



## History

### A. Stanley Higgins and the History of STC's Journal

BY ED MALONE

After twelve years under George Hayhoe's editorship, *Technical Communication*—the official journal of the Society for Technical Communication (STC)—has a new editor: Menno De Jong.[1] He is only the eighth editor in the journal's long history (see Table 1).



**Figure 1:**  
Higgins in the mid-1960s  
[35]

This changing of the guard invites a retrospection of STC's journal and one of its first editors, A. Stanley Higgins, with whom I have had the pleasure of corresponding by e-mail in recent months. He was also kind enough to send me extracts from an autobiography he wrote for his family.

Higgins served as editor of STC's journal from 1961 to 1976—a stint of 15 years. The 86-year-old wordsmith now lives in a retirement community in Florida. "I think I'm most proud of the fact that I kept the journal going," Higgins writes. "It was a second job so I spread it out over the full three-month period [for each issue]. Consequently I was constantly doing something on it. In those days the Society was small, its budget small, and the profession was just becoming known." [2]

#### The Greatest Generation

Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in August 1922, Arnold Stanley Higgins—known as Stan Higgins to his friends—was a member of that generation "who came of age during the Great Depression" and eventually helped to build "the most powerful peacetime economy in history." [3] Like many of his contemporaries, including those who founded the profession of technical communication, Higgins served overseas in the military during World War II, acquiring skills and experiences that altered the course of his life.

After his discharge from the army in 1946, Higgins returned to Cookeville, Tennessee, to resume his studies at

Tennessee Tech; however, he changed his major from journalism to electrical engineering to take advantage of his technical military training, which gave him "75 quarter-hours of credit." He continued to pursue his interest in journalism, however, by serving as editor of the college newspaper, the *Tech Oracle*. In 1947, the monthly was rated All-American by the Associated Collegiate Press for the first time in its history.[4]

### **An Editor in Oak Ridge**

In 1948, Higgins went to work for the McGraw-Hill Book Company, which had a publishing contract with the Atomic Energy Commission in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. For the next seven years, he supervised a team of editors and participated in the preparation of the prestigious National Nuclear Energy Series—a collection of about 70 volumes "based on declassified reports of the Manhattan Project (the atomic bomb work)."[5]

As Higgins tells the story, McGraw-Hill executive Ross Kepler "had assembled a team of editors in New York, about ten or so, to come down to a 'desolate' (by their standards) little town in Tennessee. Mostly New Yorkers, this group was well educated and experienced in the book publishing field. The trouble was, they lacked supervision. Or so Kepler told my friend Bill Vaden, who had come from Tech a year earlier than I to head a larger department of composers and proofreaders for the AEC. Bill told him about me and when he said I had an engineering degree, Ross's interest became instantly apparent."[6]

### **Charter Member of TWE**

During his Oak Ridge period, Higgins became involved in the movement to start a national professional organization for technical editors and writers. "My motivation was to get recognition for the professional work I was doing and the companies I worked for," he said. "McGraw-Hill was willing to send me to conferences...."[7] Those conferences were sponsored by the Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE), one of the groups that eventually became STC.

Although he did not attend the now-famous "Workshop on the Production and Use of Technical Reports," which was held in Washington D.C. in April 1953, Higgins did attend the next major gathering of the TWE founders - that is, at the convention of the American Documentation Institute in Washington in November 1953.[8] His name appears on a list of charter members that was created at that gathering.[9] "From then on," Higgins notes, "I was present at every conference of STC except the one in 1970." [10]

### **Associate Editor of TWE Journal**

In 1955, Higgins left Oak Ridge for Cincinnati to become the supervisor of a publications group in the Flight Propulsion Laboratory of General Electric's Aircraft Gas Turbine Division.[11] Also in 1955, TWE began publishing a journal: the TWE Journal—one of the first journals specifically for technical writers and editors. In content, the first issue was little more than a newsletter, but it evolved quickly into a full-fledged journal.[12]

With the third issue, Higgins joined the staff as one of three associate editors, whose main responsibility was to screen manuscripts for publication.[13] Higgins worked first under Douglas E. Knight (editor of the Spring 1956 issue) and then Walter B. Dennen, Jr. (Fall 1956 issue)—the same Dennen, by the way, who later served as chairman of IEEE-GEWS (1964-1965) and edited the Group's newsletter from 1970 to 1971.[14], [15]

During a nine-month hiatus between the Fall 1956 and Summer 1957 issues, Allan Lytel became editor and moved the journal to Syracuse, where he worked for General Electric. All three associate editors including Higgins were replaced. Lytel must have preferred to have a local editorial team because two of the new associate editors, Claire Cox and Anne Gregory, also worked at G.E. in Syracuse.[16]

### **Assistant Editor of *STWE Review***

In Fall 1957, the New York-based TWE and the Boston-based STW—anticipating a merger—published a joint journal under the title *The Technical Writer*. The inside cover identified two editorial staffs: an STW group of five men and a TWE group of three men and three women. A disclaimer beneath the names stated, "Only this issue is a joint effort of the staffs of the two publications. Please address all correspondence to the The Editor, Allan Lytel, ...."[17] After the two organizations had officially merged to form the Society of Technical Writers and Editors, the journal became the *STWE Review*, with Lytel as its editor in chief.[18]

During this period, Lytel was very active in the Institute of Radio Engineers (IRE). In fact, he was a member of the group that, in Spring 1957, founded the IRE Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech (IRE-PGEWS), the predecessor of the IEEE Professional Communication Society.[19] Lytel used the *IRE Transactions* as a model for the *STWE Review*.

