

This Day in History... February 23, 1857

American Institute of Architects

On February 23, 1857, a group of 13 architects met in New York City and discussed founding an organization to “promote the scientific and practical perfection of its members.” That organization became the American Institute of Architects.

Prior to this meeting, there weren't official architectural licensing laws or specialized schools for aspiring architects. Anyone involved in the building process, such as masons, carpenters, and brick layers, might refer to themselves as architects. One of the purposes of the 1857 gathering was to establish an official architecture organization that would “elevate the standing of the profession.”

The group met again on March 10, inviting 16 more architects to join them. They reviewed a draft of the constitution and bylaws. The only change they made was to the name of the organization, from the New York Society of Architects to the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Members then called for the constitution and bylaws to be printed on vellum for signing as well as additional copies for each member to take with them.

On April 13, a judge signed the certificate of incorporation and said he knew the AIA would succeed because its members were “aware of the necessity of a solid foundation whereupon to construct an edifice & that consequently he felt assured that we had laid our cornerstone on a rock.” The AIA founders then signed their constitution on April 15 at the New York University chapel.



The AIA called Wright “the greatest American architect of all time.”

At a meeting the following year, the AIA changed its constitution and expanded its mission “to promote the artistic, scientific, and practical profession of its members; to facilitate their intercourse and good fellowship; to elevate the standing of the profession; and to combine the efforts of those engaged in the practice of Architecture, for the general advancement of the Art.” To achieve these goals, the AIA began holding regular meetings and offering lectures that were relevant to their field. They also worked to create a library and establish a collection of architectural references for all members to access.

The AIA further expanded on its mission statement in 1867 to include “The objects of this Institute are to unite in fellowship the Architects of this continent, and to combine their efforts so as to promote the artistic, scientific, and practical efficiency of the profession.”

In 1884, the Western Association of Architects was founded in Chicago, with members based largely in the Midwest and the South. As both groups shared similar goals, and even some members, they merged in 1889, keeping the AIA name. The organization has grown to include about 300 chapters throughout the nation and around the world totaling over 95,000 members.

Today, the AIA works with local, state, and federal legislators improve public spaces, protect infrastructure, and create affordable housing. The AIA also provides a network in which architects can find schools of architecture and other architectural information and gives awards for excellence in architecture. The AIA's annual conference is the world's largest meeting of architects.



Stamp issued on the AIA's 100th anniversary pictures a Corinthian-styled capital – a Classic Greek style of architecture.

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