

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)  
Transcription

Interview of: William G Hole

Date of Interview: January 1993

Interviewed by: Morton Sloan

Note:

Morton Sloan

My name is Morton Sloan. I am a member of the ASHRAE Historical Committee and it is my privilege this morning to interview Bill Hole for the Leadership Recalled program. Bill was president of Society in 1969 and has been a very active and interested member of Society for many, many years. Like to start off Bill by asking you how and why you decided to go into engineering.

William Hole

Well before I do that. Could I tell you who I am?

M.S.

Please do that.

W.H.

I'm Bill Hole. I was ASHRAE president in 1969-70. I was born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1910 so I've been around for a while. I joined the ASHRAE Montréal chapter in 1949. Because my employer, Darling Brothers Limited was the Canadian representative of American Air Filter of Louisville, Kentucky it was convenient for me to attend ASHRAE meetings in the US at the same time as I went to Louisville on business. I got to visit in the US on a fairly regular basis. And I have the opportunity to serve on many ASHRAE committees. For example Honors and Awards, Long Range Planning, and several others. Well I got into engineering in the first place because the University of Alberta wasn't too far away from where I lived and being the oldest of nine children I thought I better get into something that would bring in some money to raise the rest of the family.

M.S.

What was your family business.

W.H.

The family business was a plumbing heating and mechanical engineering. We were, did I say I was the oldest of nine.

M.S.

Yes you said that.

W.H.

Well that meant we had to knuckle down and go through the Depression and we had all the wonderful things that happened out west.

M.S.

I see. Did you go, you graduated from University of Alberta?

W.H.

Alberta in civil engineering.

M.S.

Civil engineering not mechanical.

W.H.

They didn't have mechanical.

M.S.

I see.

W.H.

We had a total of three people in the class that year. Our professor had just graduated from Manitoba and he walked in to give his first lecture and he was shattered to find three people sitting, looking at him. So it got to be quite a congenial group and we learned our engineering at close quarters.

M.S.

With only three in a class.

W.H.

Three in the class.

M.S.

Classes today are a little bit bigger than that I think. When you graduated did you go into the family business?

W.H.

I was in the family business before I started driving the truck and doing that sort of thing.

M.S.

And when you graduated and as a civil engineer

W.H.

Civil engineering.

M.S.

Then I understand you went to England to study to do graduate work.

W.H.

University of Alberta. And I went to England to study with a friend of mine from Saskatchewan. We met on a cattle boat going over to England. And he went to City of Guilds and I went to the University of London. And we used to meet regularly in London to kind of check on where we, what we were doing.

M.S.

When did you graduate from University of Alberta?

W.H.

'33.

M.S.

'33. That's quite a few years ago. Then you went to London for, how long were you in London?

W.H.

I was in London for a year at the university and I stayed over there, took a small job for a couple of years.

M.S.

And then from there you came to Montreal?

W.H.

I won a scholarship over there to come back to work with Darling Brothers Limited in Montreal. And Darling Brothers were the Canadian representatives of American Air Filter. So that's how I became tied with American Air Filter. And of course that was my career right through until we started a separate Canadian company.

M.S.

I see. From Darling Brothers I understand you went into design, mechanical design?

W.H.

During the war, engineers were at a premium in Montreal. We were building war plants and that sort of thing. And I joined an outfit called T Pringle and Son. And we would build a tank plant Montreal, east and a propeller plant for making aircraft for propellers.

M.S.

I know T Pringle well because I worked there myself from 1947 till '50 or something like that.

W.H.

It's quite an organization.

M.S.

Yes it was. All right then you went back to Darling Brothers from T Pringle?

W.H.

They asked me to come back and take over the handling of the American Air Filter products in Canada.

M.S.

Were you, your first round in Darling Brothers, you weren't handling American Air Filter products were you?

W.H.

No.

M.S.

I see. When you went back you were handling?

W.H.

Well I was strictly in mechanical engineering with the consultants who were building the war plants.

M.S.

I see. And you left Darling Brothers and opened up a Canadian subsidiary of American Air Filter.

W.H.

That's right.

M.S.

What when was that roughly?

W.H.

That would be about 1940.

M.S.

I see. When did you get, how did you get involved in ASHRAE?

W.H.

I joined the Montreal chapter of ASHRAE while I was with a consulting engineer.

M.S.

I see. And then you started to get involved in the executive and the board of governors of the Montreal chapter.

