

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Interview of: William J Collins Jr.

Date of Interview: January 1994

Interviewed by: Charlie Henck

Charlie Henck

My name is Charlie Henck and I a member of the Historical Committee. As part of the Society's effort to document the centennial of our Society, we are conducting Leadership Recall interviews with presidential members of Society. Today we're going to be interviewing William Collins who was president Society from 1975-1976. Good afternoon Bill.

William Collins

Good afternoon Charlie.

C.H.

Bill I'd like to start off the interview by asking you to give us some background about yourself. Where you grew up, where you went to school.

W.C.

Well I was born in a little mining town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Iron River. I went to school to Michigan College of Mining Technology as it was known then in the Upper Peninsula, Michigan at Houghton. It's now known as Michigan Technological University but it was strictly an engineering school at that time and graduated in 1935.

C.H.

So you got a bachelor's degree in engineering?

W.C.

Yes.

C.H.

Mechanical engineering.

W.C.

Mechanical engineering. They had at that time what they call several options in mechanical engineering. One was steam power. Another was automotive design and diesel engines and one was heating and ventilating and refrigeration. And I had opted to take the latter option. And that's what I studied in.

C.H.

Wonder if there are many colleges that offer that kind of an option. I know today there aren't even many colleges that offer that option.

W.C.

I don't know about that but in my final year I got a copy of the ASHVE Guide as it was known as in those days and that was my first knowledge of ASHRAE. And it's interesting. I still have that copy of the Guide. It's about one inch thick, about half of the size of the president books that we have, the Handbooks and in it included not only the technical information but had all the advertising. It had a directory and it's the changes that have come about in the Guide since that time from the Guide to the present day Handbook is tremendous.

C.H.

Probably are. Of course back then the Guide was known as the bible of the industry.

W.C.

That's right.

C.H.

So after you graduated from college, where did you start working?

W.C.

I started working, I graduated in 1935 which is at the, pretty much at the height of the Depression in our area at least. And there were several options. One was to go with the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps which a great number of graduates did. The other was to take any job you could find whether it was what you'd studied for not. And I took a job with a packing company, Swift and Company and went out to their produce plant in Clinton, Iowa. And as an assistant steam and refrigeration engineer I looked at it as a fifth year of my college education because at the rate of 35 cents an hour why it certainly wasn't necessarily a livelihood but it was an expansion of my education. And from there I went on to the C A Dunham Company down in Marshalltown, Iowa to work in their research and development area. And at that time they had a policy that in order for you to work in their research and development area you had to work in all of the various sections of their plants at Marshalltown and Michigan City, Indiana for at least two weeks. So I had the pleasant experience of working in the foundry out there in Marshalltown, Iowa when it was 114 degrees in the shade outside. But their idea was that they didn't want people in R and D who were not, did not appreciate the difficulties involved in production processes. And after being with them for a period of time I went with one of their branch offices down in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and I've been there ever since except for a few years back in 1942-45 when I was in what is known to WWII. After the war, I went back to Oklahoma to Tulsa to set up my own consulting firm.

C.H.

So there you're doing design on commercial buildings?

W.C.

My first job was design of a five story hospital addition which has many years ago been brought down and a new building in place of it. It's kind of tough when you do a job, your first job and you go back and see the space and the building had been blown down and something else is up there in its place. But then I stayed in the consulting field from then up until two years ago when I retired from the design field and I had moved to Oklahoma City after about three years in Tulsa. I moved to Oklahoma City because I had contacts in Oklahoma City that I had made when I lived there prior to World War II. And there weren't very many consulting firms in Oklahoma City, there in Oklahoma at the time and so with the contacts I'd already made it was better for me to move to Oklahoma City than to Tulsa.

C.H.

Start your business there. How did you get involved in ASHRAE?

W.C.

I got involved in ASHRAE, first I went to a meeting in Chicago in 1949, in January of 1949. And this was right after I moved to Oklahoma City and after I came back from that meeting a fellow man, Joe Patton who was at Powers Regulator Company at that time came into my office and said Bill, you need to belong to ASHRAE or to ASHVE. He laid an application down on my desk and said I'm not leaving till you fill out, sign and give me a check. And I can see nothing wrong with that so I gave him the check and became an active member of a chapter. And that lead to getting into the field of the Society activities. At that time the Society had, this was ASHVE, had what they called the Chapters Conference Committee which consisted of one delegate from each chapter to go to the annual meetings and conduct some of the business that our Regions Council now conducts. But one of the main things were to select members of the Nominating Committee. And I was elected to go for my chapter and the second year that I went a gentlemen by the name of Rex Vernon from Johnson's Service Company, as it was known then in Milwaukee, was chairman of that committee and the elected secretary did not show up. And Mr. Vernon had spoken at our chapter meeting of ours just a few months before. He looked at me and said Bill you're chapter secretary. You know how to take care of these things. You're going to be secretary of this meeting. So I was reelected secretary the following year and went on to be chairman of that committee.

