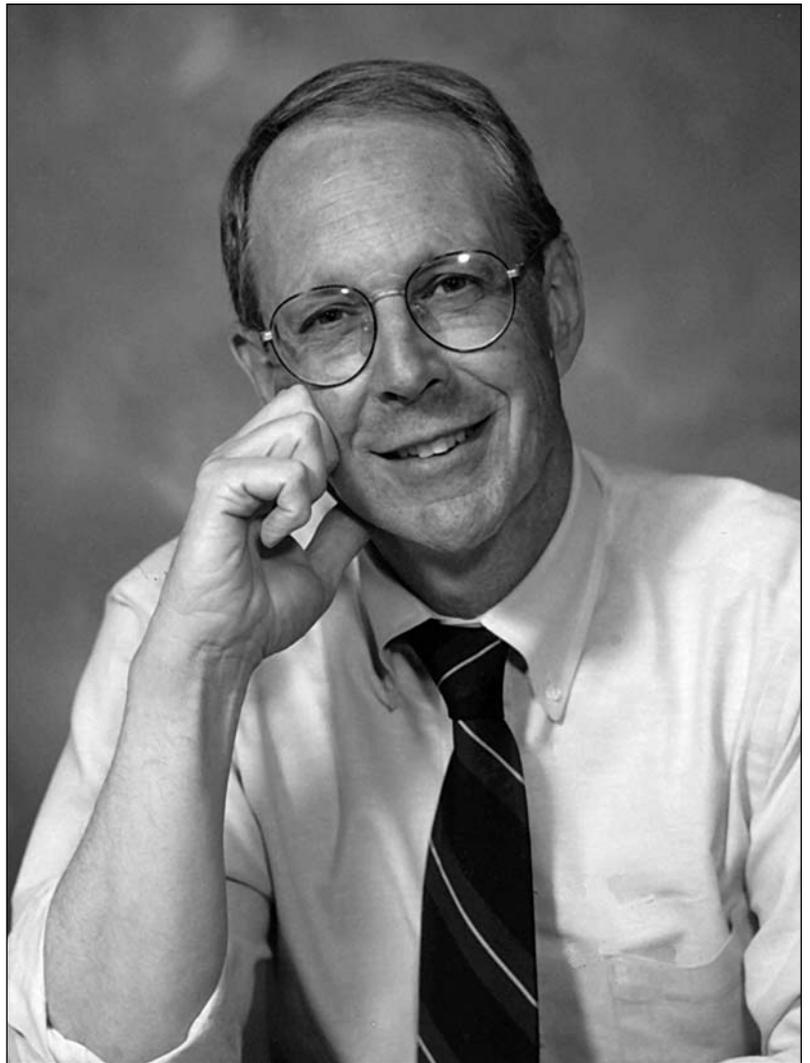# Some Recollections about the Early