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# History of The Waterborne Symposium: A 50-Year Retrospective

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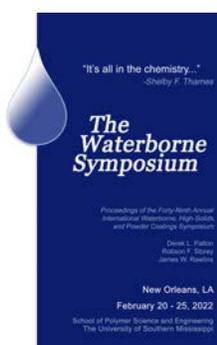
**Founders and Chairmen of the Waterborne Symposium at the 40th Annual Symposium  
from left to right: James Rawlin (Chair), George Bufkin, Gary Wildman,  
Shelby Thames (Founders), and Robson Storey (Chair)**

The First Water-Borne and Higher-Solids Coating Symposium was held August 13-15, 1973, in New Orleans, LA. It consisted of papers from industry and academia, including contributions from scientists at Union Carbide Corporation, American Cyanamid Company, DeSoto, Inc., LeHigh University, and the University of Houston. The Symposium attracted 135 attendees and was held in the Sheraton-Charles Hotel, 211 St. Charles Street. It was conceived and founded by three faculty members of the Department of Polymer Science at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM): Drs. Gary Wildman, George Bufkin, and Shelby Thames. After the First Symposium, the founders decided that future symposia would be more advantageously scheduled during the winter in New Orleans, and particularly, just prior to Mardi Gras. Thus the second Symposium was held February 3-5, 1975, and was thereafter succeeded by annual Symposia up to the most recent, the 49th, held February 23-25, 2022.

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# History of The Waterborne Symposium: Continued

With the exception of the First, the 15th (1988), the 20th (1993), and the 48th (2021), the Symposium has always been held in New Orleans on the week immediately prior to Mardi Gras. Due to hotel scheduling issues, the 15th Symposium was held one week earlier, and the 20th Symposium was held immediately after Mardi Gras, with the opening day on Ash Wednesday; due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 48th Symposium was a virtual meeting conducted from the USM campus in Hattiesburg. From its inception until 1997 (24th Symposium), the Symposium was co-sponsored by the Department of Polymer Science at USM and the Southern Society for Coatings Technology (SSCT). In 1998, USM became the sole sponsor of the Symposium, and the SSCT assumed sponsorship of a new event, The Technology Showcase, which consisted of a booth-style technology display conjoined with the Symposium. From 2012 to the present day, the Symposium, The Technology Showcase, and all other associated events and activities have been sponsored solely by USM.



Throughout its entire history, the Symposium has published its Proceedings, and these volumes represent an important technical resource within the published literature in the field of paint and coatings. Beginning in 2004, the traditional hardcopy Proceedings book was supplemented by a digital version, initially as a compact disc and currently in thumb-drive format.

From its early beginning, the Water-Borne and Higher-Solids Symposium grew in popularity, slowly at first and then more rapidly, with the number of papers presented and the attendance rising through the 1980s and early 1990s. During the mid and late 1990s attendance was routinely in excess of 425, and the number of papers presented each year was in the range of 35-55. A record-high attendance of 471 occurred in 1995 (22nd Symposium), with 54 papers presented. In their review of the 1999 (26th) Symposium, the European Coatings Journal described the Symposium as, "...North America's most prestigious conference in the field of paints and coatings." High attendance numbers prevailed until the 29th Symposium (2002) when attendance was severely reduced due to travel restrictions resulting from the terrorist attacks of 9-11. Several years later, on August 29, 2005, the city of New Orleans suffered the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. There was great concern whether city services such as air travel, hotel, restaurants, etc., would be recovered sufficiently to actually hold the Symposium in New Orleans in February 2006. The city did indeed recover, and the 33rd Symposium was successfully held as scheduled on February 22-24, 2006. Post Katrina, the Symposium steadily recovered, and attendance was in the 265-383 range throughout the 2011-2020 decade (38th through 47th Symposia). As already mentioned, the 2021 (48th) Symposium was held virtually due to the pandemic, but even under such challenging circumstances, attendance was a respectable 241. Upon return of the Symposium to New Orleans in 2022, attendance held steady at 231.