C.H.

Fantastic. Now in the chapter you said you were chapter secretary. I assume you moved up through the chairs in the chapter.

W.C.

Yes, I served in all the chapter chairs. In fact I was chapter president in '52 and '53.

C.H.

And from your chapter activities you got involved in regional activities.

W.C.

That's right. Well we didn't have the region at that time. ASHVE did not have regions at that time but at a meeting in Swampscott, Massachusetts back in the, around '52 or '53, maybe '54, the Society was considering going into the regional structure. And they asked the chapters to, each chapter to vote on whether or not they wanted to be in with a regional structure. And our chapter said no but if you're going to go to a regional chapter and have a regional conference let's have the first one here in Oklahoma City. And the regional structure did go through and we had the first meeting in Oklahoma City which was a trial balloon for regional meetings in 1955. It was not strictly regional in nature because we had people from all over the country and Canada at the meeting. But it did indicate that a regional meeting could be successful and then ASHVE went to the regional structure and when we integrated so to speak with RE in '59 why the regional structure was maintained except that the limiting lines of the various regions were changed a little bit. The boundaries and limits were changed.

C.H.

Tell me a little bit about the merger and your involvement at that point. Where you were you at that point?

W.C.

Well when the merger occurred I had just been elected to a three year term on the Council which is what the board of directors was termed then of VE. And I served for half a day until the merger vote was taken and in the merger the terms of all of the officer and directors were cut in two. Instead of having a three year term as a Regional Chairman I had a one and half year term. And subsequently I'd like to do another three year term beyond that. But those days were interesting. The two societies, although they had decided to merge, seemed to have some suspicions about each other so to speak. And at the board meeting and the board meetings were oh, I think some 46 in number members of the board. There'd be, the RE boys would be lined up on one side of the room the AE boys on the other. B Because we were AE by then we changed to AE in '55. It was always somewhat suspicion between the two sides and the meeting in Dallas, winter meeting in Dallas lasted until one thirty in the morning and I'll have to admit that the suspicion probably was not totally undue. There was a little bias on the part of the fellas from RE wanted RE to be more in control and AE were the same way but there was one gentleman, a subsequent presidential member who's now deceased, John Dube with Alco Controls at St Louis. I think he was treasurer of the RE Society when we joined together, merged. And he was the only man in the room to look straight down the line, what is best for the new Society. And I got a great deal of respect for that gentleman.

C.H.

You need somebody like that too, to direct you and head you in the right path of that when that happens. Sounds like he did an excellent job. So when did you become a board of directors member?

W.C.

At the time of the merger.

C.H.

At the time of the merger, okay. So that's when you were, you were Regional Chairman.

Regional Chairman of region, it was Region VI at that time but what is now Region VIII. At the time we had Albuquerque was in our region and they subsequently elected when, the layout in our region when it was changed to Region VI, when we went to the regional concept in '55-'56, they were in our region. When the merger came along they elected to go into the adjoining region which was IX at that time because they felt that their working conditions were more associated with the chapters in that region and El Paso which had done that earlier in the game also did that, to say that. So Region VIII then consisted of Oklahoma ,Texas minus El Paso, Arkansas, and a part of Louisiana.

C.H.

I see. So after you were a board member then you became an officer at what year?

W.C.

I became an officer in '64 after my four and a half years as a regional chairman I was elected vice president for a year. And I had a youngest in the family which resulted in the loss of my first wife. So I dropped out of the picture as far as the officer roll was concerned. But I did maintain in the Society and stayed on various committees. In fact I think I've been on the committee, some committee once or another ever since.

C.H.

Then you became an officer again in the early 70's?

W.C.

I became an officer again, let's see that would be in the early 70s. I served as a vice president for two years, a president elect one year and then as president in '75 and '76.

C.H.

At that point '75 and '76 what was happening in the world at that time?

W.C.

Well of course the big issue at that time was the oil embargo and the energy crunch. The people were becoming energy conscious. The government was getting edgy about it and that was certainly the big concern of that particular time.

C.H.

So it was like 1973 and leading on up.

W.C.

Yep, '73 on up.

C.H.

What was Society doing at that point to try to alleviate some of this concern of energy use?

W.C.