Days of AAAI
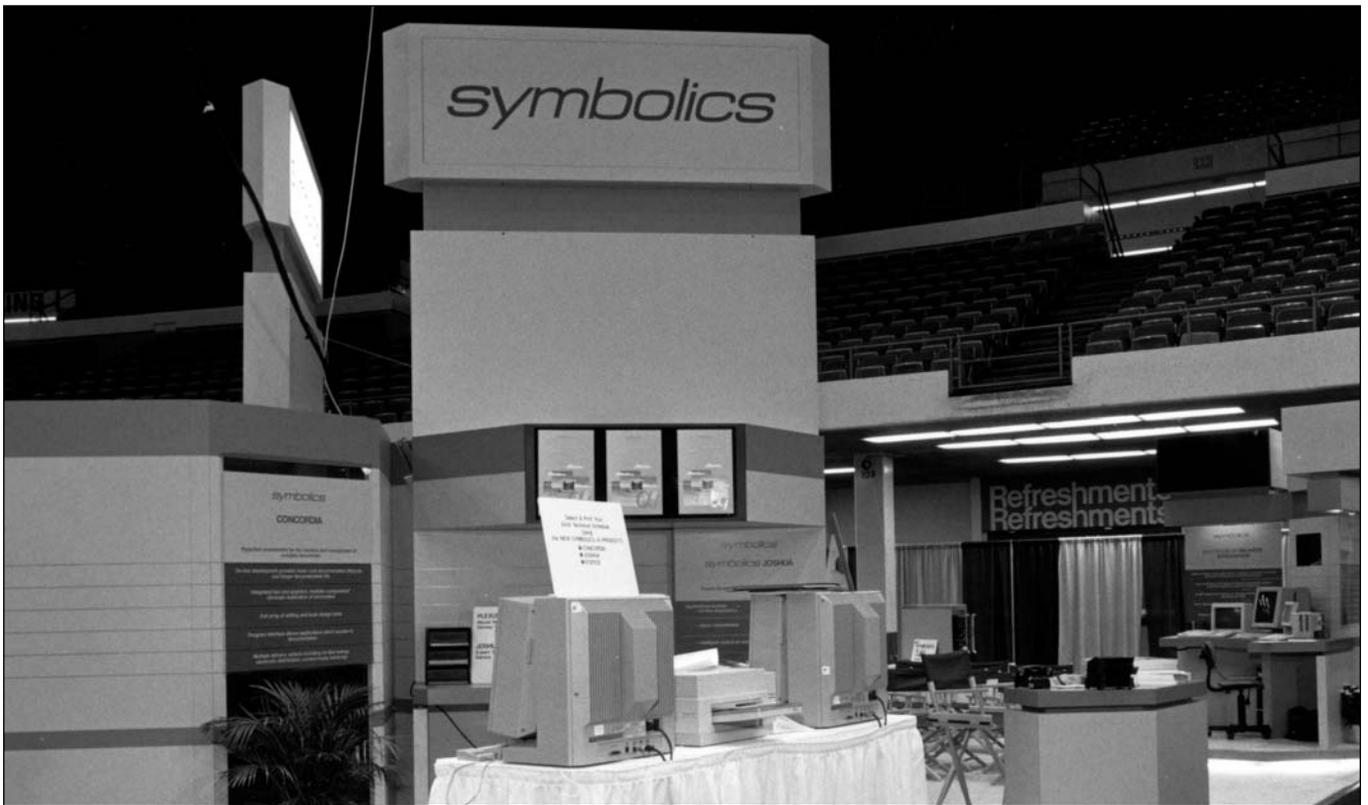
Bruce G. Buchanan

