

# My, How Time Flies ... RTA IS 98-YEARS-YOUNG

By Jim Gauntt, RTA Executive Director

*Editor's Note: This is the first in a two-part series exploring the history and mission of the Railway Tie Association.*

**Y**our association is 98-years-young this year. Navigating waters that aren't often glassy calm for nearly a century is remarkable for any organization. But a trade association? Just staying afloat amidst the turmoil of war and world crises, even in a sturdy boat, is miraculous.

I don't know why this came to me today. Perhaps I was reflecting on work and family, and that prompted deeper thought. Maybe the constant change that faces us every day overwhelmed me for a moment. I probably won't ever know why certain images from my bank of RTA memories began racing through my mind.

Then it hit me.

For nearly one-quarter of the entire history of RTA, I have had the privilege of serving as your executive director.

After I stopped shaking my head in disbelief, and feeling just a bit older than I had the moment before, I began to reflect on a 38-year wood preserving industry career, the last 22 of which have belonged to RTA.

Then I wondered if there were other organizations like RTA with this length of service to a single industry.

Turns out, yes.

The oldest operating trade association in the United States is the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA), founded in 1883.

RTA's predecessor organizations, a loose-knit group of smaller regional interests that came together to form a national association, also date back to the 1880s, according to the lore of our industry. That's heritage in its own right.

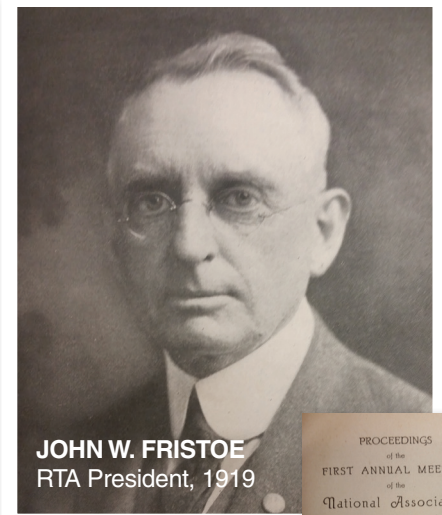
In reading a little further, I found numerous similarities in the purpose and goals of ASTA and other associations like RTA.

These can be condensed to communication and education, training, stewardship of the environment, and becoming an effective voice in all matters related to the development of the products and services for which trade associations are responsible.

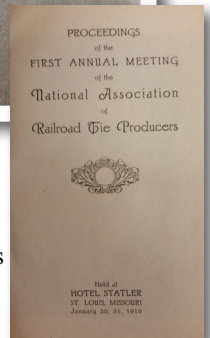
In RTA's very first meeting in St. Louis, Mo., in 1919, Mr. Walter Poleman, president of the Western Tie and Timber Company, gave an address in which he reflected on his own 30+ years in the tie industry.

"The tie men have never expressed themselves [before] and they...owe a duty as fellow citizens, who depend on the transportation system in this country, to give the true facts and the efforts being made [in and] against their own interests."

At the close of his presentation, the first president of the association, John Fristoe of the T.J. Moss Company, stated, "Mr.



**JOHN W. FRISTOE**  
RTA President, 1919



Poleman has helped me... realize how important we are to the community."

Beginning with Poleman's words, RTA embarked on a journey of advocacy for its members—and railroads—and has never looked back.

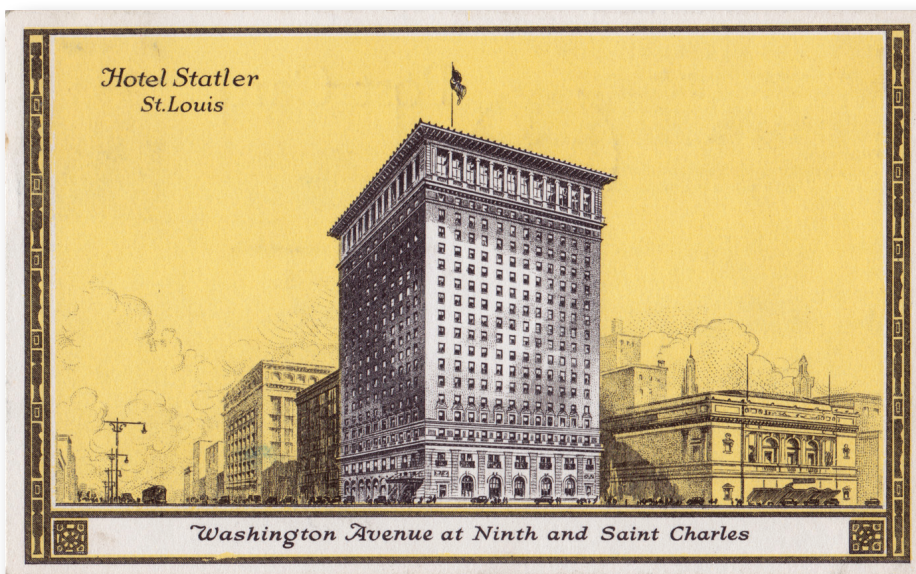
RTA has been the united voice for thousands of men and women who came before us and who provided the primary foundation of modern day track systems in daily use by North American rail companies.

I also found the following inspiration from that first meeting in 1919...

Article 3 of the association's 1919 Constitution and Bylaws set forth principles RTA yet today endeavors to embody:

**Purpose of Organization**

*This Association is organized, not for pecuniary profits in any form, but for benevolent, scientific, and educational purposes. To obtain a closer relationship between the members of the Association, between its members and others engaged in the railroad tie business and with the public at large and also with those who may subsequently become members thereof; to advance, promote, and extend the commercial and manufacturing interests of the various communities where railroad ties are produced; to inculcate just and equitable principles of trade and to improve business standards in*





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*the relations to the civic life of the communities; to establish and maintain the utmost uniformity and fairness in the commercial usages; to acquire, preserve and disseminate valuable business information; to promote friendly intercourse among its members and other tie producers and other commercial and manufacturing interest of the communities and to increase their facilities for an interchange of ideas and also for the purpose of co-operating with other organizations upon important matters affecting the commercial manufacturing as well as civic interests of various communities, the various states and the nations; to avoid and amicably adjust, as far as practicable, all controversies and misunderstandings, arising between individuals engaged in the trade and their customers; to protect and promote generally the interest of railroad tie production and those engaged therein; and to do any and all things which may be necessary and proper to carry into effect the said objects and purposes, and to facilitate in every proper way the transaction of all legitimate business between members and between them and others.*

These original guiding principles light our path forward even now. As Fristoe said, occasionally it's important to take a breath and realize that the work we do as members of the RTA family is important to the community and for the greater good of all. ■



Railway Workers With Tie Tongs