

Asphalt Through the Ages

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Beginning with this issue, *Asphalt Through the Ages* will appear in each issue of *Asphalt Magazine*. This feature will chronicle the history of the production and use of asphalt through the ages using historical Asphalt Institute (AI) photographs and text.

The industry would like to thank the AI members for supporting the effort to archive and place on CD ROM the thousands of historical asphalt industry photos. The archival process is a monumental task and will take some time to complete. So far, we have scanned and archived approximately 3,500 photos. Source Imaging of Lexington, Kentucky, is doing the work.

Ancient Building Material

Asphalt is one of the world's oldest building materials. Its first use was in the building of the Tower of Babel. Noah used asphalt in building and sealing the Ark. Moses was saved from death by a basket lined with asphalt. Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar used asphalt as a road building material for processional roads leading from his palace in honor of the Babylonian gods¹.

One of the first uses of asphalt in U.S. road building was in 1872 in New York's Union Square. Today we use asphalt to improve our quality of life. We use it as a liner for drink-water reservoirs, for built-up roofing, to cap landfills and to build highways.

Earliest AI Photos

The earliest AI photos are in 1901 from a book given to the Institute by Juan Forster, formerly of Huntway Refining. The book is about the Globe Asphalt Company and Obispo brand solid and liquid asphalt. This solid rock asphalt mine was located in Goleta, California, with the mining works in Obispo, California. Globe asphalt was used to pave about 2 million square yards of road.▲



Deposit Number 5 at the Goleta, California, mine.



The asphalt works in Obispo, California, processed the asphalt. October 15, 1902.



Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Illinois, was paved with Obispo asphalt.



Humphrey Avenue in Oak Park, Illinois, was paved with Obispo asphalt in November 1901.

1. Bituminous Substances, Percy Edwin Spielmann, D. Van Nostrand Company, 1925. Chapter 1, pages 5-6.