

Alexander Standish, CAE— 50 Years and Still Sharing

submitted by Alexander Standish, CAE

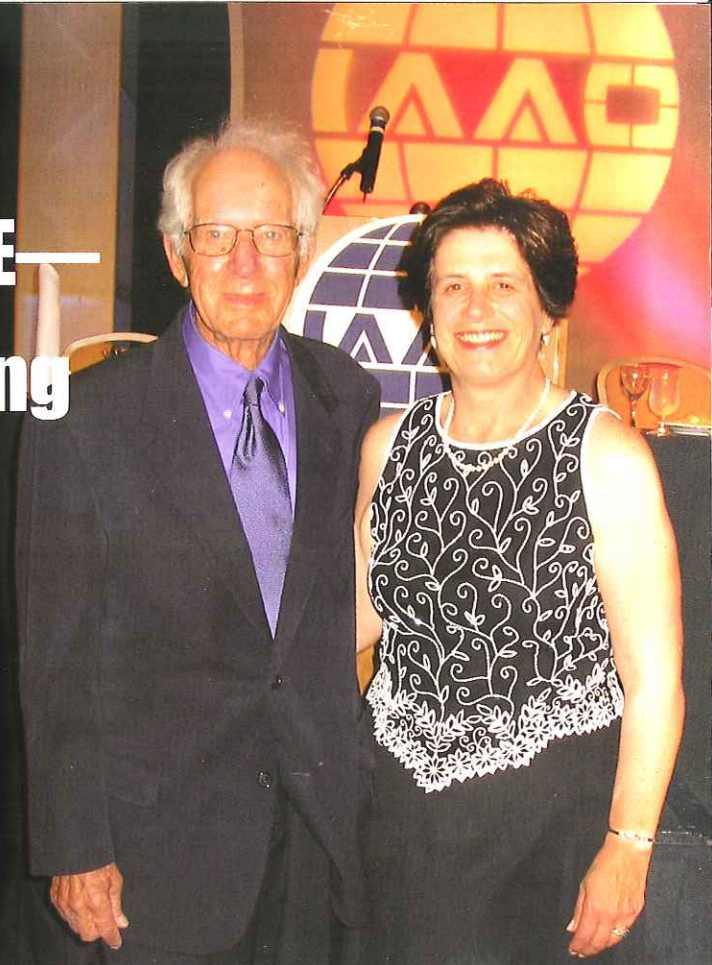
Awarded CAE (#196) in 1963

President of CAAO in 1977

Assessor of the Year Award in 1975

Essay Award in 1975 and 2001

Distinguished Service Award in 1987



Al and his wife Marsha pose for a photo at the IAAO 2007 annual conference in Atlanta.

Al Standish recently celebrated his 50th anniversary as an IAAO member. He joined the IAAO family on October 1, 1957.

Al's story begins in the Depression of the 1930s. As Al puts it, "The story of how we got started tells a great deal of where we go later." Al's recollection of the depression years is that there was not a choice of jobs—there were no jobs.

Al had four brothers and a sister. During World War II, Al served in the National Guard. Two of his brothers, Peter and Richard, served in the Army, and the other two brothers, Frank and John, served in the Navy. His sister, Nell, was in the Women's Army Corp. There were no casualties among them; they all returned home.

First, a Remodeling Business

After the war, Al managed his own remodeling business. He was making \$12,000 to \$13,000 per year. He had about ten employees, two trucks, and a variety of ladders and scaffolding, and he was familiar with all types of construction. In the early 1950s, Al became a real estate broker. He was a member of the Democratic Town Committee in East Haven, Connecticut, and was elected to the Board of Tax Review in 1953. He resigned from the BTR to accept an appointment to the Board of Assessors in about 1956 and was subsequently elected to the Board of Assessors for another term. He then became the full-time member of the board for an annual salary of \$3,800. During this time, he was phasing out his remodeling business,

but he continued to work as a real estate broker and as a representative for the Mount Vernon Mapping Company. He was looking for something less physical and less "employee-dependent" than his remodeling business.

