

History

John M. Kinn: IEEE-PCS' First Editor

By Ed Malone

In the **last installment of this column** (August 2008), I discussed the history of the Society for Technical Communication's journal and one of its early editors, A. Stanley Higgins. The occasion for that retrospection was the journal's changing of editors, from George Hayhoe to Menno De Jong, two long-time IEEE-PCS members.

As most of you know, the *Transactions on Professional Communication* (T-PC) also has a new editor, Jo Mackiewicz, who succeeded Kim Sydow Campbell on July 1, 2008. Campbell had been T-PC editor for more than a decade — the longest tenure of any editor in the journal's 50-year history. Mackiewicz is the 15th different editor of T-PC (see Table 1). This changing of the guard, like the one at STC's journal, invites a look back at the beginning of the *Transactions* and its first editor, John M. Kinn (see Figure 1), with whom I have corresponded.



Figure 1. John Kinn, first IEEE-PCS editor

The Early Years

John Matthias Kinn, Jr., was born on July 25, 1925, in New York City. He served in the U.S. Navy (Pacific Theater) during World War II. After his discharge, he attended the University of Missouri, graduating with a B.S. in Electrical Engineering in 1949.[1] "He joined the field engineering force of Western Electric Company in 1950 and provided engineering liaison at various military installations in the United States, Canada, and Europe. From 1954 to 1956, he was a Group Leader on loan to Bell Telephone Laboratories, where he worked on such [missile] projects as Terrier and Nike." [2]

In 1956, his career took a defining turn when he joined the editorial staff of *Electronics* as an associate editor. This magazine, published by McGraw-Hill in New York City, had a weekly circulation of about 50,000 in 1958.[3] As Kinn wrote, "To define the editorial scope of *Electronics* is to define electronics itself, for we are interested in the engineering and business aspects of anything which uses electron tubes, transistors, and other solid-state devices." [4]

While at *Electronics* (1956-1959), Kinn became involved in the movement to create the Institute of Radio Engineers' Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech (IRE PGEWS), the ancestor of PCS. Already a member of the IRE and editor of the New York section's *Monitor*, Kinn attended the now-famous PGEWS "founders' meeting" on March 19, 1957, at IRE Headquarters in New York City.[2]-[3],[5]

Kinn's Appointment as Editor

The first meeting of the PGEWS Administrative Committee (AdCom) was called to order on May 28, 1957, by its temporary chairman, Eleanor M. McElwee, a technical editor at RCA. It was under McElwee's leadership that the AdCom adopted a constitution and bylaws — apparently drafted by Daniel J. McNamara of Sperry Gyroscope — and selected the Group's first permanent chairman. The nominees for chairman were Kinn and McNamara. McNamara won the election and named Kinn as chair of the publications committee, with responsibility for overseeing the (future) newsletter and *Transactions*. [6]-[7]

Table 1: Editors of the Transactions[8]

#	Name	First Issue	Last Issue
1	John M. Kinn, Jr.	March 1958	December 1959
2	Herbert B. Michaelson	April 1960	December 1961
3	Frederick Van Veen	August 1962	August 1962
4	Edward R. Jennings	December 1962	September 1964
5	George E. Schindler, Jr.	December 1964	December 1966
6	L. M. Cole, Jr.	July 1967	December 1968
7	Irving M. Seideman	May 1969	December 1973
8	William F. Wells	March 1974	December 1976
9	Rudy J. Joenk	June 1977	December 1984
10	Valarie M. Arms	March 1985	March 1986
11	Joan G. Nagle	June 1986	March 1990
12a	Scott P. Sanders	June 1990	December 1993
13	Mike Markel	March 1994	December 1996
12b	Scott P. Sanders	March 1997	December 1997
14	Kim Sydow Campbell	March 1998	June 2008
15	Jo Mackiewicz	September 2008	Present

Launching the Newsletter

As I read the minutes of the June 27, 1957, AdCom meeting, I found myself feeling sorry for Mr. Kinn, who had the difficult position of being an editors' editor. Like the chef who cooks for other chefs or the physician who treats other physicians, the editors' editor gets advice and criticism from all directions — and no one is ever completely happy with his work. They are just glad they are not doing it themselves.