W.H.

That's right.

M.S.

And you became president of the Montreal chapter at one point. I believe it was in 19- nearly 50 somewhere.

W.H.

That's right.

M.S.

When did you, during that period of time were you were involved in the region at all, in the Region II?

W.H.

Mostly with the local chapter affairs.

M.S.

But not on the regional basis?

W.H.

No.

M.S.

And how did you get involved with the society?

W.H.

By going to the annual meetings in wherever they were.

M.S.

Wherever they were held at. Twice a year.

W.H.

Twice a year.

M.S.

And you served on society committees. Which committees were you active in before you became involved on the board of governors of the society?

W.H.

Oh Honors and Awards. Mostly operating committees. And I was on the merger committee that joined ASHRAE with a ASRE.

M.S.

This was before you were president?

W.H.

Oh yes. I don't know when, do you have a record of when the merger took place. I just don't recall.

M.S.

I don't recall either, no.

W.H.

But it was quite an experience being on the merger committee. The chairman of the committee for ASHRAE was Art Hess. And we would meet in Chicago trying to put the package together as far as ASHRAE was concerned. And the same time ASRE people were meeting in Milwaukee. And I can recall we had a meeting in Chicago of the ASHRAE people, that was ASHVE at that time of course. And we put

together how we thought the thing should, the merger should take place. We were one day in the meeting in Chicago. We flew to Milwaukee and we met our corresponding committee of the AE group. And the job was done two meetings.

M.S.

That's all it took.

W.H.

That's all it took. It was a complete natural. It was just had to be.

M.S.

Yes. So there was one global society to handle the, to look after the affairs of the entire group. This of course was the time I suppose that refrigeration was becoming more important in buildings. That's interesting.

W.H.

I served on a good many committees and went to meetings of course in many parts of the United States and Canada. The Canadians who preceded me as national president was Holt Gurney in 1938 and John Fox in 1962. I want to record on this video the activities and details of major events. I realize my memory fails me. What seemed to be very important at the time most certainly was. And I was only with the board members and very serious business for the society but what I remember particularly are the individuals that got together to do all the things that were required. The important memories over the years for me have been those of the people who were meeting together to develop a successful and useful society. Perhaps the best way to communicate what ASHRAE has meant in my case is to wander through some of the events that came to mind of ASHRAE experiences and progress. Not too long after I became an ASHVE member a summer meeting was held by the Montreal chapter. This was a summer meeting unique in many respects. I would guess the number of people attending would have been of the order of 200. Registration took place at the old Mount Royal Hotel on Peel Street. The mayor of Montreal, a good French Canadian actually lived in the hotel and we asked him to be our main speaker at the opening luncheon. The master of ceremonies at the luncheon was a (unintelligible), a good Montréal Irishman known as a leader in the Montreal Irish community and especially active on the St. Patrick's day activities. The mayor and (unintelligible) got into a lot of discussion between the good Irishman and the French Canadian. That was a hilarious meeting. And very entertaining for our United States visitors. There were two days of meetings and of technical committees. And on the afternoon of the second day we all went on board the Canada Steam Ships line and we went down the St. Lawrence River and up the Saguenay River to Chicoutimi and had all our technical meetings on board the ship. We came back through Quebec City and we had our annual banquet at the main hotel, Le Chateau Frontenac in Quebec City. And we had to go and walk up the hill to Quebec City. If you know that front there it was quite a sight to see all these people in full dress walking up to the banquet. It was a beautiful night and the ladies all enjoyed it immensely.

M.S.

Okay you've discussed briefly some of the people that you've come into contact with in the Montreal area. And some of the people you became involved with on, during the merger of the two societies. What other ASHRAE committees did you serve on? The merger committee was probably the highlight of your committee experience.

W.H.

Well I served mostly on Honors and Awards committees of that kind. I was not on any of the technical committees.

M.S.

I see. Your involvement in ASHRAE was strictly of the committee level, not technical. Okay, I understand also you mentioned that you were the third Canadian president of the society. And I understand from Dick Perry that you were influential in getting him involved deeply in committee work and eventually to become president of the Society as our fourth Canadian president.

W.H.

That's right.

M.S.

Yeah. Okay. I understand also that you have received a number of ASHRAE awards. Would you care to describe which awards you received?

W.H.

Honors and Awards, Long Range Planning. You name it. Over the years I was on most of those.

M.S.