When he was appointed to the Board of Assessors, although he had an extensive knowledge of construction and was a real estate broker, he had no assessment experience. As he became acquainted

with the work in the assessor's office, he realized he needed to strengthen his educational background. He enrolled in Larson College (now Quinnipiac University) to take courses in accounting, law, economics, and real estate. He worked days and attended class at night. In one economics class, a fellow



A younger Alexander Standish smiles as he looks toward the future

student was Chuck Sweeney (President of CAAO, 1969).

One course that he remembers well was given by the Appraisal Institute at the University of Connecticut. It was a two-week course, full time at the university. Al describes himself during this time as confident and working hard to get ahead. He had been doing well in his course work, but found this course especially challenging. Even students who were experienced

in the appraisal field found it challenging—some dropped out. Al worked and studied very hard. He spent the two weeks all over campus studying the material from his index cards. He passed.

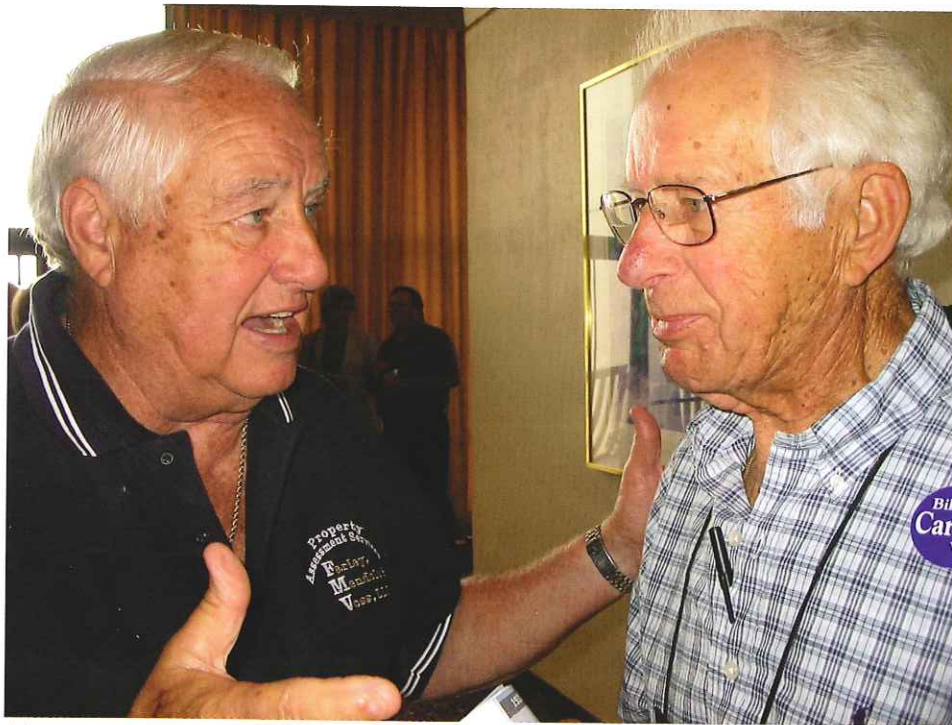
Then a Move to Assessment

Early in his assessment career in East Haven, Al says Fran Heberger (President of CAAO, 1960) and Walter Birck (President of CAAO, 1964) were his “mentors.” Birck was encouraging Al to become

involved as an instructor, and Heberger thought he should become Chairman of the New Haven County assessor’s association. He did both. Al especially recalls being part of the assessor’s program at the University of Connecticut with many individuals who were involved in the early history of the Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers: William Connelly (President of CAAO, 1937–1939), Aldro Jenks, CAE (President of CAAO, 1950), Katherine Pardee (President of CAAO, 1958), Herbert Shay, CAE (President of CAAO, 1941–1946), Louis Abt (Assessor of New Haven), Frederick Dawless, CAE (Assessor of Stamford) Francis Heberger, Robert Kemp, CAE (President of CAAO, 1963), Peter Marsele, CAE (Assessor of Bloomfield), Fred Newton (President of CAAO in 1957), and John Sullivan (State Tax Commissioner). Many of the individuals mentioned were also prominent members of IAAO.