## History of The Waterborne Symposium: Continued

The original name, Water-Borne and Higher-Solids Coatings Symposium, reflected the focus of the Symposium, which was the science and technology of low volatile organic compound (VOC) coatings. Although the Symposium has stayed true to this theme, the name of the Symposium has evolved over the years, as shown in Table 1. The most significant change occurred in 1991, when “Powder Coatings” was added to reflect the growing importance of this sector of the industry. In 1994, “Water-Borne” was changed simply to “Waterborne.” This change reflected the increasing acceptance of this word into the lexicon of the English language. In 1996 the word “International” was added to recognize a clear trend toward worldwide participation at the Symposium. In 2007 a simpler, abbreviated name was adopted for branding purposes: “The Waterborne Symposium.” However, the full name, “International Waterborne, High-Solids, and Powder Coatings Symposium,” was retained for abstracting purposes and other formal references to the Symposium.

**Table 1. Charting the Symposium Name over the Years**

Years	Name
1973-1990	Water-Borne and Higher-Solids Coatings Symposium
1991-1993	Water-Borne, Higher-Solids, and Powder Coatings Symposium
1994	Waterborne, Higher-Solids, and Powder Coatings Symposium
1995	Waterborne, High-Solids, and Powder Coatings Symposium
1996-date	International Waterborne, High-Solids, and Powder Coatings Symposium*

\*In 2007, “The Waterborne Symposium” was adopted as an abbreviated name for branding purposes. “International Waterborne, High-Solids, and Powder Coatings Symposium,” was retained for abstracting purposes and other formal references to the Symposium.

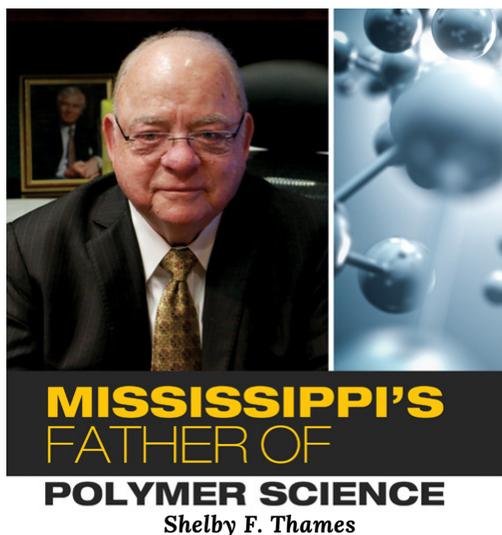


George Bufkin (center) and attendees at the 25th anniversary symposium.



Gary Wildman (left) and attendee at the 25th anniversary symposium (1998).

# History of The Waterborne Symposium: Continued



From its inception, The Waterborne Symposium has been organized and executed by faculty, staff, and students of the School of Polymer Science and Engineering (formerly the Department of Polymer Science) at USM. Past and present Chairmen of the Symposium, all of whom were or are USM faculty members, are listed in Table 2. Symposium founders Wildman and Bufkin served as co-chairmen for the first eight Symposia. The author has been a chairman of the Symposium from 1985 to the present, and for many years during this period, he co-chaired the Symposium with founder, Shelby Thames. The current co-chairmen are Robson Storey, James Rawlins, and Derek Patton.



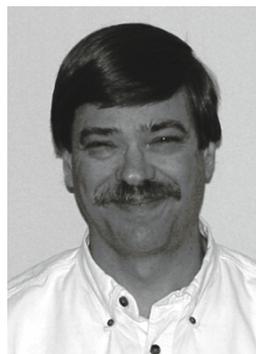
George Bufkin



Gary Wildman



Robert Burks



Charles Hoyle



Marek Urban



Douglas Wicks

**Table 2. Historical Chairmen of the Symposium**

Years	Chairmen
1973-1981	Gary Wildman and George Bufkin
1982-1983	Gary Wildman and Robert Burks
1984	Gordon L. Nelson
1985-1989	Gordon L. Nelson, Charles E. Hoyle, and Robson F. Storey
1990-2002	Robson F. Storey and Shelby F. Thames
2003-2004	Robson F. Storey, Shelby F. Thames, Marek W. Urban, and Douglas A. Wicks
2005-2010	Robson F. Storey
2011-2021	Robson F. Storey and James W. Rawlins
2022	Robson F. Storey, James W. Rawlins, and Derek L. Patton



