The Story of SAMA

SAMA, the Scientific Apparatus Makers Association, is the American association of companies that manufacture and distribute laboratory and industrial instruments, apparatus, equipment and supplies. Whereas the ISA is a professional society for individuals, SAMA is an association of companies. Both do for their members whatever can be done better collectively than by individual efforts.

SAMA’s activities vary with international, national, and local conditions and situations. There is a constant realignment of emphasis on all types of problems of over-all interest, as well as on problems of importance to specific groups.

Sections

As the industry makes and distributes as many as 40,000 products, there are various fields of activity. The problems of each field are handled by various Sections or “Product Groups” of the Association. Currently there are six such Sections—(1) Industrial Instrument, (2) Laboratory Apparatus, (3) Laboratory Equipment, (4) Nautical, Aeronautical and Military, (6) Optical Instrument, and (6) Recorder-Controller. Each Section cooperates in over-all activities and concurrently carries on its own programs devised to solve problems peculiar to the products it makes and distributes.

It should be pointed out here that SAMA is an organization of companies, not an outside organization to which companies subscribe. Its work is done largely by committees of company representatives. The permanent staff is small. Headquarters are in Chicago. SAMA maintains a Washington office, and the Recorder-Controller Section has an office and executive secretary in New York.

SAMA Sections are subject to change from time to time. New ones can be added. At least two new Sections are being discussed at this time, and two others are possibilities. On the other hand, one small Section recently disband when it was found that its members had little common interest with the rest of the industry.

History

SAMA was founded in 1918 to protect an industry that had grown from infancy to lusty adolescence during World War I. Before that war the instrument and apparatus business in this country was conducted by a number of large importing and distributing houses, most of whom had franchises for the distribution of the products of German and English manufacturers. During the war supply was cut off from both those countries, and the American government asked the infant industry to take up the slack by becoming producers of vital instruments. This they did, amassing considerable facilities and skill. At the close of the war, when German goods again came into this country, these companies found that they were being outpriced in their own market because of the tremendous differences in labor rates between the two countries, and because the U. S. industry enjoyed no tariff protection in the fields of its major markets, chiefly the educational market. American companies faced the alternatives of reverting to their pre-war importer status, going out of business, or cooperating to bring about a change in the basic tariff laws.

Col. E. E. Kimble, founder and former president of the Kimble Glass Co., receives the SAMA Award for Outstanding Service at the 1951 Annual Meeting of the Association at the Greenbrier Hotel, White Sulphur Springs, W. Va. Charles S. Redding, Pres., Leeds & Northrup Co., and SAMA president at that time, made the presentation and is shown at center. At right is John M. Roberts, former partner in Central Scientific Co., and for more than 20 years president of SAMA.
Twelve leaders of the new industry, representing seven companies, joined in the Scientific Apparatus Makers of America (now the Scientific Apparatus Makers Association) to attempt to change the basic tariff law to include educational institutions. After four years they succeeded in 1922.

SAMA has grown steadily for a period of 34 years. Now more than 200 companies are members. Since 1922, tariff rates on most of the industry’s products have been increased twice; more recently they have been reduced for some items.

Activities

National Representation

At all times and for all Sections, matters in Washington are of prime interest. A major function of SAMA is educating Government people as to the strategic and economic importance of the American instrument industry. Association spadework during World War II resulted in the establishment of a separate division for this industry’s products in the National Security Resources Board and in the National Production Authority which followed it. Effectiveness of this work shows in the fact that the NPA has allotted sufficient critical materials to instrument and apparatus manufacturers to keep them operating at levels above pre-Korean rate.

Before controls on basic raw materials were loosened recently, SAMA companies were recognized as the pace-setters of scientific research and development and of industrial control, without which processing on large scale is impossible.

SAMA action also established a basis upon which instrument companies can file for exemption of key, skilled personnel from draft, and recall of reservists.

Another SAMA function of importance has been to assist in the establishment of minimum wage standards for jobs in the instrument industry under the Walsh-Healey Act.

