The Birth of a Maga
The year was 1974. AWCI was on an "international kick."

The 1976 convention was to be held in London.

To get a "feel" for the atmosphere there and what London had to offer, the AWCI Executive Committee decided to hold its 1974 meeting in London with an adjourned session in Monaco.

Among the profound subjects on the agenda was a meeting of the ladies of the Executive Committee where a decision was made to create a Past First Lady's medallion. Helen Ratliff, wife of AWCI President E.M. "Bus" Ratliff, brought with her a design created by a jeweler in Los Angeles, and the ladies spent hours discussing this proposal.

In the meantime, Bus Ratliff had his hands full with planning for the AWCI Annual Convention that
would be held two years hence. Another topic on his agenda was the possibility of AWCI’s starting its own magazine.

Switch back in time

AWCI had proposed to purchase all rights to Walls & Ceilings. Chuck Clay, who had “fathered” the predecessor magazine, Plastering Industries (which became Walls and Ceilings when the national association dropped “lathing and plastering” from its title for a more universal name incorporating all wall and ceiling work), had recently passed away. His magazine, while not governed by AWCI directives, was recognized as the “official” publication of the national association.

Chuck had been an industry icon. His influence not only in the national association, but in the entire industry, was probably as strong as the influence of any contractor leader. (His posthumous presentation of The E.F. Venzie Award—which later became the Pinnacle Award—is an indication of the prestige he enjoyed.) Chuck attended all association meetings, even those of the Executive Committee and board of directors.

When Chuck died, the AWCI leadership agreed that AWCI should take over the magazine and bring it “in house.” J. Monroe “Mun” McNulty and his wife, Julie, who both had always been close to Chuck and Margaret, flew to Seattle to meet with Margaret to offer to buy the magazine from her. In the meantime, Bob Welch, who had been Chuck’s number one field rep, and a close personal friend, also offered to buy the magazine. The friendship between Bob and the Clays was too strong, and Margaret decided to accept Bob’s offer. Walls & Ceilings was to remain independent.

At just about this time, the editor at the National Electrical Contractors’ Association was looking for a job. Jerry Wykoff—as an aside, possibly one of the best writers this writer has ever known—appeared in the AWCI offices on Church Street in Washington, D.C., one evening with a note of introduction from McNeill (Mac) Stokes, who was AWCI’s general counsel at that time. Jerry was in a mild state of shock, being
In 1974 ...

... Post-it Notes were developed by 3M engineer Art Fry in response to a need for bookmarks that do not slip out but are easily removable.

... The first international fax standards were set by the United Nations, allowing facsimile messages to be transmitted at a rate of one page every six minutes.

... The United States was drowning in Watergate. Richard Nixon resigned as president and was succeeded by Gerald Ford.

... The oil crisis continued, and waiting in gas lines became a way of life.

unemployed for the first time in his memory, and suggested possibly helping AWCI to start its own magazine.

The political implications of doing this were severe in that Plastering Industries and now Walls & Ceilings had been the association’s “official” publication for at least a quarter century. Nevertheless, the feelings were also strong that with Walls & Ceilings no longer available as the association’s property, AWCI should look elsewhere.

“Elsewhere” suddenly appeared on our doorstep in the guise of Gerald L. Wykoff, whose publishing credentials were noteworthy, to say the least.

Don Chambers, at that time a member of AWCI’s Executive Committee and in line to become AWCI’s president, flew into Washington for a meeting with Jerry. Jerry showed Don his portfolio and convinced Don that it could be done. Don contacted Past President Mun McNulty — who had had the unsuccessful job of trying to buy Walls & Ceilings — and the two of them agreed the matter should go to the AWCI Executive Committee with their affirmative recommendation.

Back in London . . .

As the Executive Committee meeting wound down in London, the commit-
In 1974 ...  

... Cannonade won the Kentucky Derby with a time of 2:04.

... Muhammad Ali, using the “rope a dope,” knocked out George Foreman, in the eighth round, in Zaire.

... Whitey Ford and Mickey Mantle were elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

... Entertainer Ted Nugent won the National Squirrel Shooting Archery Contest by hitting a squirrel at 150 yards.
In 1974 ... 

... Hank Aaron broke Babe Ruth’s home run record with his 715th.

... Evonne Goolagong ended Chris Evert’s 55-match tennis winning streak.

... Miami beat Minnesota 24 to 7 in Superbowl VIII.

... Notre Dame ended UCLA’s 88-game winning streak in college basketball.

... Golfer Johny Miller established a one-year, money-winning record of $346,933.

... Frank Robinson, of the Cleveland Indians, is hired as the first black manager in major league baseball.

... After much discussion, and with the backing and prestige of Mun McNulty and Past Presidents John Thomson and Bob Maidt (both of whom were in attendance), the committee voted unanimously to move ahead. It directed me to call Jerry so that Bus Ratliff and Don Chambers could talk with him about the proposal.

I put in the call, immediately got through to Jerry, and the rest is history.

About the Author

Joe M. Baker Jr. was executive vice president from 1955 to 1992. He is currently president of the U.S. Division of PlasterForm.