ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Interview of: Joseph Lazar

Date of Interview: ca 1995

Interviewed by: Miami Chapter Historian

Note: Joseph Lazar was one of three 100 year old ASHRAE members recognized at ASHRAE's Centennial (along with R. Alex Anderson and Milton Garland – also interviewed for Leadership Recall) Parts of interview are missing. A ? denotes unintelligible audio. The Miami Chapter Historian is not named. During the interview the video cuts out at times. The end of the interview is missing.

Historian of the Miami Chapter of the society.

Mr. Lazar, first of all thank you very much for inviting us into your home.

Joseph Lazar

Glad to have you.

Historian

What attracted you to engineering? I guess this must be going back some 80 years or so ago.

J.L.

Well I was in a different business. I was very much interested in radio and I had most of the loud speakers at the Chicago World's Fair at the lakefront where my speakers were all rented out. And the big crash came along in '29. It put me out of business. The banks I dealt with went broke. My wife's and my daughter's saving account were closed off. That bank went broke too. So I had to do something to recoup. I liquidated my business, paid everybody off to a dime, to the last dime. And decided that the next thing in this world that I felt would be to eliminate the ice man. The ice man carrying ice to all of the apartments and also taking care of all the perishables. So I asked my wife to go to the ice house and when the big truck with ice left the ice house to follow the truck and when they unloaded the ice at a tavern or a meat market to give me their address. Gathered the addresses, so I went back to these places and I sold them refrigeration by telling them, look I had a coin box, you put in six quarters in this box a day and you never have to pay the ice man anything. You can get rid of all that straw and all the dirt that you have in your refrigerator. That made me enough money so I could afford to take my family to Florida for vacation a couple of weeks of the year. Westinghouse induced me to go to work for them. So I went to work for Westinghouse selling refrigeration, air-conditioning and my first installation was, as I recall, four half horse power sulfur dioxide hermetically sealed units. I installed four blowers in an air conditioning in a small cocktail lounge , it was the first air-conditioning job I ever did. And it became a sensation in the north side of Chicago. I was so successful in that field and decided to go into the business for myself. So in 1930 I left Westinghouse and started Refrigeration Systems first and then changed the name System Engineering Corporation and you have my record after that.

Historian

Could you describe the industry? This is really the emergence of refrigeration in terms of, I guess, smaller units that could be used in commercial establishments and residential.

J.L.

The next commercial unit that I sold was a methyl chloride unit for an apartment building. I ran my lines outside through the porches because the ice man comes to the back porch and they had doors in the wall to put a piece of ice into the home refrigerator. So that, I installed I think it was 12 apartments, with my first installation. And instead of using copper I used at that time, they used iron pipe. But it was successful and from then on I decided that there was a wonderful opportunity to build this type of business. Shortly after that I heard about American Society Refrigeration Engineers. So I joined that and they've been very helpful. They of course changed their names several times and the final name today is, of course, ASHRAE as we know it. I believe that any person that's interested at all in thermodynamics should be a member of ASHRAE. It helped me tremendously. Their manuals each year saved me a lot of time at the library hours, a lot of library hours. And made it possible for me to expedite my work. I had one instance when they were very valuable. They saved me a lot of money. I got a contract from Chrysler Corporation for a atmospheric test chamber. After I build this test chamber and looked inside, I thought well it didn't look well inside so I thought I would paint it. Well I painted the interior and from then on I had nothing but trouble. I couldn't get the vacuum down. I blamed the vacuum pump manufacturer, I blamed everybody except myself. That day- (video cuts out)

Historian

-for companies that dealt with medical work and the freezing of plasma. Could you tell us a little bit about your work in that area?

J.L.

Well when our boys landed in Africa there was a great demand for blood. And of course blood it must be fresh. It can't, it will not keep very long. A government asked the pharmaceutical manufacturers to come up with dry blood plasma. Well I got a call from Commonwealth Edison Company one day asking me to call Michael Reese's Research Foundation in Chicago. I called on Mr. Sidney Levinson who had charge of the foundation. He told me what his requirements, he said, we want something that will freeze blood very, very fast and then dry it while it's frozen because blood is alive. So I told them I thought I could do it. Well they gave me this contract to develop this product. I think it took me about 10 days and I came up with a fast drying process which consisted of making a pan that would hold alcohol and we brought the alcohol down to 90 below zero and by putting the bottles on rollers and rolling them horizontally it would freeze the blood to the interior of the glass which gave us an open in the center to the neck, gives a big opening. And that way we were able to freeze blood very fast and fortunately a gentleman happened to come in to my place one day and said, I heard that you're building something to freeze blood plasma. I said yes. Well he says, well I have a heater that will accelerate drying of the blood plasma. Well I said I'm very much interested. So I had him build a couple of pans with these special resistance heaters, operated by variac, I would put a thermal couple in the pilot bottle of blood plasma and by keeping the temperature down four degrees below melting, we were able to knock out the vapor fast enough so we were able to dry a batch in approximately four hours. And the container that holds the 500 cc of plasma was just the right size for the cabinet that I built. And we would dry 100 bottles per shelf and I had two shelves in the steel container so we were able to dry 200

bottles in four hours which was quite a deal. So the government heard about that and I guess they must have contacted all the pharmaceutical houses in the country because I got a call from all over the country for this dryer. And that's how we got our dry blood plasma. It was also possible to dry a lot of miracle drugs. One of them of course was ? juice tubecularserum, which at Illinois University manufactured by using one of my dryers that's still in use today at the Cook County Hospital in Chicago.

