

# PSA Conventions

Richard M. Frieders, Hon PSA, FPSA  
Public Relations Vice President • Past President



Richard Frieders served as Conventions VP from 1985 to 1997 and has attended all of the last 35 International Conferences.

One of the most interesting activities of PSA is its annual week-long Conference. It's the place where one can enjoy special photo tours as well as great speakers, programs, workshops, and a host of other photographic activities. It's really the PSA social event of the year and a great place to meet people and renew acquaintances that members make with each other over the years.

PSA has held an annual gathering for members since it started in 1934. An item in the Pittsburgh newspaper of April 6, 1934 opened with this statement: *"The 1st Convention of the PSA was held in Pittsburgh Sunday. 22 members met for lunch and listened to inspiring messages by President Dr. Max Thorak and Chairman Louis Bucher. At a Banquet later, 100 guests enjoyed dinner while an orchestra and soloist furnished entertainment."*

Since then PSA has had 70 more annual gatherings, however due to government restrictions during the war, there were no events held during 1944-1947 except for the required business meeting. Originally they were called "Conventions" but in 1990 the name was changed to "Conference" as the Society felt it better implied that it was open to anyone with an interest in photography rather than to just PSA members.

For many years PSA also had Regional Conventions, which usually started on Thursday and ended on Saturday evening. At least one and sometimes as many as five Regionals were

held each year, usually at times and locations that would not compete with the International event in the fall. When attendance at both types of conferences started to decline in 1997 it was decided to discontinue the Regionals.

Originally, the International Convention was run by a local area committee assisted by the PSA Conventions committee. This continued for many years but eventually there was not enough interest in running the event by members in ideal convention cities so the task of managing the convention was taken over by the national convention committee. This provided better management continuity from year to year as well as the ability to go to cities that would provide the tour possibilities and photographic activities that PSA needed.

Besides the *PSA Journal*, as a way of promoting some of the earlier conventions, a sound slide show was created showing information on the city, as well as tours, programs and other activities. This was made available to chapters, clubs and councils to show to their members. Eventually replacing the slide show, a color, 4-page brochure, with complete information, was sent to every member. But, all of this gave way in recent years to the PSA Website where all current conference information is presented.

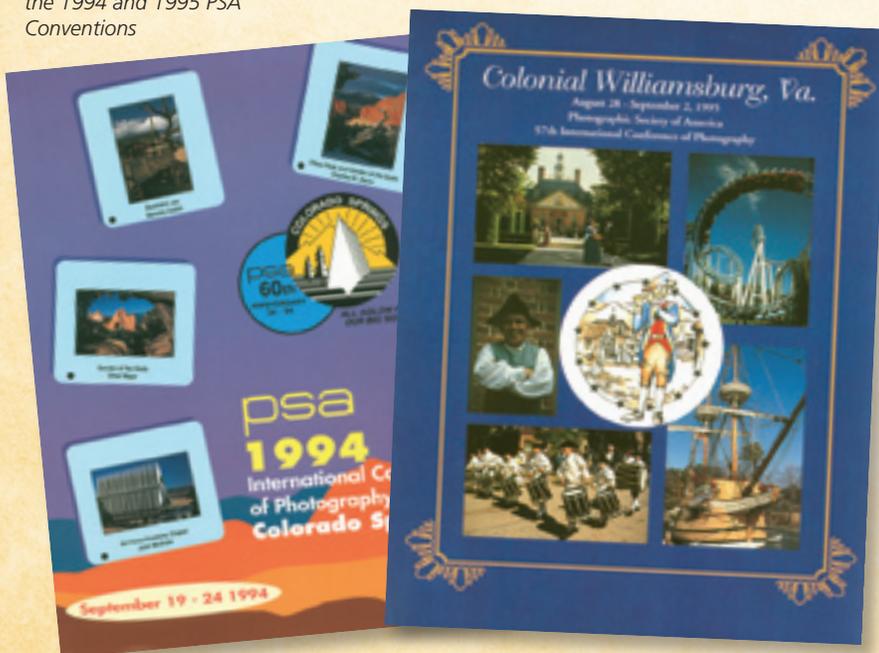
In 1973, conference attendance was at an all time high of 2003 people. That same year the total PSA membership was 15,275. This total PSA membership increased to a high of 18,962 in 1976.