Kinn "showed the group a proposed title page for the membership newsletter with a suggested title 'The Paper Mill' and a two-column format. He explained that the tentative plan was to set the newsletter like a newspaper, with heads, subheads, and short paragraphs." Immediately there were objections to the title and the newspaper style. Someone suggested that the newsletter be called "Newsletter" with the "ews" highlighted to stand for "engineering writing and speech." "Several members made sketches of mastheads for the new title" — apparently right there in the meeting — "and gave them to Mr. Kinn for his guidance." He was sent forth with the "suggestion" that each page of the four-page newsletter should have "a single column of straight typing about 5 1/2 or 6 inches wide." [9]

The minutes of the August 8, 1957, AdCom meeting record that "A metal plate is being made of the masthead, and IRE Headquarters has obtained yellow paper for the Newsletter." [10] I have not seen a copy of the first issue, but Rudy Joenk gives the publication date as August 20, 1957, and describes it as being "four pages ... of announcements, news, and a list of AdCom members" on 8.5-by-11-inch yellow stock. [11]

By early January 1958, two issues of the newsletter had been published and a third was ready for duplicating and mailing at IRE Headquarters. [12] Kinn would edit a total of nine newsletter issues, from August 20, 1957, to September 1, 1959. [13]

Launching the *Transactions*

As early as May 28, 1957, the AdCom had decided that the first issue of the *Transactions* would be a compilation of presented papers, transcriptions of panel discussions, and other material from the first PGEWS National Symposium, to be held on October 21 and 22, 1957 in New York City, and that it would be published in early 1958. By January 1958, the Publications Committee, chaired by Kinn, already had about 70 percent of the necessary copy in hand, but still lacked the transcriptions and an observer's report of an audio-visual demonstration. [12]

At the January 9, 1958 AdCom meeting, the Group opted for letterpress rather than offset printing for the *Transactions* even though the cost was much higher: approximately \$1500 versus \$1100 for 1700 copies of a 32-page issue. [12],[14]

Although the first issue does not explicitly identify Kinn as editor, he was clearly in charge: "Mr. Kinn will meet with Mr. [Elwood] Gannett [at IRE Headquarters] during the week of January 13th to select the type faces to be used, and will turn over the copy on hand and a complete table of contents." [12]

The AdCom wanted the *Transactions* to be ready for the IRE National Convention in March 1958, but the publications committee — consisting of Charles Meyer, William Stocklin, and Kinn — could not deliver, citing "late submission of papers" and delays at IRE Headquarters. There was some talk at the March 25, 1958 AdCom meeting of working directly with an external publisher rather than going through IRE Headquarters and even of hiring a "professional editor" for the *Transactions*. [15] (It is worth noting that, unlike in the first issue, Kinn is explicitly identified as the *Transactions* editor in the second issue; however, there is no mention of his receiving a stipend or salary for his editorial work.)

The first issue of T-EWS is dated March 1958, but was not published until late April or early May. What is most interesting about this issue is its emphasis on diverse media. [15]-[16] Titles such as "More Senses Make More Sense" and "Technical

Films — "A Luxury or a Necessity" suggest technical communication in a modern sense. In fact, the intended focus of PGEWS at the beginning was non-verbal, as well as verbal communication. As McElwee noted in her report of the founders' meeting, "The scope of the proposed Group would be broader than that of non-IRE organizations in that it would handle spoken and visual, as well as written, communication." The group's aim—in one proposed rendering—was "The encouragement and improvement of technical communications—written, oral, and visual." [17]

Later Issues of T-EWS

STC used to be called the Society of Technical Writers and Editors (STWE). In early 1959, an editor of the STWE Review wrote, "we received the second issue [August 1958] of their journal or 'Transactions' as it is called. There was quite a change in format from the first issue. The first issue's format followed the style of the Proceedings of the I.R.E. This second issue has a large amount of white space around the article titles. The titles themselves are larger too. A great deal of credit goes to the editor John M. Kinn, Jr." [18]

The second issue cost about \$200 more to produce than the first issue, mainly because of "the use of a different grade of paper and the use of half-tones," but the result was "a better looking and a more professional job in a shorter time." Kinn asked the AdCom for a vote of confidence "to continue with the methods used on EWS-2," and he received it unanimously. [19] (See Figure 2 for pages from the first and second issues, respectively. Note the significant change in layout.)