James Rawlins



Robson Storey



Derek Patton



# History of The Waterborne Symposium: Continued



*Velda Moore*

Since the early 1980s, the execution of essential Symposium operations such as registration, attendee services, program brochure printing and distribution, layout and printing of the Proceedings, interfacing with the hotel, etc., have been carried out by the Symposium Coordinator, a full-time USM staff employee. Table 3 provides a historical list of the persons who have filled this important role.

**Table 3. Historical Symposium Coordinators**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Symposium Coordinator</b>
1982-1988	Velda Moore
1989-1990	Tonya Terral
1991-1996	Kathleen McCormick
1997-2003	Laura Fosselman
2004	Rick Durden
2005-2010	Laura Fosselman
2011 to date	Melanie Bryan



*Laura Fosselman*



*Kathleen McCormick*



*Melanie Bryan*



## History of The Waterborne Symposium: Continued

The Symposium has been held in various hotels in New Orleans over the years, as shown in Table 4. Starting in 1978 and extending for 26 consecutive years, the Symposium hotel was the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Poydras Plaza. In later years, the Symposium has resided at several different hotels, most of which are directly adjacent to the French Quarter.

**Table 4. Historical Symposium Hotels**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Hotel</b>
1973	Sheraton-Charles Hotel 211 St. Charles Street
1975-1977	International Hotel 300 Canal Street
1978-2003	Hyatt Regency Hotel Poydras Plaza and Loyola Ave.
2004-2007	The New Orleans Marriott 555 Canal Street
2008-2009	New Orleans Downtown Marriott at the Convention Center 859 Convention Center Blvd.
2010-2011	Astor Crowne Plaza-New Orleans French Quarter 739 Canal Street at Bourbon
2012-2013	The New Orleans Marriott
2014-2016	Sheraton New Orleans Hotel 500 Canal Street
2017	The New Orleans Marriott
2018-2019	Astor Crowne Plaza-New Orleans French Quarter
2020	Sheraton New Orleans Hotel
2021	None (virtual Symposium conducted from USM)
2022	Astor Crowne Plaza-New Orleans French Quarter

Without exception, the Symposium has always been organized as a three-day meeting: two full days plus a “short” third day (ending mid-day or early afternoon) to allow attendees to return home that evening. The early symposia were held Monday-Wednesday; in 1985 (12th Symposium) the program moved permanently to a Wednesday-Friday format. The program has always included a reception held in the evening of day one of the Symposium. Beginning in 1991 and extending continuously through 2011, this reception was generously sponsored by Eastman Chemical Co. Eastman also sponsored the reception at the 40th Symposium in 2013. Over the years, the Symposium has expanded into a week-long event encompassing multiple activities. Short courses held prior to the Symposium on Monday and Tuesday were added in 1987 (14th Symposium). In various years, as many as six short courses have been offered, some starting as early as the Saturday prior to the Symposium. The Technology Showcase, mentioned already, was added in 1998. It is a forum for scientists and engineers from manufacturers, suppliers, and service-oriented providers to present their most recent developments in a booth format. The Technology Showcase typically begins on the Tuesday prior to the Symposium and extends through the second day (Thursday) of the Symposium. A student poster session, held on Thursday of the Symposium, was added in 2007 (34th Symposium) and has continued to the present day.

