

## History Activities Coordinator

Anthony Davies

### Goals

The two primary aims of the History Activities are unchanged: [1] to encourage IEEE units in R8 (Sections and Chapters) to retain and keep available their historical development and past achievements (the action of the Sweden Section, as described in the Region 8 Committee meeting in Stockholm, indicates what should be done by others) and [2] to encourage interest in historical achievements in Region 8 via History Milestone proposals and in other ways. Success can be judged by the Section and Chapter (and Society) histories which are readily available, the numbers of new Milestones, their locations if in Sections which have had few or none previously, and particularly by any signs of interest in technology history by students and young professionals

### Status and Past Contributions

Together with the Life Members Activity Group, the development of History Milestone Proposals is one of my main volunteer activities. We hope that a milestone at Dundee, Scotland, about amorphous thin-film silicon transistors will be approved shortly - this was an essential step in the development of flat panel TV displays. See [http://ieeemilestones.ethw.org/index.php/Milestone-Proposal:Amorphous\\_Silicon\\_TFT\\_Switches](http://ieeemilestones.ethw.org/index.php/Milestone-Proposal:Amorphous_Silicon_TFT_Switches)

Work is underway on proposals to recognise the development of superconducting magnets for medical applications by Oxford Instruments and for the LEO Computer (world's first computer for commercial data processing), and several others at lower priority. The Region 8 conference HISTELCON 2017 is taking place this year in Japan <http://www.ieee-jp.org/section/kansai/histelcon2017/> It will be the fifth.

A bid has been made to the R8 Conference Committee for HISTELCON 2019 to be held in the UK and Ireland Section in August or early September, probably at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Scotland. Glasgow has good rail and transport links and many accessible places of tourist interest nearby. The active involvement of other organisations is being developed: the Computer Conservation Society <http://www.computerconservationsociety.org>, the LEO Computers Society <http://www.leo-computers.org.uk/> and various others including appropriate museums. In May, I gave an invited talk about the history of Surface to Air Guided Missiles to SREK (Society for Retired Engineers in Kent) which attracted a nice audience of about 50 people. I hope that such activities increase interest both in IEEE and in Technology History. Martin Bastiaans will 'represent' the R8 History Activities Committee at the Sections Congress in Sydney, because no other members of the Committee are able to attend.

### Outlook

I see no reason to suggest a change in the general scope and direction: the challenge is to keep that going and preferably grow the amount of activity, while at the same time involving more people, especially stimulating the interests of students and young professionals. Additionally it would be good to find ways of encouraging 'managements' to financially and otherwise support those who take an interest in Technology History - since this provides some real protection against 'reinvention of the wheel' and assists in trying to make engineering and scientific progress. The next conference ICECS of the IEEE CAS Society is planned for December 2017 in Batumi, Georgia. As far as I know there are no plans for a Section in Georgia, nor any Chapters, so this should be a good opportunity for the Region 8 Committee to stimulate IEEE activity and membership there. However, I think that there is NO involvement by the organisers of ICECS 2017 with any of the R8 Committee - I have just pointed that out to the ICECS 2017 general co-chair and organiser.



Historical Plaque illustrating one of the many languages of Region 8



Label on restored steam locomotive now in Wales, once in South Africa - apparently showing a change in the Afrikaans language which would now be Spoorweg rather than Spoorweë.

This year is the 60th anniversary of the formation of the British Computer Society. Recently approved milestones in Region 8 include [1] Fermi's contribution to semiconductor statistics, Florence, Italy. [2] Dadda's multiplier, Milan, Italy. [3] Germany's first broadcast transmission, Koenigs Wuesterhausen, Germany. Several more are in progress, including one jointly with Poland and Germany: the Czochralski method of crystal growth, 1916, which it is proposed will be at Berlin, Warsaw and Kcynia (e.g. three plaques altogether for the same Milestone). The first History Milestone in Sweden (Gotland HVDC link, 1954) was installed in May 2017.

**Points of concern**

It will be a substantial challenge to get active volunteer support and the sponsorship needed for financial viability to proceed with the successful organization of HISTELCON 2019: History related activities have to be affordable because many participants have to pay their costs personally, so that a low registration fee is essential and sponsorship and volunteer support from collaborating organisations is essential.

The absorption of the IEEE's Global History Network (GHN) into the Engineering Technology History Wiki (ETHW) <http://ethw.org> has broadened the coverage but made finding IEEE-relevant material (especially the pages and procedures related to History Milestone Proposals) much more challenging. It is also notable that the eight other organisations in ETHW are mostly far more 'USA centred' than IEEE, half of them having "American" as part of their title. Their presence therefore makes ETHW look much more of a USA operation than was the case with the GHN. One bad consequence of the altered structure is that comments on Milestone proposals in process are hardly ever being provided, for the reason that it is far harder for members and non-members to find out how to do that. That risks undermining the rigour of the evaluation process for Milestones.

**R8 History Activities Subcommittee**

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