Not only because he was encouraged by others but also because of his own interest and self confidence, Al was constantly striving to achieve professional designations and credentials. On October 20, 1963, he was awarded CAE designation #196. Shortly thereafter, he was awarded the SRA (Senior Residential Appraiser) designation by the Society of Real Estate Appraisers. In addition, Al has obtained the CSA senior designation from the Columbia Society of Real Estate Appraisers, the CCA (Certified Connecticut Assessor) from CAAO, the CCMA (Certified Connecticut Municipal Assessor) from the State of Connecticut, and the SRPA (Senior Real Property Appraiser) from the Society of Real Estate Appraisers. He also has been approved to do revaluations in Connecticut and New Hampshire.

Al believed the Assessor in East Haven should not be an elected position. The political pressures of a town and the requirements of assessment laws of the state were frequently at odds. So he asked the officials of the Town of East Haven to change the town charter to provide for an appointed assessor; at that time they did not follow his advice. In the meantime other opportunities started to develop. He was approached by Borden Mahoney, CAE, the Assessor of Hartford (and President of CAAO,



Al and Jewette Farley, CAE swap stories at the 2007 conference in Atlanta.



Al poses with 2008 Vice President Bill Carroll and his wife Joann

1961), about becoming the Deputy Assessor in Hartford. In addition, Al was a leading candidate to become the first Assessment Agent for the State of Connecticut. And the assessor's position in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, was open. Al interviewed for the Hartford position but accepted the position of Assessor for Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Some Time in Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Al had visited Portsmouth with Steve Palmer (Assessor of Branford) and found that it was a beautiful city and that the assessor's office had two very experienced and qualified clerks. In his original physical examination for the Portsmouth job, Al was found to have high blood pressure. With the blood pressure under control and even though he had just built a new house in East Haven and had tuition payments for a son in prep school, Al moved to Portsmouth to become the assessor. Al says, as was typical for him in those years, he bought a big, Elizabethan-style house in the Strawberry Banke area. It had 200 feet of frontage and a three-car garage. He bought it from the owner of the biggest department store in Portsmouth.

He found the people of Portsmouth very respectful of public officials, and he was affirmed by the support of the city manager. He recalled one particular incident in which a large public utility in New Hampshire wanted an assessment matter to be resolved in its favor. At a meeting of very influential company officials with the city manager and Al, the city manager stated that Al was the Assessor for Portsmouth and Al was the one who would make the decisions.

In Portsmouth, Al had skilled, collaborative staff members. He was IAAO Representative for New Hampshire. He was an instructor at the New Hampshire school for assessors, and he was editor of the assessor's newsletter in New Hampshire. Nevertheless, after two years, Al began to feel that the opportunities and challenges in New Hampshire were too few and that his professional development was slowing down. When he received a second call from Borden Mahoney in Hartford, he accepted the position of Deputy Assessor of Hartford.



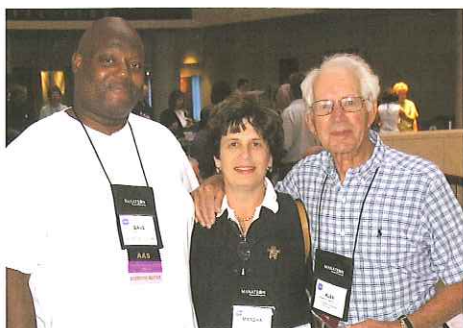
Al poses with Nanette Ward, Lidija Zavtrakova, Arvydas Bagdonavičius, and Richard Ward, Ph.D., CAE.