The Association grew out of a need for tariff protection on its industry’s products. For some segments tariff matters continue to be the most pressing problems. However, other Sections have other problems. Recognition in Washington so that member companies might get their proper share of controlled basic raw materials was one of the most recent ones. Recognition, so a proper basis for deferment of draftees or reservists can be established, has been another major, all-industry problem, and continues to be a prime one. Other problems come and go with economic tides and with international, national, and local decisions, trends, and factors. There are always industry problems which require industry-wide action. Combating these is a major function of a trade association. But it is not the only raison d’etre; SAMA has many day-to-day activities. For instance:

SAMA maintains a Washington office with a representative who obtains application forms, export licenses, answers to questions, etc., for individual companies upon request. He offers time-saving suggestions to individuals in Government agencies who should be consulted on specific problems. Government agencies issue a continuous flood of orders, regulations, reports, releases, etc.; interpretations or copies of the orders are sent to members regularly.

The Washington office manager aids and abets SAMA’s Government Liaison Committee and special committees which represent the industry in obtaining information concerning industry problems, preparing briefs, etc., and appearing as spokesmen before regulatory agencies.

Publications

Headquarters staff of SAMA issues two series of bulletins. The SAMA Letter, the industry’s newsletter, issued every second week or whenever occasion warrants, contains information about the industry, its people, and any other material and data of interest or value in running the member’s business. The Foreign Trade Report contains information about markets abroad, and about companies or individuals in foreign countries seeking to purchase instruments or apparatus or to act as agents.


Standardization

SAMA carries on standardization activities with professional societies. These help to reduce production costs, lower inventory carrying charges, and make component parts more readily available. Use of standards developed by SAMA and other societies is on a purely voluntary basis.

Public Information

Another function is a public information program. This helps to educate and inform users of instruments and apparatus, the business and general publics, and Government officials about this industry, particularly its economic and strategic importance.

Industry Trends

SAMA, or its Sections, has for years compiled sales data and issued monthly reports to indicate industry trends so its members can check their relative standing in the industry. Monthly reports of orders billed by all member companies are summarized and figures sent to all members. Some groups collect data on orders received and backlog of unfilled orders. In one instance, sales figures are classified according to customer industries.

Sections make periodic or special surveys to obtain accurate information upon which to base certain basic management decisions. For example, there is the operating cost ratio survey of laboratory-apparatus distributors. A study carried on by one group surveys packaging recommendations by distributors of laboratory apparatus for manufacturers of their products. Another group studies sales, salaries and supplemental compensation, sales agents' commissions, general advertising, and other selling expenses as compared with the company's total sales volume.

SAMA operates two other services of interest from its Chicago offices. One is a credit clearing file through which its members may exchange information concerning organizations and individuals who do not meet their obligations within a reasonable period of time. This is potentially of considerable import because many companies sell to individuals and small concerns not regularly listed by the regular commercial credit investigating agencies. The other service is a microscope (and other optical instrument) registration service whereby purchasers may register name and number of instruments they purchase; this has proven immensely valuable over a period of years in tracing stolen instruments.

Meetings

Despite the scope and number of the functions it performs for its members, perhaps half the value of SAMA membership comes from Annual and Midyear Meetings. Business-wise, these are forums where representatives of the various member companies meet in a friendly atmosphere. Committees report on their industry-wide activities. Plans for new projects are discussed and appropriate actions taken. In other sessions, members consider internal management problems such as company pension plans, employee communication programs, incentives for employees, budgeting, sales forecasting, training factory employees and salesmen, cost reduction, and similar facets of operating a business.

Socially, activities and opportunities to visit with other members in an informal, congenial atmosphere frequently result in friendships which are of even greater benefit than attendance at formal sessions. SAMA is a business organization of competitors which, through its equal benefits to small and large business, preserves and fosters competition.

Committees

A good way to get a clear picture of SAMA is to list and describe some of the more active committees of company representatives of SAMA and its various Sections.

