

NCMCA Golden Anniversary Celebration Series – January 2024

2024-01-26

We're starting off the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association Golden 50th Anniversary Year by highlighting some monumental events that have taken place throughout the existence of NCMCA. Each month throughout 2024 we will have articles that will showcase the history and folks that helped NCMCA get to where it is today. Please enjoy this yearlong series with our first article, "In the Beginning"..

In the late nineteen-sixties a few masonry firms in the Hickory-Morganton area began to investigate and to use advanced, newly innovated equipment such as automated scaffolding and reach forklifts. To learn more about the new way of doing things, Glenn W. Sipe and his sons of Glenn W. Sipe & Sons, and Ivey Griffin, Jr. of Griffin Masonry, as it was called at the time, had attended equipment trade shows of the Masonry Contractors Association of America (MCAA) encouraged by their mutual sales representatives at Contractor Sales & Service.

At the same time, several of these Hickory-Morganton area firms began evolving into “turnkey” (or as it is sometimes called, “lump-sum”) contractors, a radical idea at the time. These firms performed masonry contracting that including purchasing their own materials instead of being paid by the hour or by the unit, as was the custom of the day.

Realizing their common interests, Mr. Sipe and Mr. Griffin along with a few of their competitors, including Jerry Eckard, Howard Rowe, Bobby Matthews and Carl Moser, and a few supplier representatives, began meeting informally over dinner occasionally. Howard Rowe once reminisced about how “We’d meet at Mull’s Restaurant, eat prime rib, drink George Dickle, and talk about the hard times.”

Mr. Sipe recalled how one of the early projects of the group was to lobby brick (and later concrete block) companies to begin “strapping” brick for delivery so the contractors could begin making the best use of their new equipment. He related that on one visit to press a brick manufacturing company owner for the change to strapping, the executive told Mr. Sipe he could see no good reason to make such an expensive change to his company’s operation and had no plans to do so, which Mr.

Sipe said at the time, was utilizing “pack-haulers” for delivery. (One “big old pack of bricks” that had to be broken down and stacked on pallets in order to be handled by forklifts.) That day, Mr. Sipe, now representing some of the largest masonry contracting companies in the southeast, warned the executive of the increasing buying power the lump-sum masonry contractors, saying, “If I ran a brick company, I’d package each brick like a cake of soap if that’s what the customer wanted.” Of course, “strapped brick” are now the industry standard, perhaps at least in part thanks to Glenn Sipe and the Western Carolina Masonry Contractors Association.

By the early seventies, the group was meeting regularly and in a more formal manner. Several members of the group were regularly participating in MCAA conventions. Soon, the Hickory-Morganton contractors successfully applied to become the Western Carolina Chapter of the Mason Contractors Association of America, the first MCAA chapter in the southeast and the first chapter made up exclusively of open-shop companies. (Records are not clear when or why the formal affiliation as a chapter of MCAA ended although NCMCA has always aligned with and supported most of MCAA projects and initiatives. Traditionally, many NCMCA member companies are also members of MCAA.)

By the early seventies, masonry contractors in other areas of the state had also begun meeting on a regular basis, often with representatives of the Western Carolina Chapter in attendance. The early leaders of the local groups included Robert Merrill of Merrill Masonry in Brevard, Belton Koontz of Koontz Masonry in Lexington, Richard Robertson of Robertson Masonry in Burlington, Red Brookshire of Brookshire Masonry in Charlotte, and Thomas Butts of Thomas Butts Masonry in Greenville. As with the Western Carolina group, turnkey/lump-sum masonry and equipment evolution were among the most common issues bringing together the participating companies.

In April of 1974, the consolidated local groups successfully incorporated to become the North Carolina *Mason Contractors Association*. (The name was eventually changed from “*MasonContractors*” to “*Masonry Contractors*.”) Glenn W. Sipe would serve as NCMCA’s charter president. 2024: NCMCA’s Golden Anniversary.

Article Written by Lynn Nash

These NCMCA “Founding Fathers,” now all deceased, met in Hickory in July of 2000 to talk about the Association’s early days. An audio recording of that session is held in the NCMCA archives. The picture includes three past state NCMCA presidents and two members of the NCAA Masonry Hall of Fame. Can you name them?



Top row, left to right, Howard Rowe, Carl Moser, Sr., Robert “Bob” Merrill, Jerry Eckard, and B.E. “Bobby” Matthews. Seated, Glenn W. Sipe, left, and Ivey Griffin, Jr.
