort to grow the membership, a renewed energy took hold within the section and a group of new leaders emerged. John Hofer and Jerry Archer have provided leadership in the role of president from the east Tennessee sub-section, with Jeb Barrett currently serving as President-Elect. Vanessa Bateman, Sam Vinson, and others have served as the Section president from middle Tennessee, with Todd McFarland currently serving as President.

During the last 10 years, the Tennessee section has tried to strengthen relationships with the East Tennessee Geological Society and through the efforts of John Hofer, the section has participated jointly with the ETGS in meetings and fieldtrips. Also, in recent years, through the work of Vanessa Bateman, a relationship has developed between Tennessee Section of AIPG and the Geosciences Department of Middle Tennessee State University. Several MTSU students attend the section meetings in Nashville. Regular quarterly meetings have typically been held at various venues in the Nashville area. The section also hosted a joint field trip with the Georgia and Alabama sections in 2004 to the Ocoee River Gorge and Ducktown, TN. In 2007 and 2008, the Section hosted a presentation contest during the May Quarterly Meeting where geology students could present their thesis papers and be eligible for cash awards.

The most significant accomplishment since revitalization of the Tennessee Section in 2003 has been the passage of the Geologist Registration Act of 2007. Work on replacement of the old 1988 law began with a survey in 2005 of all professional geologists registered in the State of Tennessee. That survey showed overwhelming support for strengthening the licensing requirements for geologist in the State. The new registration law includes requirements for examinations and a board with provisions available to establish continuing education requirements. The effort was headed by John Hofer and Vanessa Bateman with a host of Section members and non-AIPG geologists providing tremendous assistance. The bill was signed into law by the Governor in June 2007.