Historian

It's a different would through the use of refrigeration. (video cuts out)

J.L.

Well he invested five years after he became a partner. From then on I was sole owner.

Historian

You have a hobby. We see it around your apartment here. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

J.L.

My children wanted me to, well in 1975 at that time I was 80 years old. '75, yeah I was 80 years old at the time. They wanted me to retire and I didn't want to but they insisted. So I sold my business in 1975 and of course I can't stand inactivity. So I decided I would pursue a hobby that I liked very much and that's sculpture and abstract art. And so I decided to, instead of using mixed media art, I decided to use acrylics. People call it Lucite. Lucite's the trade name for it owned by Dupont as you know. I preferred another brand called plexi glass which is owned by Rohm & Haas Company. Although Lucite is very good, my preference is Plexi glass and I've been working with Plexi glass every since. And I found it very interesting and it's rewarding.

Historian

What would you say is the, maybe the … single back to the HVAC-(video cuts out). -and conservation.

J.L.

Very much so. Very much so. As I mentioned to you before our population was increased by a hundred million last year. After that the increase of people living longer. Average span of life today is 75 years, you probably know. We got millions of people living past 75. They require water, more water. The hundred million population increase requires tremendous amount of water. Add to that the amount of water required for commercial use. We've got to be more careful in how we use our water supply today. And with energy being more expensive by day, sewer costs, your water costs are constantly under rise. We've got to be more careful and think very seriously about saving energy in every form.

Historian

What advice would you give to a young person who wanted to pursue a- (video cuts out). You mentioned the Drake Hotel before. Tell me about the Drake.

J.L.

Well, that was funny. We were doing a large shopping center at Harlem Irving in Chicago, I think about 50 stores. Our men were due to finish the job in the fall of the year. Well what was I going to do with those men. I tried to keep my men at work year round at work but in air-conditioning you do nothing in the winter time unless you're in heating as well. So I went to the Drake hotel to the owner. I said, look if you do your air conditioning in the winter time you'll save a lot of money. I've got men there that I want to keep busy for the winter. So I made them a deal. I said you pay my men, you put my men on your pay roll and I charged them a percentage, and I'll furnish the equipment and engineering. And I did

the Drake Hotel in two winters, kept my men busy in the winter time. That's how they got the installation in there for at a reasonable price.

Historian

And the system is still there.

J.L.

The system is still there, yes, sir.

Historian

Tell us how you found that?

J.L.

Well last year my great grandson Mitchell took me down town and I asked him whether he'd take me near the Drake. I got my electric car out and he and I went down to Drake Hotel and I went to see the chief engineer. Well of course the engineer was there when I was there was no longer there and there was a new man there. So I asked him, I told him look I air-conditioned this building in 1951. He looked at me and he said, well is that so. I said, I am very much interested in how much of that equipment that I put in '51 is still working. So he laughed and said the only thing we changed is the compressor, everything else is still working. That made me feel pretty good.

Historian

Would you care to make any comments to ASHRAE members? They're going to see part of this video tape at the meeting in Chicago. Do you have any message that you'd like to extend?

J.L.

Yes, I would say that if they're good business men. If they're good business men, they will have their engineers become ASHRAE members. And they of course should be ASHRAE members because I feel that the ASHRAE organization brings to them everything that's new. They get it first. They'll learn an awful lot by being in ASHRAE. They'll also see a lot of advertising that'll make it possible to buy what they want. As an example our building here- (video cuts out)

Historian

John would you please, we've got a souvenir here for Joe. Would you mind passing this on to him? And this is an ASHRAE hat with a centennial pin.

J.L.

That's wonderful. Thank you. Just fits. Very good, thank you. I'll use it when I ride from here to my shop.

Historian

Thank you very much. I guess the last that I'd like to do is if you can maybe just get a couple of, now just be informal now, but just a couple of- (video cuts out)

J.L

-an hour. He said Joe that's it.

Historian

-that you can pass on to other ASHRAE members who may wish to reach the age of 99.

J.L.

Well the first of course is to take a ?. That's the first. You set your goal and you try to reach you goal. I tell people never, never worry. Never worry. Worry doesn't do anyone any good. It just makes them sick, it makes them nervous, and upsets them. So never worry. I strongly believe in fresh air. And I have

for the past 45 years eliminated mostly red meats. I do my own preparations for food most of the time and it's mostly fruits, vegetables, and nuts. And I do eat fish. I strongly believe that salmon, I think, is the healthiest of all the fish you can eat. I don't know why but I do believe that. One of the health faddists told me that about 35-40 years ago. And I love salmon anyway. But I think that a person should rest when they're tired, they should rest with the fresh air, sunshine, proper combination of food and not abuse yourself. But never, never worry. That's very important. (repeated audio).

J.L.
But that's too far for me to go. There's a place like that in Fort Lauderdale.
(silence for :40)

Any additional interview is missing.