Figure 2. Pages of first and second *Transactions*

Kinn went on to edit three more issues of the *Transactions*: January, June, and December 1959. After the January issue, he turned some of the work over to the IRE staff: "Mr. Kinn made arrangements with Mr. Gannett for Headquarters to handle the mechanics of copy editing, layout, and printing in accordance with our own style and specifications. He will, of course, still do the final checking prior to printing." [21]

Although Herbert B. Michaelson officially replaced Kinn as chair of the publications committee in July 1959 [22], Kinn continued to serve as *Transactions* editor until the end of the year: "Responsibility for Group publications is presently

divided, with Mr. Kinn continuing work on the next *Transactions*, and Mr. Michaelson making plans for future issues." [23] Kinn's last issue, the December issue, did not come out until late January or early February 1960. [24]

In his final T-EWS editorial, Kinn wrote, "To say that the job [of editing the *Transactions*] has been all peaches and cream would be as erroneous as saying it had been the hardest of tasks. In truth, it was a mixture of both with, perhaps, a heavier leaning toward the former. It's difficult to find one word or phrase that aptly describes the rewards one receives from work of this sort, hence I shall only say that I sincerely enjoyed the many new associations that were formed during these first two and a half years of PGEWS...." [25]

The Challenges of Publication

The challenges that Kinn and the rest of the Group faced with its new journal were typical of such endeavors: finding the funds to cover the cost of publication, attracting high-quality submissions in sufficient numbers to ensure a first-rate journal, and meeting a quarterly publication schedule.

Funding. At an Executive Committee Meeting on October 15, 1958, Treasurer Michaelson reported that PGEWS had a \$750 deficit. Kinn asked whether the *Transactions* should be put on hold for the rest of the year until the treasury could be replenished, but the AdCom instructed him to proceed as soon as copy was ready. [26]

At their December 8 meeting, they decided to permit advertising even though the "consensus" a few months earlier had been "to build up the treasury by other methods first" [27]-[28] Kinn appointed Lawrence A. Ferrara of Western Electric as the journal's business manager. [27] The first advertisement appeared in the June 1959 issue: a quarter-page employment ad for engineering writers at the RCA's Moorestown plant. [29] RCA paid \$400 for it, which covered part of the \$1,200 publication cost of the June 1959 issue. [22] As late as 1961, however, there was still talk about changing the *Transactions'* "publishing schedule in view of the financial problems of the Group" and selling "institutional listings" to defray costs. [30]-[31]

Submissions. Kinn was constantly complaining about "the shortage of good papers." [22] McNamara suggested that the AdCom members "pick suitable subjects, clear them with Mr. Kinn so duplication can be avoided, and begin to write." [15] Theodore T. Patterson (see Figure 4) made a similar suggestion more than a year later, noting that "the availability of good papers for meetings and for publication is of vital importance to the future of the Group." [32] Michaelson said he was going to "write several 'known experts in the field' and ask them to write papers specifically for the *PGEWS Transactions*." [33] Joe Chapline thought that papers should be solicited from "logicians or lawyers on organization and argumentation." [34] The most promising proposal, however, was Elmer T. Ebersol's "papers procurement procedure" — an elaborate plan for identifying relevant papers authored by IRE members and routing them to the chairs of PGEWS meetings and the editor of the *Transactions* for consideration. [33]



Figure 4. Members of the Publications committee

Publication Schedule. Although the goal was to publish four issues of T-EWS per year, Kinn never managed to produce more than three in one year. "The committee expressed some concern at the scarcity and irregularity of PGEWS publications in the two years since it was formed," McElwee wrote in the minutes of the April 22, 1959, AdCom meeting. "The members agreed that it is essential for the Group to publish worthwhile *Transactions* on a regular basis in order to serve the large number of members who do not presently have close contact with the Group through local chapters." [35] At the January 21 meeting, McElwee read a letter of complaint from a new member and "urged that a regular schedule be established for both the *Transactions* and the *Newsletter* so that no more than two months will go by at any one time without some communication to the membership." [24] In all fairness to Kinn, however, his successors did not do much better. In fact, in 1965, the words "Published Aperiodically" began to appear on the journal's cover. [36]

In early 1960, Michaelson took over as *Transactions* editor. [34] During his first year, he produced only two issues, one in April and the other in July. [37] He would edit three issues in 1961. But Michaelson was much more interested in quality than quantity or regularity. At the October 12, 1960, AdCom meeting, he told members that "he had turned down ten out of sixteen papers submitted within the recent months because they were unsuitable." [38] His high standards provoked shudders of concern from some PGEWS members, who (according to Patterson) were now "afraid to ask high-level people in their own organizations to write for PGEWS lest their papers be turned down." [37]

First Two-Term Chairman

Kinn served as Vice Chairman of PGEWS from 1959 to 1960 and PGEWS Chairman from 1960 to 1962 (see Table 2). He was the Society's first and only two-term chairman (or president) until the 1970s. [39] This latter distinction is not only a comment on his commitment to the organization but also an indication of the regard in which he was held by his peers. He believed firmly in the educational mission of the organization.