## History of The Waterborne Symposium: Continued

A number of important technologies in the arena of low VOC coatings have been introduced at the Symposium over its 50-year history. For example, many of the early developments in supercritical fluid spray technology by such companies as Union Carbide Corporation and S.C. Johnson and Sons, were first introduced at the Water-Borne and Higher-Solids Coatings Symposium. New emulsion polymerization technologies, including, core-shell latex particle morphologies, latices with improved latex particle size and size distribution, and various technologies toward superior latex particle morphological control were first reported at the Symposium. Surfactant technologies that have enabled new water-reducible vehicles and improved stabilization of existing vehicles have been first reported at the Symposium. Finally, a number of thermosetting latex technologies have debuted at the Symposium, including the vegetable oil macromonomer technology developed in the Thames-Rawlins Research Group at USM.

Proceeds from the Symposium are very important to USM and the School of Polymer Science and Engineering. They are used for various elements of academic program development, including junior faculty development, graduate student stipends, equipment acquisition and maintenance, and most especially, scholarships for undergraduate students majoring in Polymer Science and Polymer Science and Engineering, most of whom enter the coatings or related polymer industries upon graduation. These scholarships are critical to our efforts to recruit the highest-achieving students into our program.

As we make plans for next year's 50th Anniversary Symposium, we look confidently to the future of the Symposium and will strive to maintain its position as the premier technical symposium within the field of paint and coatings.

### Coatings scientists celebrate with USM

BY BILL SUTLEY

**NEW ORLEANS** — Their names aren't familiar, but you can't go through a day without benefiting from their work.

The 450 scientists who gathered from around the world at the Hyatt Regency in downtown New Orleans Feb. 18-21 are the brains behind the coatings that make possible contact lenses, computer chips, paints, waxes and hundreds of other everyday applications.

This year, they took a few moments to recognize the USM Department of Polymer Science for its 25-year role in their professional development.

"This conference covers a broad spectrum of what's going on in the coatings industry," said Nick Dispensa, applications manager for a Kansas City-based manufacturer. "This conference features down-to-earth people dealing with everyday technical concerns."

Forty-four papers were on this year's agenda from Thursday through Saturday at the 25th anniversary International Waterborne, High-Solids, & Powder Coatings Symposium before an audience that mixed industrial scientists from a dozen nations.

See COATINGS, back page



**25 YEARS OF MEMORIES FOUNDING TRIO** — Dr. Shelby Thames, center, founder of USM's Department of Polymer Science, catches up with former Southern Miss faculty Dr. Gary Wildman, left, and Dr. George Bufkin Feb. 18 at the 25th International Waterborne, High-Solids, and Coatings Symposium in New Orleans. The trio teamed up to launch the successful conference in 1973 and it has grown ever since.

# History of The Waterborne Symposium: Continued

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF**

# WATER BORNE

The idea of an annual technical conference for the coatings industry was conceived by Drs. Gary Wildman, George Bufkin, and Shelby Thames. (Faculty of the Department of Polymer Science at USM)

- 1973**  
Inaugural Water-Borne and Higher-Solids Coating Symposium" was held on **August 13 - 15** in **New Orleans, LA**
- 1985**  
Implemented **Wednesday - Friday** format
- 1991**  
Symposium name was officially changed to **Water-borne, Higher-Solids and Powder Coatings Symposium**
- 1994**  
Symposium name was officially changed to **Waterborne, Higher-Solids and Powder Coatings Symposium**
- 1995**  
Symposium name was officially changed to **Waterborne, High-Solids and Powder Coatings Symposium**
- 1996**  
Symposium name was officially changed to **International Waterborne, High-Solids and Powder Coatings Symposium**
- 1998**  
Monday and Tuesday **Short Courses** were added to the program. In subsequent years, as many as six short courses were offered per year, some starting as early as the Saturday prior to the Symposium.
- 1998**  
A new forum for exhibiting, the **Technology Showcase** was added to the program
- 2006**  
First conference held in New Orleans after **Hurricane Katrina** ravaged the city
- 2021**  
Virtual Symposium was held due to the **Covid-19 Pandemic**
- 2022**  
Back to in-person conference held in New Orleans after **Covid-19**
- 2023**  
**50th Anniversary**

