

“ACTIVITIES OF THE IEEE HISTORY CENTER & MILESTONES”

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ABSTRACT

IEEE (“Institute of Electrical and Electrons Engineers”) originated in 1884 as the AIEE (“American Institute of Electrical Engineers”). Since its official founding in 1963 through a merger of the AIEE and the IRE (“Institute of Radio Engineers”), IEEE has grown to be the world’s largest professional technical association, with more than 375,000 members in 160 countries. Also since its founding, IEEE has recognized the importance of the heritage of engineering and has had a standing History Committee to advise the Board of Directors on historical matters.

In 1980, IEEE created a staff arm, the IEEE History Center, to carry out the historical activities recommended and overseen by the History Committee. In 1990, the IEEE History Center was moved to New Brunswick, NJ, USA, to the Campus of Rutgers University, which became a cosponsor. The mission of the History Committee and its History Center is to facilitate the preservation of, research into, and promotion of the heritage of IEEE, its members, their technological areas, and their professions and industries. By doing this, they increase the awareness and appreciation of the public of the historical role of technical professionals in enhancing the quality of human life and building the modern world.

Frequent historical activities of IEEE include: Academic activities at Rutgers; publications, web features, conferences and exhibits; responding to reference requests; publishing a newsletter; and maintaining the IEEE Archives. The two most important programs from an IEEE Member/Section perspective are the Oral History program and the IEEE Milestones in Electrical Engineering & Computing program.

The Oral History program captures the achievements of key engineers in their own words and converts them into a historical record. The History Center has collected over 400 interviews, and most of these are available as transcripts on the IEEE web site. Many of the key interviews are from Japan. Beginning this year, interviews are being videotaped, allowing them to be disseminated through other venues, such as IEEE.tv.

The Milestones program has perhaps best captured the imagination of IEEE members, combining as it does all three aspects of IEEE historical activities—preservation, research, promotion. Milestones, which must be at least 25 years old, date from 1757 to 1977 and cover every IEEE technical field. The program began in 1983, and there are now over 80 Milestones representing 50 Sections and all 10 Regions. The Sections of IEEE Japan Council have been particularly active. Currently an ad hoc committee is examining how to strengthen the program even further.

In 2008, a major activity of the History Center will be an IEEE New Initiative to establish the IEEE Global History Network (GHN). The GHN will be the premier worldwide network of the history of electrotechnology. It will integrate IEEE history resources with the capabilities of the web for collaboration, and in addition it will provide new tools to support the mission of the History Center. The GHN will give an opportunity for IEEE members and other interested parties such as professional historians to work together to preserve and analyze the legacy of technology while giving the general public a single source for information about that legacy. Included in the GHN will be the material from the IEEE Virtual Museum, the current website that the History Center maintains specifically for the general public. The first program of its kind for IEEE, the GHN will take on the look and feel of a wiki and utilize various formats including PDFs, video and photographs. The GHN will be rolled out at IEEE Sections Congress 2008 in September, and we will look forward to inviting Sections of the IEEE Japan Council to contribute to it as well.

Finally, it should be noted that 2009 will be the 125th anniversary of IEEE. Many activities will be planned. The History Center will sponsor a conference in August in Philadelphia that will focus on the role of technical associations in promoting progress. It is hoped that there will be strong, worldwide participation.