

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Interview of: John Fox

Date of Interview: October 12, 1995

Interviewed by: Cliff Thompson

Note: John Fox is hard to understand at times. These spots are noted as (unintelligible).

Cliff Thompson

Good morning. My name is Cliff Thompson and I am region II historian. This morning, October the 12th 1995 we are visiting with John Fox, Society president in 1962-1963 at his home on Lake Ontario near Bowmanville, Ontario. Thank you John, very much, for meeting with us this morning. Before we get to your presidential years, perhaps we could review your years in high school and university and how they effected you final choice in being in the air conditioning business.

John Fox

Well, my early schooling was Central Technical School in Toronto with the course directed to faculty of applied science in Toronto. I was there in, graduated in 1919. So that was a pre-selected course to university. I happened to be too young to go right on so I took time out to get some money which I was in desperate need of. What else do you want to know about my early school? I'm a University of Toronto graduate in engineering. And there was a struggle to get through financially.

C.T.

What course did you take John?

J.F.

I took what they called at that time civil hydraulics and not only was civil a broad (unintelligible) course but the hydraulics was very much involved at the time when the Niagara power plants where being put into effect. And that's where the hydraulics came in. It was a broad ranging course which I never regretted having taken.

C.T.

John, after you left university how did you start your business and ASHVE career?

J.F.

As you know I stayed a year after graduation on demonstrating in the labs and to do research on welding. Then when I was, joined with the Dunham company at the time they wanted to protect us but they wouldn't buy a membership so I protected for a couple years at the Toronto chapter for all the speakers. It was very interesting. I got introduced. But it wasn't until I moved to Honeywell in 1931-34, when the first move they made to get me to join Toronto chapter which my starting career. That was in '34.

C.T.

In 1938 Holt Gurney became the first Canadian to be president of our Society. Did you know him and can you tell us something about him?

J.F.

Yes I knew Holt pretty well. He was the president of the Gurney Foundry which made cast iron radiation and boilers. And he was the one who instigated bringing the annual meeting to Canada for the first time, which went up to Bigwinn Inn. He was quite a character, very much of an influential man and a true Canadian.

C.T.

John, how did you spend the second World War years? I understand...

J.F.

Oh, how did I spend it. Dodging the bombs. In September the 15th '39, I was tested into what was then the engineering section of the Ordnance Corp. Told to go home and relax. Then I put on my uniform on Boxing Day of 1939 and was overseas in January of 1940 and after that from there on it was shuttling back and forth between Canada and continental Europe which spent the last 14 months active in Antwerp enjoying the buzz bombs and the stuff the French decided to throw at us.

C.T.

I understand that you received the Order of the British Empire from King George the Sixth.

J.F.

Should I tell you what it's really called? Other bugger's efforts! And we don't know why you get it but I did enjoy going to Buckingham Palace and it was in the last installation of King George the Sixth.

C.T.

After the war, you returned to Honeywell and your business and ASHRAE career started in earnest. Why don't you tell us about it.

J.F.

I got home on a Friday night. And Tom McDonald had heard that I was back. Of course Tom lost two brothers in the show. And he got a hold of me and he said, when are you coming back to work. And this was on Friday. He said I want to see you on Monday. I said "Tom I have no clothes". He said what's wrong with what you're wearing? So I went back to Honeywell and that'd be in February of 1955.

C.T.

'45.

J.F.

'45. Yeah.

C.T.

John in 1949 you were chairman of the Ontario chapter, as the Toronto chapter was called then and you also became Regional Director for Canada. Can you tell us about how all that came about?

J.F.

Well when I joined Honeywell one of the first requirements was that I become active in ASHRAE or heating and ventilating, it was back then. That meant I got into the chairs by invitation or direction and became elected president in '49. And then I remember well, Nat Hunter came up to Toronto, who was then vice president of heating and ventilating and he suggested that I go on to become a regional director. And at that time the region was all of Canada from coast to coast which is quite a bit of challenge for me. So I arranged with Honeywell for their directors to authorize me to take on the office,

which I did. And that was a three year appointment so by '52 I was finishing my year and at the same time I was becoming active in the association of professional engineers in Ontario. And in a short while I became president of that and at the same time was Regional Director. So it was a busy life.

C.T.

John, what can you tell us about the merger with ASRE?

J.F.