■ This article provides a historical background on the origins of AAAI, recounting some of the issues discussed and requirements to be fulfilled by the new society. It provides a personal reminiscence of some of the persons who founded the association, including Raj Reddy, Donald Walker, and Woody Bledsoe, and also recounts some of my experiences as secretary-treasurer and later president of AAAI.

After much preliminary discussion in the AI community about forming a national society, Raj Reddy took on the work of organizing people. In 1979 he was the general chair for IJCAI-79, and I was the program chair, so we were already working closely together and thinking about organization. We were not alone in being frustrated by the phoenix-like nature of IJCAI—springing to life before every biannual conference, then dying, with little continuity. Also, it was obvious that volunteers from academe and industry had numerous distractions and other obligations besides IJCAI, so important deadlines could easily be missed. An organization with a permanent staff could solve both those problems.
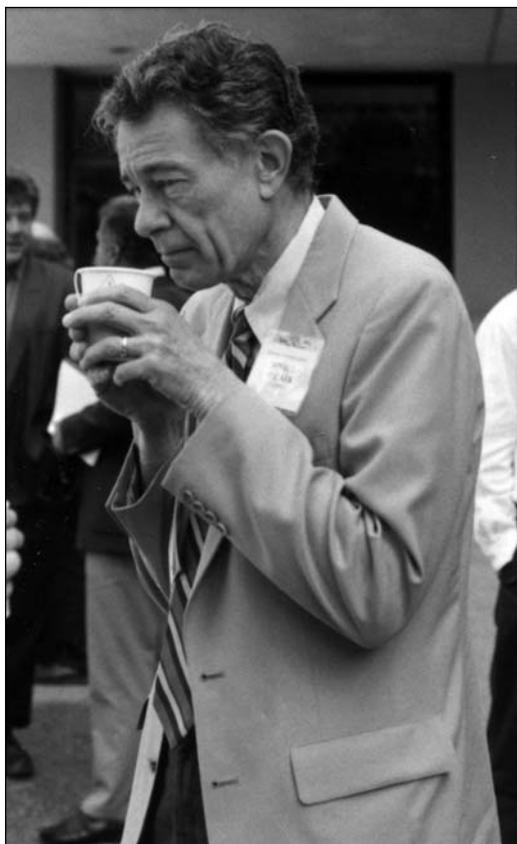
On the way to Tokyo in the summer of 1979, Raj brought together Don Walker, Woody Bledsoe, and me for a meeting in Menlo Park to nail down some of the details of organizing the new society. (The name of the restaurant, perhaps aptly, was *Late for the Train*.) Don Walker had been the secretary-treasurer of IJCAI for a number of years—and was the "corporate memory" for IJCAI—so Raj asked Don to become the first secretary-treasurer of the new organization. Raj had, I believe, already secured agreement from

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*The Expert Systems Boom Fueled Expansion of the National Conference Trade Shows
and Advertising in* AI Magazine, *Which Brought in Substantial Income to AAAI in the 1980s.*
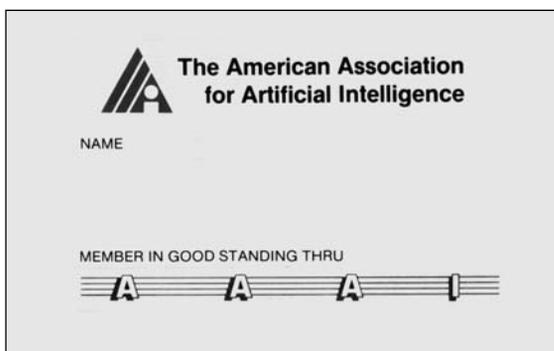
Donald Walker, AAAI's First Secretary-Treasurer.

Woody Bledsoe, AAAI's Sixth President.

AAAI's First Membership Card (1983).

Al Newell to be the first president and had talked with several others about serving as president. At this meeting he lined up Woody to serve on the first council and become one of the first presidents and asked me to help as membership chair.