You were on all those committees. Also you were given the Fellow Award.

W.H.

Yes.

M.S.

Of ASHRAE. And then just a couple of years ago you got your Distinguished 50 Year Service award. Do you have any other, are there other awards that you received over the years? Or those were the main ones?

W.H.

Well there's some I perhaps shouldn't mention.

M.S.

No for drinking we don't count.

W.H.

Well here I have an note. Well I did mention I hope that one of the members on this trip up the Saguenay was Willis Carrier.

M.S.

You did not mention that.

W.H.

Well that was a highlight for me to have him on board and to meet him, a man whose name you knew from many, many years back. I served on a committee, chaired by Art Hess of California. The committee was assigned to develop an agreement to merge ASHVE and ASRE and eventually to create ASHRAE. We met at an airport hotel in Chicago. It was remarkable how we reached an agreement in a short period of time. I did mention that before.

M.S.

Yeah, I think yes you did.

W.H.

We moved up to Milwaukee and that was done the next day.

M.S.

What advice would you give a young person today who's in engineering and becoming deeply involved in ASHRAE work? Would you think that, would you advise someone, a young engineer to do that sort of thing?

W.H.

Well I did it and I think that I got a lot in return from it. And I'm sure any young fella today who's in any way connect, connected with mechanical engineering and environment and buildings just can't avoid, just shouldn't avoid being a member.

M.S.

Okay the world today is a lot different than it was when you were president of Society. Indoor air quality which is what your main field of interest was with American Air Filter was in its infancy at the time. Today it's the catchword. Indoor air quality. Do you feel that ASHRAE played a very involved, were very deeply involved in that?

W.H.

I think ASHRAE was the key to bringing it all together. There are so many disciplines that are involved in an ASHRAE or that this sort of makes a platform, makes an environment for doing many of these things.

M.S.

With all the research programs and so on. Would you care to discuss how your involvement in ASHRAE, where you gave up in effect one or two years of your total time devoted to ASHRAE, what effect did that have if any on your business career?

W.H.

I don't think that's a fair statement. I think that it's part of your work. You're involved in ASHRAE and it's more help than it's taking time that is not useful to you.

M.S.

So you feel that it was a very a useful experience. You were giving back some of what you had gotten from the society. You were serving the people.

W.H.

I don't think you think of it in those terms. It just happens while you were there. It's the support for many of the things that you're doing. And that helps you to know what people are doing in other fields. Speakers at our banquets would tell us what was happening in space. What some of the problems were in air pollution. That's just no end of opportunities to understand the whole picture. I have a note here about Calgary. The Calgary chapter was formed in my time. Calgary is the stampede city of Canada. A few thousand miles from Halifax and southern Alberta. We had been to Halifax and established a chapter there. And when we chartered the Calgary chapter, three of us went out by train. P.B. Gordon of New York City and Elmer Queer of the University of Pennsylvania. And we traveled to present the chapter and we returned by train as well. It was an opportunity to travel in the new dome cars. Calgary is well known for its hospitality. The Mayor of Calgary gave us a royal welcome, attended our banquet, and presented each of us, the visitors, with a white Stetson Calgary cowboy hat. To my surprise when I put mine on if it fitted perfectly. And it was true of the other three that the other two that my friends got. They had somehow gotten our measurements and I still have that Calgary white Stetson hat today.

M.S.

Yes, I was at a CRC in Calgary many years ago and they gave us each a Stetson hat also. It's just their symbol.

W.H.

I have a note. The end of day meetings, particularly summer meetings, occasionally on a free night. A group of members and wives would cross paths in the convention hotel lobby. The subject of the moment would be where might we go to a restaurant that might be unique to the territory. Usually someone in the local group would have a favorite spot. We might have a group of as many as 20 or 30 people. I remember one such occasion where we went to a large seafood restaurant, a big establishment with overhead pulleys and belts like you'd see in the old fashioned machine shop. The group walked into this restaurant and were staggered by the appearance. Good friend of mine Earl Wagner who was with Powers Regulator was standing with a group and he said: "look at that". He says, that is an air conditioning system to beat any that was ever erected. The pulleys, belts were all over the ceiling, very high ceiling. And the big radial fans just put the air down to the occupied level. Well in that particular climate which was southern US, the air is very dry. And a propeller fan like that does quite an adequate job but what a conglomeration to see all these things as an ASHRAE installation of air conditioning. And a very good friend of mine from Philadelphia was in our group, Earl Wagner and Earl said, look. He says that is a site. He says that's the history of our organization. He says I know that that installation was specified Honeywell. But Johnson got the job and Powers had to make it work.

