

## Connecticut Assessors Preserve Their History

*CAAO Research/Historian Committee*

**O**n December 21, 1994, the Executive Board of the Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers (CAAO) formed the Research/Historian Committee. The purpose of this committee was to write the history of the CAAO and the history of the Connecticut assessment profession.

Writing the history of any organization is by no means an easy task. Writing the history of the CAAO presented some difficult and challenging assignments, but it also had a number of positive outcomes.

A positive note was the ingrained belief, of committee members, that the recording of history is an important part of informing future generations of assessors how their forefathers established, maintained, and improved their organization. The committee letterhead includes a slogan, not originated by the committee but adopted by it, stating, "Retention of current events will prevent the loss of history for future generations." This is a profound statement about the importance of preserving knowledge for future generations.

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Another positive note was that the history of CAAO runs somewhat parallel with the history of IAAO. The first meeting of the National Association of Assessing Officers (NAAO), forerunner of IAAO, was held September 17–19, 1934. The formation of the Assessing Officials Association of Connecticut, forerunner to CAAO, occurred on January 14, 1935.

A member of the NAAO formation committee was Bridgeport, Connecticut, Assessor William Connelly. Another connection with IAAO history was the presentation of the first Certified Assessment Evaluator (CAE) designation to Waterbury, Connecticut, Assessor Aldro Jenks. Over the long history of CAAO and IAAO, Connecticut has seen five of its assessors become president of IAAO.

### Putting the Wheels in Motion

The first step is always the biggest, Where do we start? The span between the time that CAAO first started and the inception of the research committee was 59 years. There wasn't going to be any help from the founding fathers, so the committee made the following decisions. Starting around 1999–2000, the committee began gathering any and all available documents and articles about the CAAO.

Note that the committee was formed in 1994, but the real activity did not start until around 1999–2000. It was at that point that the committee sought information instead of waiting for assessors to send information to the committee. Available from the Connecticut State Library were documents pertaining to the minutes of the formation of the association on January 14, 1935, minutes of the first state meeting on December 30, 1935, and a copy of the first constitution of the association.

Available from the Institute of Public Service at the University of Connecticut, where the CAAO Assessor School is located, was a lengthy article on the history of CAAO by Extension Professor Edward T. Dowling of the Institute of Public Service and an article by Assistant Professor Edward Sember of the Institute of Public Service, "50 Years of Assessor Training in Connecticut." Other articles and documents, although not as old, pertained to the state certification program, the assessors' newsletter, website, motor vehicle committee, and other miscellaneous articles.

### Next Step Was Gigantic

With the documentation side of the program filling up, the committee added another feature to get the ball rolling. The idea of interviewing retired assessors who have made a contribution to the association was adopted and became an instant success. The committee selected some 21 retired assessors to be interviewed; the first interview was scheduled for November 19, 2001.

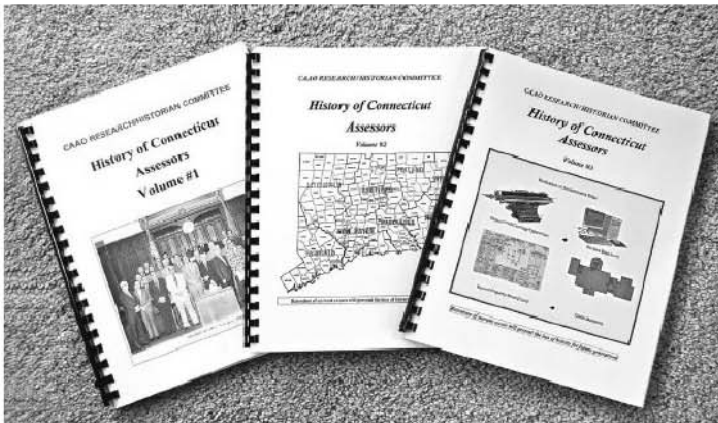
The interview process started with adopting a two-page questionnaire, which was mailed to future interviewees to prepare them for the interview. The committee established a set location and a standard time for the interviews. Before each interview, the committee does some background homework on the interviewee so it can bring out the best historical information that the interviewee can provide. Currently, all the committee's interviews are being held at this same location and are recorded.

As a result of reviews of early interviews, questions were revised to avoid any appearance of “incomplete” documentation and to ensure that questions generated informative and enlightening answers while placing personal perspectives into the shared history. It was hoped that this would avoid the worst thing that can happen during an interview—coming up short because of a lack of information. In addition, the committee discovered the use of two recorders should be the norm because at one of the early interviews the single tape recorder broke down and the entire interview had to be rescheduled. As we continue to learn our history, the committee is better prepared to record it today.

### Timely Publications

Gathering information on historical events of the association and interviewing assessors is planned so that every three years the committee completes a volume of the *History of Connecticut Assessors*. To date, three volumes have been completed, and another is planned for June 2017. Each volume is about 145 pages.

The committee has interviewed some 50 Connecticut assessors to date and also written stories on deceased assessors. Although these are not as long as the interviewee narratives, they are a very important part of recognizing those assessors who have contributed to the history of the Connecticut assessment profession.



Pictured above are the three publications on the History of Connecticut Assessors that the CAAO Research/Historian Committee have completed. The fourth volume will be published in June 2017.

When the first volume was completed, it was distributed by hand through the county assessors' associations. The volumes are now on the CAAO website along with other historical documentation. The decision to distribute the publication every three years allowed those interviewed assessors to have their “stories” presented before the association in a timely fashion.

### Other Duties of the Research/Historian Committee

The *History of Connecticut Assessors* is no doubt the biggest project that the committee has undertaken. We meet every month, except July, August, and December. Other projects include a document titled, *Abstract of the Single Assessors in Connecticut*, which lists all 169 town single assessors, the year they were appointed, and a history of the various assessing functions completed in their community, such as the town's first CAMA revaluation, first GIS system, or the first photo on a property record card. This history is updated annually.

Other publications that the committee has completed are an *80th Anniversary Publication*, a collection of all the written essays and award articles, and a *Question and Answer Publication* on the history of state statutes and assessors. A question-and-answer column is also featured in each edition of the CAAO newsletter, *Assessoreporter*. In addition, the committee maintains reports and documents of historical importance. All this information is available on the CAAO website, caao.com.

Moreover, CAAO has secured a place among the archives and special collections of the Thomas J. Dodd Center of the University of Connecticut. This section of the University of Connecticut library system maintains items and documents of special significance to the State of Connecticut.

### CAAO Structure Powers Historical Events

Connecticut has a proud history of assessment achievements. On August 21, 1944, the first School for Connecticut Assessors was established at the University of Connecticut. The school has served as one of the longest continuous assessment training schools in the country with a quality education that provides state certification for Connecticut assessors who have completed the five mandated assessment courses.

In October 1970, *Assessoreporter* was established as the official newsletter of CAAO. In September 1974, *Assessoreporter* was the recipient of the IAAO Zangerle Award as the best periodical publication of an assessors' association or IAAO chapter.

In 1988, the CAAO established the first website for its association business. The website now includes a section for the publications and research reports issued by the CAAO Research/Historian Committee. All these programs have made Connecticut assessors better informed and educated and have provided a foundation for recording of the history of CAAO and the assessors within that organization.

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