**75th Anniversary Series**

**The 1950s**

By Kathy B. Sedgwick

During the 1950s, the changing needs of the world’s population had a dramatic impact on the construction industry. People wanted newer, better housing, and they wanted it faster. To meet these demands, the industry developed new approaches to construction methods.

For example, several innovations were featured in the construction of the Lever House on Park Avenue in New York City, completed in 1952. Here, false ceilings contained services, and the building’s base was an open passage for pedestrians. Another Park Avenue structure, the Seagram Building, used curtain wall, bronze panels, and metal framed glass curtain walls.

Other uniquely shaped landmark buildings were constructed during this period. Of special note are Frank Lloyd Wright’s spiral and drum design for the Guggenheim Art Museum in New York and, in Australia, the highly recognizable Sydney Opera House, with its sail-like roofs which dominate the harbor.

As these product and design innovations were popularized, CPIA was making changes, too. Until 1954, the CPIA had been headquartered in the city where the elected secretary lived. When Floyd Jennings became president in 1954, he moved the offices to Washington, DC, sharing space with the newly formed National Bureau for Lathing and Plastering. Later, CPIA found space down the street from the NBLP, and hired Ruth Rosenthal to handle paperwork.

In the spring of 1954, Japanese construction industry leaders scheduled an American tour, and Saburo Sugiyama became Japan’s first member in the CPIA.

In 1955, the new President of CPIA, Loyd Peterson of Minneapolis, a lather by trade, urged the Board to change the CPIA bylaws to admit lathing contractors into membership. Later, the association’s name was changed to the Contracting Plasterers’ and Lathers’ International Association (CPLIA).

Although the membership included some double-breasted contractors, non-union contractors officially began joining CPLIA in the mid-50s.

During and immediately following World War II, drywall became a major factor, as new communities grew outside major cities. In 1957 a drywall association, the Gypsum Drywall Contractors International (GDCI), was founded. A union organization, GDCI dealt with two unions, the Carpenters and the Painters.

The two associations—CPLIA and GDCI—functioned separately for a number of years. As drywall became more and more in vogue, the CPLIA became deeply involved in the promotion of lath and plaster. Even so, many CPLIA members, formerly 100% involved in lath and plaster, began contracting drywall and acoustical tile ceilings.

**Next Month: The 1960s**