Under his leadership, PGEWS added an Education Committee to its roster of standing committees.[37],[40] There is one passage in the minutes of a meeting that may shed some light on his character. In response to Frederick Van Veen's suggestion that convention speakers be rated for the benefit of future program chairmen, Kinn "cautioned against black-listing mediocre speakers who might improve considerably with some coaching and rehearsal." [40] He would later look after the educational needs of all IEEE members as the Director of Educational Services at IEEE Headquarters.

Table 2: Nominees and Chairmen of PGEWS

Years	Nominees	Chairman
1957-1958	Daniel J. McNamara John M. Kinn, Jr.	Daniel J. McNamara
1958-1959[28]	Joseph D. Chapline, Jr. Charles A. Meyer (declined) Chester W. Sall (declined) Theodore T. Patterson	Joseph D. Chapline, Jr.
1959-1960[22]	Theodore T. Patterson Eleanor M. McElwee (declined)	Theodore T. Patterson
1960-1961[45]	John M. Kinn, Jr. Herbert B. Michaelson (declined)	John M. Kinn, Jr.
1961-1962[46]	John M. Kinn, Jr. [unknown]	John M. Kinn, Jr.
1962-1963[47]	Chester W. Sall	Chester W. Sall

The Last Fifty Years

Kinn had a long and successful career after leaving *Electronics* magazine. He quickly moved out of editing and into management and administration:

1959-1965: IBM

- 1959-1961: Associate Editor, IBM Journal of Research and Development
- 1961-1964: Manager of Scientific Information
- 1964-1965: Manager of Technical Information and Liaison Services

1965-1979: IEEE

- 1965-1976: Director of Educational Services, New York City Office
- 1976-1979: Staff Director of Professional Services, Washington D.C. Office
- c. 1979: American Federation of Information Processing Societies (Executive Director)

1979-1992: Electronic Industries Association (Vice President of Engineering)

At some point, he also served as Executive Secretary of the Joint Electron Device Engineering Council (JEDEC).[1],[41]-[42]

The 83-year-old Kinn now lives in Virginia with his wife, Gloria, who is also an octogenarian. Recently Jack sent me a paper titled "Saint Louis: Cradle of International Electrotechnical Standardization," which he had written a few years ago to promote the centennial of the 3rd International Electrical Congress, held in St. Louis in 1904. This meeting eventually led to the creation of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).

Jack is a life honorary member of the IEC's U.S. National Committee and was one of the first recipients of the Lord Kelvin Award in 1995.[43] He had hoped his "article might trigger the University [of Missouri] into doing something in commemoration of the [1904 Congress]," but nothing came of it.[44]

References

- [1] *Who's Who in America*, 1994, 48th ed., New Providence, NJ: Marquis Who's Who, 1993, vol. 1
- [2] "PGEWS 1960-1961 Officers," *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech*, vol. 3, no. 2, July 1960, p. 35
- [3] Allan Herbert Lytel, "A Study of the Growth and Development of American Technical, Professional, and Scientific Magazines, 1900-1958, in the Field of Electronics," unpublished thesis, Syracuse University, 1960, pp. 104, 173
- [4] John M. Kinn, Jr., "Writing for 'Electronics,'" *IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech*, Vol. EWS-1, no. 1, March 1958, pp. 21-22 at 21
- [5] Eleanor M. McElwee, "Founders' Conference: Report on Meeting of Committee for New IRE Professional Group," *Newsletter [of the IEEE-Group on Professional Communication]*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1977, pp. 5-6
- [6] McElwee, "Report on Interim Meeting [April 30, 1957] for IRE Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech (PGEWS)," retrieved from the archives at the IEEE Headquarters, Piscataway, New Jersey
- [7] McElwee, "Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech, Minutes of Administrative Committee Meeting Held at IRE Headquarters, May 28, 1957," retrieved from the archives at the IEEE Headquarters [Hereafter, all references to AdCom minutes and Executive Committee reports will be abbreviated; unless otherwise noted, these minutes and reports were written by McElwee and are stored in the archives at the IEEE Headquarters.]
- [8] Zhen Li, a graduate student at Missouri S&T, assisted with the preparation of this list, which is based on an inspection of paper copies of the *Transactions*. As of this date, IEEEExplore does not reprint the front and back covers of the *Transactions*, nor does it reprint preliminaries such as editorials. One such editorial, unavailable through IEEEExplore, is Scott P. Sanders' "Editorial: Forty" (*IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, March 1997, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 1-3), which identifies the *Transactions* editors from 1958 to 1997.
- [9] Minutes of June 27, 1957, AdCom meeting
- [10] Minutes of the Aug. 8, 1957, AdCom meeting
- [11] Rudy Joenk, "End of an Era," *IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter*, Nov./Dec. 2004, vol. 48, no. 6, pp. 1, 4