As Higgins recalls, "Our covers were the same—they simply listed the articles in the issue (like the Reader's Digest used to do)."[20]

When Lytel and the journal moved to Cincinnati in 1959, Higgins once again joined the staff, this time as Assistant Editor.[21] He remained in that position for the next two years, even after he left Cincinnati in 1960 to work at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh.[22] In that same year, *STWE* merged with the Los Angeles-based Technical Publishing Society to form the Society of Technical Writers and Publishers (STWP), and the *STWE Review* became the *STWP Review*.

### **The Friendly Undertaker**

In November 1960, STWP president Vernon Root appointed an external review board to examine the organization's various publications, including its journal. The review board concluded that, "The present publication effort of the STWP ... seems too extensive for the Society at this stage of its existence. The Society is relatively young, its financial resources are limited, and the membership is not particularly large." [23] They recommended that the journal be discontinued in favor of a larger newsletter. This recommendation so incensed Lytel that he resigned on the spot.[24]

H.C. ("Mac") McDaniel, who was serving on the STWP Board of Directors at the time and who had helped Higgins find the job at Westinghouse, asked Higgins to step in as editor. "As Mac presented it, I was to be sort of a 'friendly undertaker' for the *Review*, charged with officiating over its final few issues. But to paraphrase Mark Twain, its demise was greatly exaggerated. Consequently, the friendly undertaker stayed on for 15 years." [25]

Thus began Higgins' long tenure as the journal's editor in chief—a tenure that was eclipsed only by that of his successor, Frank R. Smith, who edited the journal for 18 years—from 1976 to 1995. [26]

## On Editing the Journal

In our correspondence, Higgins described his editorial routine during those early years of the journal:

"After I went over the submitted manuscripts that had been approved by the Board and marked them for the printer (typesize, etc.), they were picked up by Herbick and Held, one of Pittsburgh's largest printers. Within about a week I received galley proof of the copy. After I had proofed the pages and H&H had corrected them, I tackled the make-up phase.

"Where did I do this layout? On my living room floor, usually, where there was enough room to spread everything out. I had a chuckle when I read your 'Did the journal have an editorial office in Pittsburgh....What roles did the subeditors and editorial staff play?' The answer is none—all done by me in my house. Later on, I did have an Associate Editor and a couple of people who helped with the proofreading."

For his efforts, Higgins received a small stipend of \$1,500 per quarterly issue. Later, that amount increased to \$2,000 per issue.[27]

## On the Quality of Scholarship

As soon as he became editor, Higgins appointed a three-person editorial board.[28] One member was Frank Smith with whom Higgins had already become close friends—in fact, "drinking buddies" at conferences.[29] Another was Herbert B. Michaelson, one of the founders of IRE PGEWS.[30] As Higgins recalls,

"[The Board's] principal job was to evaluate submitted articles, recommending acceptance or rejection, sometimes suggesting what the author needed to do to make the piece acceptable. I relied almost entirely on the Board's decision. Of course I wrote the rejection letters, but the Board supplied the reasons.

"Sometimes the Board suggested articles and subjects, but they were very hard to come by in the early days. There wasn't much out there, really. Our business was in its infancy stage.

"The quality of scholarship was quite low then, and we really had to scrape for qualified manuscripts. When I was editor—and also Frank did the same thing—my main job at the conferences was to button-hole every likely candidate for authorship. That was between sessions, at after-dinner gatherings in the rooms of vendors, and in the halls."[31]

Higgins saw the journal through several name changes—from the *STWP Review* to *Technical Communications* (with an "s" on the end) to *Technical Communication* (its present name). In 1976, after fifteen years as editor, he turned the reins over to his friend Frank Smith. Three years later (1979-1980), Higgins served as President of STC.[32]

## Active in Church and Community

After his retirement from Westinghouse in 1987, Higgins moved to Florida to be close to his family. Since then, he has not done any contract work for industry; nor has he remained active in STC; instead, he has devoted his time and energy to church and community.

For example, every week he edits and lays out his Church's Sunday bulletin. He also edits the Church's 12-page monthly newsletter. From time to time, he even helps the rectors with their letters and publications.[33]

At the senior living community where he resides, he was recently elected to a two-year term as President of the Residents' Association. "My biggest contribution has been leading a drive called the Employee Recognition Fund. This year we collected \$25,000 from our residents to give a Christmas/Hanukah gift to each of the 100 nonmanagement employees." [34]

Note: In the next column, I hope to profile John M. Kinn, the first editor of the IRE-PGEWS's *Transactions* and newsletter.

**Table 1:** Journal Titles and Editors

Title	Editor(s)	Organization	Year(s)	Issue(s)
<i>Technical Writing Review</i>	publications committee	Society of Technical Writers (STW)	1954-1957	11
<i>TWE Journal</i>	Douglas E. Knight; Walter B. Dennen; Allan H. Lytel	Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE)	1955-1957	5
<i>Technical Communications</i>	Albert E. Tyler	Technical Publishing Society (TPS)	1957-1959	18
<i>The Technical Writer</i>	Allan H. Lytel	STW & TWE	1957	1
<i>STWE Review</i>	Allan H. Lytel	Society of Technical Writers and Editors (STWE)	1958-1960	10
<i>STWP Review</i>	Allan H. Lytel; A. Stanley Higgins	Society of Technical Writers and Publishers (STWP)	1960-1966	26
<i>Technical Communications</i>	A. Stanley Higgins	STWP	1967-1971	19
<i>Technical Communication</i>	A. Stanley Higgins; Frank R. Smith; Roger A. Grice; George F. Hayhoe; Menno D.T. de Jong	Society for Technical Communication (STC)	1971-Present	150

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