In 1980, at the St. Louis Convention, PSA started a commercial trade show, called *Photo USA*. This was a collection of manufacturers and dealers of photographic equipment that displayed their products during the weeklong conference. This show ran for three more years but was discontinued due to lack of space in some previously booked hotels as well as dropping convention attendance.

**Some conference statistics:** Chicago had the most conferences with 7 Internationals and 4 Regionals, while Portland, Oregon and Rochester, New York tied for second place. Portland had 2 Internationals and 6 Regionals and Rochester had 3 Internationals and 5 Regionals. New York City was next with 5 Internationals and 2 Regionals.

**Some interesting notes from the past**—In 1939, the convention was held in New York City. Hotel rooms were \$3 single, \$5 double and the

Four-color brochures for the 1994 and 1995 PSA Conventions



banquet dinner was \$3. A pre-convention cruise from New York to Bermuda was held the week before. PSA's 25th Anniversary Convention in 1958 was held in Philadelphia. Room rates at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, just a few blocks away from PSA headquarters, were \$8 Single and \$12 Double. The convention registration rate was \$8 for a member and spouse. Photo tours included trips to Longwood Gardens and to Valley Forge.

In 1983, San Francisco was the location of the 50th Convention. Attendance topped 1000 as total membership then was 15,000. Remodeling of the hotel caused many problems in the meeting rooms and an impromptu appearance by President Ronald Reagan at another meeting in the hotel caused further disruptions and security problems for PSA's event. Everyone that attended had a great time however and was happy that they were there to celebrate 50 years of PSA. One member, **Margaret Hemphill**, from Sydney, Australia rode her wheelchair mounted on a specially adapted motorcycle sidecar alone from Wichita, KS to San Francisco: a 2400 mile journey with side trips to Estes Park and the Grand Tetons en route. One night, engine trouble caused her to spend the night along side the road until someone came to her aid the following morning.

PSA Conferences have been a major part of



PSA. They have been a place for people to see old friends, make new friends, see and photograph various unique parts of the country and learn more about photography. I hope you'll join us in Yellowstone this year or in one of the other cities in future years. ■

*Margaret Hemphill, from Sydney, Australia, rode her wheelchair mounted on a specially adapted motorcycle sidecar alone from Wichita, KS to San Francisco to attend the 50th Convention. Photo submitted by Richard M. Frieders, Hon PSA, FPSA*

## Historical Vignette:

# ***Celebrating 75 years of PSA***

Many members may wonder why the *PSA Journal* is dedicating its History Series, *Celebrating 75 Years of PSA*, to the memory of longtime Photographic Society of America (PSA) Historian, **Tony Patti, Hon PSA, FPSA**. Tony was appointed as the official "Historian for the Society" in 1980. He took his job very seriously and was a prolific worker in preserving PSA's history. In 1990 he proposed to then *PSA Journal* Editor, John A. Maxwell that he write an historical series to be published monthly in the *Journal*. Mr. Maxwell agreed and over the next 10 years Tony wrote 100 *Historically Speaking* articles. Each article began with the words DID YOU KNOW THAT... Tony received a Gold Editorial Star in 1994.

As Public Relations Vice President, Tony headed the Historical Research Committee, which proposed in 1990 that each division appoint an historian who would send a formal annual report on each division's history to headquarters where the Division Histories would be stored, thus preserving and documenting important information. Today members can find the names of the division historians in the Services and Activities section published quarterly in the *Journal*.

But perhaps the most important project undertaken by Mr. Patti was the creation of a digitized Index of the *PSA Journal*. First Tony had to find a complete set of *PSA Journals* and then Tony tells us, "Creation of the Electronic Index was no small undertaking considering the status of the personal computer in 1980...with its limited memory and capabilities." The Index runs from January 1945 to January 2003 and was invaluable in creating the *Journal's* present history series. The new PSA Historian, **Peter Steeper**, recently saved the *Journal* Index from computer obsolescence.

Tony Patti is also responsible for issuing an appeal in the January 1989 *PSA Journal* requesting photography books for the PSA Library. The library, located at Headquarters in Oklahoma, presently has one of the largest collections of photography books in the nation. In the first year alone, Tony collected over 1300 books.

And now, all of our members know why it is the *PSA Journal's* great honor to dedicate this series, *Celebrating 75 Years of PSA*, to the memory of **Tony Patti, Hon PSA, FPSA**.

*Elena McTighe • Publications Vice President*