Well Rod Kirkwood, two years previous to my term had set up a committee which you called it, resulted in a standard committee to bring forth what we now know as standard 90, energy conservation in buildings. And they worked on that for two years prior to my administration and there was a lot of conflict and thoughts as to what should be in that standard. And part of it was the result of trying to ascertain where should we start to measure energy, at the point where it enters the building or at the point of its source. Which brought the utilities, electric and gas utilities into conflict with each other. And the riffs and the ruffs they were known as in those days, presented a problem. And in, during my term Bill Chapman who followed me as president, he and I went to a special meeting of the Standards Committee in New York and prevailed upon them to bring the standard to the board for approval. They were trying to come up with a perfect standard which certainly could not be obtained and the general public, the government, the Society, everybody was restless. We had to have a standard. So I hate to use the word pressure but we had to pressure the committee to bring the standard to the board so that it could be approved and utilized. And I would say that I would consider that as one of the outstanding accomplishments of my particular term.

C.H.

It's very outstanding. Yes indeed. As well not in your term but as the history of Society even. It's an excellent standard. Did you have a theme during your presidential year?

W.C.

My theme was commitment. I had heard a speaker many years, several years earlier speak on commitment and he told a story about Joe Namath and how he was going to take his team to the Super Bowl or whatever the championship game was that time. And I think they were going to playing Baltimore which had a much higher rating. Every time anybody talked to Joe, they were going to win that game. And it got so that the people in Baltimore were wondering whether maybe he knew something that they didn't. But he got his team committed and they won the game and commitment was a good theme for my term.

C.H.

How did that commitment tie into the Presidential Award of Excellence for the year?

W.C.

Well I would say that it improved the activity towards the Presidential Award of Excellence. In other words I asked for commitment from all of the committees of the Society, not only those with the regions or the chapters. And I think we've got an enthusiasm engendered that got out a good deal in fact at this point I have to brag just a little bit and say that my chapter won the Presidential Award of Excellence during my year.

C.H.

Oh great.

W.C.

But they did not win the award of the region a month or two earlier.

C.H.

What other significant events happened at either the annual or semiannual meeting you can recall?

W.C.

There are two things that I think of right off hand. One was I was invited or maybe challenged to come to the AGA meeting in Boston to discuss the standard 90 and the energy standard. And I think that after visiting with them this week and impressing their Society, their group, I think I allayed a number of their fears that they had about what effect the standard might have on the gas industry and I think certainly the way things have gone since then has proven that out. The other thing, I did charter, there were two charters chartered that year. The two charter nights were just one night apart. I took one and Bill Chapman, the president elect took the other. I elected to go to Reno to charter the northern Nevada chapter at that time. And it was a very pleasant chore.

C.H.

Was that chapter in Region VIII?

W.C.

No that was in Region X.

C.H.

Okay, so it wasn't in your home region then.

W.C.

No it was not in there.

C.H.

You had mentioned earlier to me that you were on the R&T committee for a while. Tell me a little about that experience in R&T.

W.C.

You may want to delete this but I'll tell you one little experience about R&T. When I was on R&T of course at that time the headquarters was still in New York and R&T committee meetings were held sometimes in different places. And Otto Nussbaum who was on R&T at that time and who recently passed away, convinced the committee that we ought to have a meeting in Atlanta. And so the meeting was set for Atlanta. I left Oklahoma City and flew to St Louis and connected with a plane to Atlanta to Louisville. I was going to stop at Louisville, Kentucky to talk to one of my TC chairmen before going to the R&T meeting. And after we'd been in the air for about an hour and a half, why the pilot, this is April, the pilot came on air and he said ladies and gentlemen, he said, it's snowing in Louisville. We are unable to land there. We're going to divert the landing to Indianapolis. We went to Indianapolis and we were