F. F. Shetterly, sales manager, Laboratory and Pharmaceutical Sales Department, Corning Glass Works, Corning, N. Y., addresses a group of scientific instrument and laboratory apparatus company executives at the SAMA Annual Meeting May 6-9, 1952, in the Edgewater Beach Hotel. Seated at left are R. E. Welch, V. P. and Treas., W. M. Welch Mfg. Co., Chicago; and J. O. Bengston, Pres., Chicago Apparatus Company.

Walter C. Skuce, assistant to the administrator, National Production Authority and formerly vice-president of Owens-Illinois Fiberglass, Inc., discusses the Controlled Materials Plan at a business session of the annual meeting. Seated at left are Henry F. Dever, Pres., Brown Instruments Div., Minneapolis Honeywell Regulator Co., chairman of SAMA's Recorder-Controller Section, and a director of the Association. Next to Dever is Edward J. Albert, Pres., Thwing-Albert Instruments, Inc., and president pro tempore of SAMA.
Much of SAMA's work in Washington is done by the Government Liaison Committee, composed of members from each Section in constant contact with various departments, bureaus, sections, offices, etc. of the Federal Government. The Committee presents facts, figures, and testimony on all matters which touch on the industry. Other spokesmen appear from time to time when their testimony is needed or benefits.

A major activity of the entire group is Standardization. The SAMA Standardization Committee has as its function "to act as a liaison agency for contact with recognized standardizing agencies; to recommend policies on over-all questions of standardization; to review Section standardization programs."

The Association also maintains a Bureau of Standards Committee to cooperate with the National Bureau of Standards to improve standardization service and certification of scientific apparatus and instruments.

Sections have their own Standardization committees to work specifically on the products they represent. Some Sections also have their own Government Liaison Committees, and all have their special machinery to deal with special problems of that Section only, or with a type of product which presents peculiar problems, or with improving relations, marketing, etc., in general.

The Laboratory Apparatus Section, for instance, is the only Section which is made up of both manufacturers and distributors (all others are manufacturers only). An active committee in this group is the Manufacturers-Distributors Relations Committee. Another is the Packaging Committee, which not only recommends changes in packaging standards, but is responsible for a study conducted among distributors which has resulted in a series of recommendations to manufacturers for better packaging. This Section also does much work on determining proper inventory-to-sales ratios, on sales costs, and on future demands. Members of the Optical Section cooperate with the Laboratory Apparatus group in much of their work.

The Recorder-Controller Section, on the other hand, is made up only of manufacturers or companies who sell direct, who deal in entire tailor-made instrumentation systems, and who install their products. This Section has different problems. It has its own Executive, Public Relations and Government Liaison Committee. But it also has a series of committees such as the Engineering Executives' Committee, Financial Executives' Committee, and Sales Executives' Committee.

The Industrial Instruments Section finds it expedient to have groups such as its Electronics and its Mercury Thermometer Committees.

Laboratory Equipment Section has an Advertising Committee and the only paid advertising program within the Association.

A complete listing of SAMA and Section Committees and their members requires 10 mimeographed pages, indicating the number and variety of activities.

Awards

Most recently added activity of SAMA is the Scientific Apparatus Makers Award in Chemical Education administered by the American Chemical Society. This $1000 and gold-medal award was presented for the first time this year. Recipient was Dr. Joel L. Hildebrand, Department of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, University of California.

A SAMA Award for Outstanding Service is presented whenever the committee for this award feels it is merited, to persons who have contributed outstandingly to the industry. Thus far the Award has been given only to three men, each an octogenarian. These are the late Morris L. Leeds, founder and president, and chairman of the board, Leeds & Northrup Company, Philadelphia, Pa.; Dr. Harvey N. Ott, president of the Spencer Lens Company (now the Instrument Division of the American Optical Company); and Dr. E. E. Kimble, founder and president of the Kimble Glass Co., (now a division of the Owens-Illinois Glass Co.).

A special award was presented to John Marshall Roberts, SAMA president for more than 20 years when he retired from that position in 1948. When Roberts, a founder of SAMA, retired, the Association reverted to its former structure of members, presidents. Current president is J. Claire Evans, president of The Denver Fire Clay Company, who was elected in 1951 and reelected in 1952.