We did not yet have a name for the society. Because the term *artificial intelligence* was controversial within the AI community, and inflammatory to some outside, we tried out numerous suggestions. Except for Raj, the discussion could have continued forever, but in the end we decided that the initials AAAI could borrow some prestige from the AAAS and that there was no other name for what we do that was generally agreed to be better than AI. So the organization became known as AAAI.
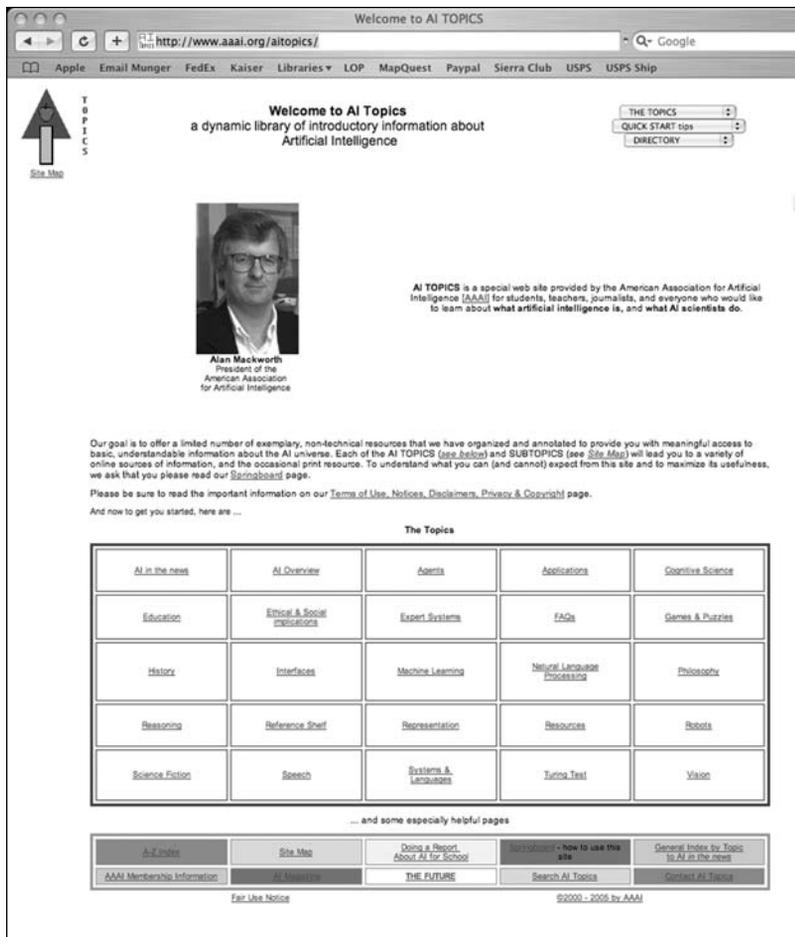
Nearly everyone wanted to avoid a large bureaucracy. Raj designed a "lean" organization with a small office structure, counting on the energy and talent of volunteers to work with the staff on many initiatives, but with the onerous details of record-keeping and accounting left to professionals. Papers for the first conference in 1980, for example, were collected and assembled mostly by the staff and then reviewed and discussed by volunteers in one weekend meeting at Stanford.

The expert-systems boom of the early 1980s boosted attendance at the national conferences for enough years to bring in substantial income. When I took over as secretary-treasurer, I worked on two major initiatives: first, tighter accounting procedures to track the flow of funds and reduce the possibility that any one or two individuals could fly to Rio with all the money. Second, I worked with the finance committee to find professional money managers who would follow our fiscally responsible guidelines to invest in stocks and bonds for better returns than we had been receiving.

In my term as president, I tried to accom-

The AI Topics Website.

plish two main goals: first, establish a stronger committee structure with proposals and issues thought out before they were brought to the council meetings. Second, I established a website (www.aaai.org/aitopics) to provide general information about AI to students, journalists, and others who frequently called the office staff for answers to questions. Many of the questions were of the form, "What has AI done recently?" and we wanted one place to collect up-to-date information so questions could be answered without delay. (The current webmaster, Jon Glick, has worked within this initial vision but has implemented many new features.)

It has been a privilege for me to work with Raj, the professional staff, and the officers over the years on making AAAI a first-class scientific society.

Bruce G. Buchanan was a founding member of AAAI, secretary-treasurer from 1986-1992, and president from 1999-2001. He received a B.A. in mathematics from Ohio Wesleyan University (1961) and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in philosophy from Michigan State University (1966). He is University Professor emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh, where he has joint appointments with the Departments of Computer Science, Philosophy, and Medicine and the Intelligent Systems Program. He is a fellow of the American Association for Artificial Intelligence (AAAI), a fellow of the American College of Medical Informatics, and a member of the National Academy of Science Institute of Medicine. His e-mail address is buchanan@cs.pitt.edu.

AAAI President Bruce Buchanan (third from left) talks with 1997 Program Cochair Benjamin J. Kuipers, AI Magazine *Editor Emeritus Robert S. Engelmore, and 1998 Program Cochair Charles Rich at the 2000 AAAI Fellows Dinner in Austin Texas.*