

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL MEETING

AT Hotel La Salle, Chicago, May 12th and 13th, will be held the annual meeting of the American Association of Engineers. The tentative program schedules the first session for 9:30 a.m., Monday, May 12th, when reports of officers and committees will be presented. At 10.30 a.m. there will be a general discussion of the relation of the American Association to local and state societies, national societies, Engineering Council and the Engineering Institute of Canada. The discussion regarding the relation of the association to the Engineering Institute will be lead by Secretary Keith, of Montreal. A paper will also be read by one of the members of the association on "The Relation of Engineers to Each Other in Employment."

At 1.30 p.m., Monday, miscellaneous business will receive consideration, to be followed by a discussion and voting on amendments to the constitution. At 3 p.m., Prof. Frederic Bass, of the University of Minnesota, will read a paper entitled "How Shall the Curricula of Engineering Colleges be Modified to Meet Modern Conditions?"

"Recognition" will be the key-note of the discussion Tuesday morning. There will be papers on proper compensation of engineers,—“Ways and Means of Obtaining,” “Recognition Through Self-Improvement and Service,” “The Engineer in Politics,” “How Far Will A.A.E. Go Into Politics?” and “Action on Behalf of the Engineers in Public Service.”

Employment and opportunities will receive attention Tuesday afternoon. The discussion will be opened by papers on “How to Make the Employment Department More Valuable” and “New Fields and Opportunities for Engineers.”

There will be a half hour's business session before dinner Tuesday, at which the judges of election will make their report and the new officers will be installed. Among the after-dinner speeches will be, “Fitting the Engineer to His Job,” by Walter Dill Scott; “Winding Up the Old Year,” by W. H. Finley; and “What We See in Front of Us,” by F. H. Newell.

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH MANUFACTURERS

SEVERAL hundred Canadian representatives and branches of English and Scotch firms are forming an organization called the Canadian Association of British Manufacturers, with branches at Toronto and Montreal. Similar associations have existed for several years in Australia and New Zealand. The objects of the association as set forth in its constitution are as follows:—“To further the interests of British trade throughout the Dominion of Canada and to affiliate with and work in concert with kindred associations in other centres of the Dominion having similar objects.”

Those interested in the formation of the association naturally wish to increase Great Britain's share of the import trade of Canada. As Canada is buying a considerable volume of merchandise abroad each year, it is desired that the United Kingdom shall obtain a substantial share of that business. It is felt that the progress which Canadian manufacturers have made, especially during the past few years, will be exceeded by the manufacturing developments in Canada in the future. This is recognized as a welcome and gratifying feature, because as each unit of the British Empire becomes stronger industrially and agriculturally, each developing its resources, so will the empire grow in stability, prosperity and influence.

The association is governed by a supreme council and each branch will have its own executive council. The supreme council will consist of the chairman and one councillor from each local executive. The association will consist of British subjects only:—

(a) British manufacturers and wholesale exporters from the United Kingdom;

(b) Representatives and agents of British manufacturers and wholesale exporters from the United Kingdom.

No representative or agent of British manufacturers who enters into any agency agreement with, or in any way represents any manufacturers or wholesale exporters whose principal works or place of business are situated in any country deemed by the supreme council to be or to have been hostile or unfriendly, will be entitled to membership in the association.

Assistance in the formation of the association has been rendered by G. T. Milne and F. W. Field, the British Government Trade Commissioners in Canada.

EXPIRATION OF NORCROSS FLAT-SLAB PATENT*

ON April 29th, 1919, the famous Norcross patent, U. S. No. 698,542, on reinforced-concrete flat-slab floors expired, and with it, according to the present legal status of the case, went the right of the Flat Slab Patents Co., the owner of the patent, to charge a royalty or to issue a license for the construction and use of a flat-slab floor. This right had been generally recognized since the 1918 decision in the Lauter Piano case, and by many admitted since the 1914 Drum vs. Turner decision. It had been so recognized, however, not because engineers believed those decisions to be just or reasonable, but because it became evident that the complicated legal patent procedure had firmly established the Norcross patent as the basic patent on flat slabs and that it would be futile to try to override the precedent of two original Circuit Court decisions, with several confirmatory later decisions.

It is not the intention of this journal now to enter into a discussion of the evidence and procedure which marked the various Turner-Norcross patent cases. The printed record of those cases occupies many volumes, and only one who was forced to do so would attempt to wade through it. Certainly, the various engineering experts on both sides, whether intentionally or not, succeeded in obscuring the real issue and in confusing the judges as to the technical questions involved. It is of interest, though, to note that the two cases are founded on diametrically opposite principles. According to the Drum-Turner decision, Norcross showed invention in his novel arrangement of steel in a flat-slab floor, although obviously flat-slab floors had been previously patented and built. The later Lauter decision held that Turner's patent infringes Norcross' because its difference in placing reinforcement does not constitute invention. In other words, the first case sets up Norcross as a basic patentee on analogous grounds to which the second case denies invention to Turner. To confuse matters, in a later decision the Drum-Turner court specifically stated that it considered the Norcross invention to lie in a floor without supporting beams, not merely in the location of the reinforcing rods.

In practically all of the other reinforced concrete patent cases there has been a growing movement toward consistent thought. Arrangement of reinforcement to meet stresses is now fairly definitely established as mere engineering design and not invention. On such a basis neither Turner nor Norcross was entitled to a patent, because both developed through ready processes of engineering thought a type of structure established by record if not by extensive practice. A flat reinforced-concrete slab, supported on four columns, antedated both patents. Whether the designers and builders of these earlier slabs understood the actions that took place in the structure or designed correctly to meet those actions, is not pertinent if there was sufficient suggestion in them to permit an engineer skilled in structural design to adapt the principle to meet acceptable theory.

The progress of the litigation and the subsequent success of the Norcross patent, with its levying a tax on hundreds of structures, was a legal victory entirely and not an engineering one. No one doubts that Turner developed a commercial flat-slab floor, though few agree with his highly optimistic views on the strength of his floors. On the

*Editorial in “Engineering News-Record,” New York.