M.S.

There's still the same rivalry among the three companies. Bill, it's 25 years, roughly since you were president of the society and its 75th anniversary. We're now approaching our 100th anniversary. Where do you feel ASHRAE is going and what has it meant and what is it going to be meaning to everybody?

W.H.

Well I think the merger put us on the right track. ASHRAE today is a society, as the name indicates and as a society it is unique in many ways. We are members of the Engineers Joint Council. A high percentage of our members are registered professional engineers. Civil, mechanical, electrical, etc. And we are the doers, the men and women who design and install simple and sophisticated systems and make them work. We have duties also to maintain the systems and keep them working efficiently. ASHRAE helps all of us to do our jobs and provides the data we need to keep up to date. Change and variety is the name of our game. Going back a few years, no one would have thought of refrigeration being required in the pouring of concrete in large volumes such as for the power and control dams in Colorado. Concrete generates heat as it sets and cures and heat buildup could result in stress fractures. One of our members Frank Faust of General Electric designed refrigeration piping to act as reinforcing and provide cooling as the concrete cured. But the piping of course remained as reinforcement. The fields of combined disciplines embraced by our society members are endless. ASHRAE members are very well positioned to face the challenge that lies ahead.

M.S.

Ok Bill, as I understand it when you were president, each president selects a theme for his presidency. Your theme was "Professional Ethics and the Engineer". I gather you consider yourself quite an ethical person and you were wanting to instill that type of ethics on engineers and on the society. Any comment.

W.H.

Yes. One way to be an ethical person is to join ASHRAE to take part in the activities and you'll never regret what you get out of that.

M.S.

That's the commercial. Your son is an engineer and is in the family business in the west.

W.H.

You want me to brag about my family?

M.S.

Yeah, brag about your family a little bit.

W.H.

I can really brag about my family. I am the oldest of nine.

M.S.

Yes you told us that.

W.H.

I have six brothers and two sisters. They're all living today. Most of them are in Edmonton. The family business in the depression years couldn't handle such talent as I had so they shipped me over to England to study for a couple of years and I did that and then I won a scholarship to come back to Canada. And the scholarship was put out by this exhibition of the 18 Crystal Palace that was built in London. And this enabled me to come back and take a job with Darling Brothers and that's how I started in this down the trail of being in air conditioning and air cleaning.

M.S.

Well it's been...

W.H.

You asked me about my son. I want to brag about him.

M.S.

Yeah. Please do.

W.H.

He is now running the family firm in Edmonton. They have done a tremendous job. He graduated in engineering and went out there first of all worked on the pipeline. And then my youngest brother got him in to take over the partnership in the company. Now my youngest brother has retired.

M.S.

That's your brother Jack?

W.H.

No my brother Jack's in Calgary. My brother Jim, he was the, Jack ran the Calgary office.

M.S.

Jack that I have met.

W.H.

Yeah you met Jack. They're going gangbusters. They're doing work all over the world.

M.S.

That's great.

W.H.

He graduated from University in Ontario.

Western Ontario

W.H.

Western. And he's really doing a job there. Right now putting in a water treatment plant in China. And it goes on from there. Down in the southern states they do a lot of work and in northern Canada.

M.S.

That's great. Okay it's certainly been a pleasure interviewing you. Our paths first crossed in 1965 on the trip to visit an air conditioning show in Amsterdam.

W.H.

Exactly.

M.S.

You know that was a great trip. You had your youngest daughter with you at that time. And the highlight for her was visiting the, walking through the red light district in Amsterdam.

W.H.

And one of the group in that expedition was Bill Isaac.

M.S.

Bill and Vicki Isaac.

W.H.

Bill is a very close friend of mine to this day and lives right near me. He's now retired and moved in to playing golf.

M.S.

Hay Murray and his wife were on that trip. And Art Dubrian was on that trip.

W.H.

Exactly. Yeah and subsequently I went with Art Dubrian and his wife on a trip to Australia and New Zealand. ASHRAE takes you to a lot of places.

M.S.

You've made some nice friends over the years in ASHRAE. Bill it has been a pleasure and let's do it again some time.

W.H.

Okay.

M.S.

Thank you.