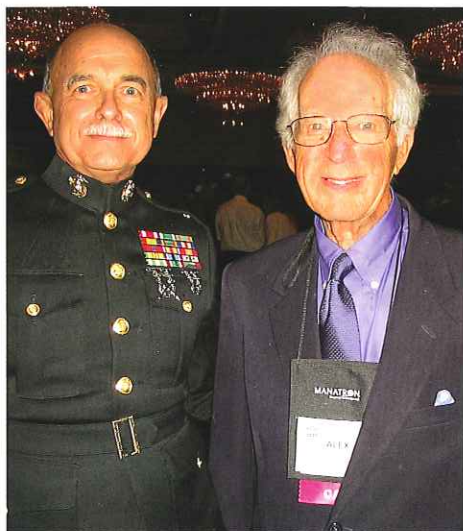
A gathering of friends from Connecticut—(l to r) Catherine Daboll, Alexander Standish, CAE, Joan Rice-Robinson, Susan Altieri, Donna Price-Bekech, Joan Paskewich, Mike Bekech



Robert Reardon, CAE, Marsha Standish, Marilee Fuller, CAE, and Alexander Standish, CAE, enjoy a moment together.



David Jackson, CAE, poses with Marsha and Al.



Al and Ken Voss, CAE, compare stories of their military service.



Al shares a fun moment with Edward Crapo, AAS, and Catherine Daboll.



Al poses with 2008 President-Elect Josephine Lim, Ph.D., and her husband Norman.

Back to Hartford

Before he could return to Hartford, however, Al suffered a heart attack. Hartford held the position for him while he recovered in Portsmouth. He then spent 25 years in Hartford, from 1963 to 1987. Al recalls that when he began working there, his first impression was that Hartford was a maze of highways and new construction. Constitution Plaza was under construction. Main Street, Asylum Street, and Pearl Street still had some two-story, frame buildings in the downtown area. Al recalls taking his staff out to the construction site of the "Gold Building." It was essentially a hole in the ground at that point, so the staff had an opportunity to familiarize itself with the underground structure of major buildings. During Al's tenure in the assessor's office, the City of Hartford assessed improvements before buildings actually started to rise out of the ground. The city requested design costs, surveys, and engineering plans and reviewed site preparation including subsurface installations to determine appropriate valuations at these early stages of development.

When Ted Gwartney, an Assistant Assessor in Los Angeles County and one of the first assessors with a computer background, became the Assessor of Hartford, the assessor's office undertook a revaluation using regression analysis. At that time, according to Al, the regression process was hard to understand and even harder to explain. Gwartney left, and Al became Acting Assessor (something that occurred several times during his years in Hartford). When he was asked not to implement the regression revaluation, Al requested that the city hire an expert to review the revaluation. The expert found that the revaluation could not be legally defended, so Al signed the documents to stop that revaluation. Under John McDermott and Al, the City of Hartford conducted an in-house revaluation. McDermott left prior to the completion of the revaluation. Al, as Acting Assessor again, and other office staff members completed it. That revaluation became the subject of a significant 17-day trial that challenged the validity of the revaluation. Peter Marsele, a witness for the plaintiffs, says he was there under subpoena for all 17 days. Al is proud to recall that the City

of Hartford prevailed and the work of the revaluation was accepted.

Al served as an IAAO Representative, President of CAAO, and as an instructor for the CCMA Courses II and III during his Hartford tenure. It was while teaching at the Assessor's School that he met his present wife Marsha, and as such they have continued to be active in the assessment profession locally and internationally.

Just prior to retirement as the Assessor of the City of Hartford, Al was selected by the Office of Policy and Management of the State of Connecticut to be the first Certified Assessor for Bradley International Airport. Public Act 84-358 had created this position to serve the towns of East Granby, Suffield, Windsor, and Windsor Locks to determine the valuation of property at the airport that was taxable. The revenue was to be divided by statutory formula among the towns.

Retired, But Not

Al has had a long, dedicated career as an assessment professional. He is a life member and regular member of the Appraisal Institute. He is a life member of the Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers. He served as chairman of the CAAO Research and Historian Committee and continues to serve CAAO as a regular member. May his career, which links the founders of CAAO to present-day practitioners, continue for many years to come. ■



Al receives a certificate of anniversary from 2007 President Marion Johnson, CAE, in recognition of his many years as an active IAAO member.