As you well know ASRE was involved with refrigeration ice making and the preservation of foods and in other words it was not for comfort. It was an industrial operation where as the heating and ventilating was concerned with environmental things and personal comfort. So, but there were enough people that were, had a dual membership that they decided that they better get together and hold meetings to joint meetings with one and another. Refrigeration was coming in to be part of air conditioning so it was a natural thing the two groups would merge. It had some interesting repercussions. For instance I had to high tail it out to Chicago to placate the people in the RE branch in south Chicago who were chiefly concerned with slaughter houses and things like that, meat preservation. Whereas the Illinois chapter uptown was concerned with environmental things, comfort and personal things of that kind. The deal we made right out the top my head was, you fellows got good chapter and all the rest of it, carry on. Then I told the Illinois people the same thing. You carry on. Then I had to go back to the board and say I made a deal. So what's the deal? Well there will be a chapter in south Chicago and chapter in uptown. That meant that the Society had to authorize two or three places that could have two chapters that would not burst. One was Chicago, one was St. Louis, and one was in New Jersey. So we got through that, got a merger agreement, 80 percent of the people were in favor of it.

C.T.

John how would you describe your presidential year?

J.F.

Well my presidential year of the national Society?

C.T.

Yes, John.

J.F.

I would considered it satisfactory. I am the sole survivor of the original negotiators on the... Looking back I don't see many things we could have changed. It might have been a busy time for me traveling. I had to - from coast to coast. I guess we were, what we were PR, public relations, very actively. But it worked and it's now been going for 30 years. So I think it was a good deal.

C.T.

You left Honeywell in 1967, but you didn't retire. What are the different involvements that you got into after?

J.F.

See the rules of Honeywell 's retirement scheme were you had to retire at the year closest to your 65th tear. And it happened, it was '67 for me. So I went from that to a good friend of mine in the engineering business, Nick Forter. And I stayed with Nick for about four years and traveled all over the world promoting things like slaughter houses, air fields. We're in the Himalayas one minute and Hawaii another. It was an interesting time for four years. Nick happened to have a large contract with the Toronto post office and I could see this thing I was in coming to an end. So I negotiated a deal to go the

post office and look after Nick's interests. So I went to the post office, it took two or three weeks or months and I ended up for six years at the post office. So that's the way I started retirement.

C.T.

And after you left the post office you became involved with the Ontario Department of Energy and the churches.

J.F.

Oh yes, I was at the Department of Energy, they had a proposal that they would permit me to make a complete survey for, of their environmental situations and make a recommendation and the Ontario government would pay for it, Department of Energy. The cost was usually around two or three hundred dollars per visit. Well one of my clients at that time was Harmony United Church in (unintelligible). And we made a recommendation that would cost them about \$14,000 which they put into effect and then the first year they saved 17 so I guess it was a good deal. Incidentally there are about 75 religious denominations available. Some of them, there's Christian, Muslim, a whole heap of them, 75. And I learned where to put on my hat and take off my shoes as I went around. There were over 2,000 churches in Ontario and I had a clientele of about 300. So it was pretty interesting. There are 20,000 churches, synagogues, and so on in Canada and about 10 percent of them in Ontario. Now that program has fallen by the wayside. The government had no money for it and the churches had no money to pay me for it so it just gradually folded up. And I closed my Toronto office, moved down here to Bowmanville and was uptown officer about three or four years. A year ago I closed the uptown office and opened a little one as an adjunct of my home here at the lake. So that's what happened. Kind of a busy retirement.

C.T.

John, for more years than I even care to remember, you have been inducting the new officers of the Toronto chapter. Can you tell us how that all came about?

J.F.

Well I was installed in '61 or '62 in Miami. And the boys down there, up to that time, they had just said come on here and sit at the end table. Some of the boys, Mike and my contemporaries said we can do better than that. So they established a ritual in which I was the first victim. And I was, a lot of it was based on certain well established fraternities so I was installed formally by my peers and friends. The next year we carried that on and checked in my successor. Well two years later I was invited by Toronto chapter to install the new officers and naturally I just tuned up the old ritual in and put it into effect. And we carried that on for 30 years. And last year was the first year which I haven't installed the Ontario, Toronto chapter officers. It's kind of a miss but I guess it's getting older.

C.T.

John, on behalf of the Toronto chapter I want to thank you for that. And maybe now John how would you summarize your engineering life and what sort of advice and comments would you give to young engineers coming up in the HVAC&R business?

J.F.

Well first of all, life has been exciting and most rewarding and I basically have no complaints. I'm not a millionaire but I have a lot of satisfaction. I lived through two depressions, a war, and I've almost been able to keep myself busy. You can't be too choosy in what you do but you can pick something and start to get enjoyment out of it. If it doesn't give you satisfaction normally then probably something else will

turn up. But I've found life twists and turns and I no sooner turn from something, I find something else to do. And if I can't farm here, raise apples I can do something else. So keep yourself busy, keep your mind active and if you're blessed with good health, what more can you ask?

C.T.

John on behalf of region II and behalf of Society, we want to thank you very much for spending this time with us this morning and wish you many more years of happy retirement.

J.F.

Thank you.