[12] Minutes of the Jan. 9, 1958, AdCom meeting

[13] Joenk, "The Newsletter Editors of PCS," *IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter*, Sept./Oct. 1997, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 6, 14 [Thanks to George Hayhoe for lending me his copies of this newsletter issue as well as the issues cited in notes 36 and 39 below.]

[14] "Annual Report," *IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech*, vol. EWS-1, no. 2, August 1958, pp. 18-19

[15] Minutes of the Mar. 25, 1958, AdCom meeting

[16] *IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech*, vol. EWS-1, no. 1, March 1958

[17] McElwee, "Report on Meeting [March 19, 1957] of Committee for New IRE Professional Group"

[18] "IRE-PGEWS News," *STWE Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1959, p. 20

[19] Minutes of the Oct. 2, 1958, AdCom meeting

[20] *IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech*, vol. EWS- 1, no. 1, March 1958, p. 21, and vol. EWS-1, no. 2, August 1958, p. 9

[21] Minutes of the Mar. 24, 1959, AdCom meeting

[22] Minutes of the June 24, 1959, AdCom meeting

[23] Minutes of the Oct. 21, 1959, AdCom meeting

[24] Minutes of the Jan. 21, 1960, AdCom meeting

[25] Kinn, "Editorial," *IRE Transactions on Professional Writing and Speech*, vol. EWS-2, no. 2, December 1959, p. 68

[26] Report to the PGEWS AdCom about the Oct. 15, 1958, Executive Committee Meeting

[27] Minutes of the Dec. 8, 1958, AdCom meeting

[28] Minutes of the June 25, 1958, AdCom meeting

[29] *IRE Transactions on Professional Writing and Speech*, vol. EWS-2, no. 2, June 1959, p. 64

[30] Minutes of the Mar. 21, 1961, AdCom meeting

[31] Minutes of the May 16, 1961, AdCom meeting

[32] Minutes of the Oct. 21, 1959, AdCom meeting

[33] Report to the PGEWS AdCom about the Oct. 7, 1959, Executive Committee Meeting

[34] Minutes of the Mar. 22, 1960, AdCom meeting

[35] Minutes of the April 22, 1959, AdCom meeting

[36] Rudy Joenk, "PCS Pastiche," *IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter*, vol. 41, no. 6, Nov-Dec. 1997, 18-19

[37] Minutes of the Nov. 30, 1960, AdCom meeting

[38] Minutes of the Oct. 12, 1960, AdCom meeting

[39] Rudy Joenk, "The Officers of PCS," *IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter*, July/August 1997, 41.4 pp. 16-18

[40] Minutes of the Jan. 18, 1961, AdCom meeting.

[41] "Kinn to Be New AFIPS Executive Director," *Computer*, vol. 12, no. 6, June 1979, p. 92

[42] Kinn, "Saint Louis: Cradle of International Electrotechnical Standardization," unpublished paper, c. 2004, p. 5

[43] "Lord Kelvin Award: Recipients: List," International Electrotechnical Commission, http://www.iec.ch/about/awards/lordkelvin/lka_list.htm

[44] Kinn, e-mail to author, September 24, 2008

[45] Minutes of the June 21, 1960, AdCom meeting

[46] The minutes of the June 27, 1961, AdCom meeting were missing from the archives at IEEE Headquarters when I visited there last May.

[47] Minutes of the June 21, 1962, AdCom meeting

[48] "Meet Our 1958-1959 Officers," *IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech*, EWS-2, no. 2, August 1958, pp. 2-3

[49] "Contributors' Biographies," *IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech*, EWS-2, no. 2, August 1958, p. 32

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