



# SOCIETY FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHEOLOGY

## NEWSLETTER

Volume 14

1985

Number 3

### INSIDE THE SIA: THE MEMBERS SPEAK

- More than a third of the Society's far-flung membership were introduced to the SIA by a friend or other contact.
- The National Trust for Historic Preservation ranks as the most popular other organization to which SIA members belong.
- Almost all (94%) of those attending SIA annual conferences find fees and expenses to be within their budgets.

These and other facts are revealed in responses to the membership questionnaire mailed last spring. A healthy 38% of you answered the seven questions put to you, in the hope that the Board of Directors may find ways to improve service to the SIA masses. Given the great plurality of opinion, it is difficult to discern a clear mandate in any one direction. Therein may lie a major truth, however, for one of the enduring distinctions of SIA's membership is its extraordinary diversity.

Slightly more than a third of the 344 respondents are, or have been, associated in some way with the architectural or engineering professions. A fifth work, or have worked, in a museum, library, or preservation office. After that, occupations become very diverse. Many report that industrial archeology has no connection whatsoever with their daily labor.

While 26% claimed membership in the National Trust, they and others also belong in force to the Society for the History of Technology (SHOT), and to at least one of the nation's two major railroad history groups, the National Railway Historical Society (NRHS) or the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society (RLHS). The rest are spread among such groups as the Assn. for Preservation Technology (APT), the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), the Society of Automotive Historians (also SAH), the American Truck Historical Society, and the Assn. for Gravestone Studies.

The SIA's publications received a strong vote of confidence, 83% giving their unofficial approval to a slight increase in dues in order to fund a second issue of the still-annual journal, *IA*. Many had kind things to say about both the journal and newsletter, expressing the hope that both could appear more often.

Surprising to no one, there's a great latent interest in new-chapter activity in the U.S., especially in areas where no chapters exist. Any leadership types among you interested in coalescing a Rocky Mountains, Midwest, Upper New York State, West Coast, or Great Lakes Chapter? Zip-coded mailing lists are available from the SIA Wash. D.C. headquarters office. Chapters now standing should ask for new area lists, since a number of national members in your areas are not aware of you.

As if to typify SIA's smorgasbord membership, vast numbers of the respondents used the "remarks" section to express deep feelings. From Calif.: "How about being more newsy and critical of some of these crummy dishonest restorations?" From Mass.: "Please make sure all conference hotels are wheelchair accessible." From Colo.: "There is a small but deep and growing interest out here. Many of our original bridges, buildings, and mines are being pushed aside with little and sometimes no concern for the history of, or preservation of, their origins." From an unidentified source: "Most

of my effort is to keep up on the history of BRIDGES OVER WATER. If you could promote BRIDGES more I would be happy" [emphasis in the original]. And again from Calif.: "Perhaps [the SIA could champion] some effort in schools to attempt to give students some perspective, and that there was something before the computer and the Porsche."

Who is to say that, with sufficient combing and scrutinizing, these and other responses won't reveal the true and vital essence of SIA? Even if nothing comes of the survey, the response itself was heartening, and the spirit shown by many should be reassuring to those who have lead the Society through its early years. The future is in good hands, one may conclude, especially if SIA remains as broadly defined as it was originally, embracing a wide spectrum of interests — including those who would lack a collective outlet for their energies, were it not for SIA.

D.S.

### FIRE LEVELS PASSAIC MILLS

A devastating fire on Labor Day destroyed a quarter of industrial Passaic, N.J., including 18 brick factory buildings, with losses estimated at \$400-500 million. State historians consider it one of the fiercest blazes to hit the city since the 19th-C, according to Terry Karschner [SIA] of the N.J. Historical Commn.

One unfortunate historical loss was the former Gera Worsted Mills complex, which was known as the Eighth Street Industrial Park and serviced miscellaneous smaller industries. Founded in 1899, Gera was one of several German-owned worsted companies attracted to Passaic between 1889 and 1910. Located on the Passaic



GERA WORSTED MILLS, Passaic, in 1984. *N.J. Historical Commission photograph.*

R. between Newark and Paterson, the city emerged at the turn of the century as a prominent manufacturer of textiles, notably woolen goods. By 1910, it ranked first in N.J. and fourth nationally in worsted production.

Another significant loss was the former Acheson Harden Co. building (1899), a handkerchief manufacturer with its home base in Belfast, Ireland. Numerous small firms were housed in the larger complexes.