the last plane to land in Indianapolis. I tried to find a number of ways to get out of there to go to Atlanta. Finally I called the railroad terminal and asked if there's a train out to Chicago or St Louis or any place where I can make plane connections to Atlanta. They said there was a train going to St Louis. So I had a tough time convincing a cabbie to take me from the airport to the train station down in Indianapolis. I thought when I got there I would have dinner and I got in the station and I think there were 14 ticket stalls in the station. There was only one of them that was operating. The dining room was, big sign on the door. This room will close on January second, two years earlier than I was there. So I got my ticket and I asked the salesman whether there was a diner on the train to St Louis and he kind of laughed and said no. Well I got on the train and I realize why. It was a single, other than the baggage express cars, there was one car and it was a mail, combination mail car and passenger car. And it had a pot belly stove in it to keep you warm. And we got part way across Illinois and we came on a frozen switch and we had to sit there in the cold for an hour waiting for turns to use a different line back into St. Louis. Got into St. Louis at twelve o'clock at night and there wasn't any cabs at the terminal. There was another gentleman standing there and he came over to me and said are you looking for a cab. And I said yeah and he said well there aren't any here. He said the firemen had a convention in Memphis, Tennessee and all of the trains came in about an hour ago and all the cabs are gone. But he said I'm a fire chief from a little town out here northwest of St Louis and he said the squad car come in for me and he said if you say you want to go to the airport and I said yes and he said I'll give you a ride to the airport. So I got to the airport and to the hotel there near the airport and got in and was probably about quarter to one or so. I gave bellman my key to take my bag up to my room. I'm going to go get a bite to eat and headed for what was to be the dining room. As I got there they slammed the door shut. It was one o'clock and all services stopped. So I got up the next morning and caught an early plane direct from St Louis to Atlanta. And got to the R&T meeting and behold our host would convinced us we should come to Atlanta was not there. He had moved to a job up in New York and not said anything to anybody about it and nobody knew where he was. It was one of my experiences with R&T. Non technical of course but an experience.

C.H.

But what, you know, members of the ASHRAE do to get to a meeting right? That says a lot about you as a person to get there. I noticed on your jacket under your presidential member award you have a little gold gavel. What is that from?

W.C.

Back in 1970 Jack Thompson again since deceased and George Meffert and myself met him at the winter meeting in Columbus, Ohio which he tried to set up some kind of a program that would create a little competition between chapters and get a little bit of activity among the chapters and we decided on the golden gavel award. And so we instituted that. What I would do is each year at the CRC determination will be made of what chapter was the number one chapter in the region based on 12 different categories and they would win the golden gavel. And so what I would do is get a presidential chapter president's pin from the Society and take it down to my jeweler and I have him put a gold little gavel under it. That process continues to this day and I have to say that in 1971 or, 71 I believe it was, Frank Bridgers came to our CRC in Houston and he saw the enthusiasm that this golden gavel created and he wondered what he could do to do the same thing at our Society level so he then came up with the idea

of Presidential Award of Excellence. And after I had been president the region decided that I should have a golden gavel under my pin too so they gave it to me.

C.H.

That's great, that's great. So through your efforts and other gentleman's efforts the really, the President's Award of Excellence was developed.

W.C.

That's right and not only that but the thing that we wanted to do was to have other regions emulate us. We weren't just trying to work within our own region. We wanted to help the Society and a number of the other regions, in fact maybe all of them now have a similar award. It may not be called that but they do have an award.

C.H.

Can you tell me about some people you've encountered along the way that had an influence on you?

W.C.

Well I mentioned, I think I mentioned most of them already. Back in the early days, Rex Vernon followed by Art Hess from Los Angeles. Art was the first person, who was the only man who was ever president of all three societies, ASRE, ASHAE, and ASHRAE. And Art was quite a gentleman and he got me, kept me interested in ASHRAE. I also have to mention John Dube who I mentioned before and Frank Bridgers and I got to mention Jim May from Louisville, Kentucky as well. Those five I would say have had an impact on my interest in ASHRAE.

C.H.

What kind of advice would you give to a college graduate today going to enter that field?

W.C.

I would say that he shouldn't because he had ought to be made a student member of ASHRAE while he was still in college and that he ought to stay in the field and because there are wonderful opportunities in this area, in this discipline. And but you've got to get interested and get into things and do it. You only get out of it what you put in. And you got to put something into it. In fact we had a keynote speaker at a meeting, summer meeting in Nassau back in 1972 who he was from Radio Station in St Louis and his keynote speech was put a little something back. And certainly that's true. Matter of fact one of our past presidents once said, I can't exactly say what he said, but to paraphrase it he said no man has the right to withhold from the business or industry from which he earns his living. And he's got take a part in it.

C.H.

What you've been doing since your term as president? You were president in '75 and '76, I'm sure that there's been a lot of things you've been involved with, a lot of committees.

W.C.

Well I've been on the Nominating Committee, Long Range Planning Committee, Honors and Awards Committee. Most recently, as I said I was on several ad hoc committees. And one I'm serving on now is the Centennial Committee. I've been on it I think since it was organized and course ad hoc will ultimately die out by virtue of the calendar and I'm also on the General Insights Committee.

C.H.

Sounds like you've been really involved in ASHRAE over your entire career. I mean a lot of people would think, gee you've done your duty. You've been president and then that's it. And you've been involved for another 15 plus years since that time.

W.C.

I can give you the answer to that in one word.

C.H.

What's that?

W.C.

People.

C.H.

The people in our Society.

W.C.

The people in ASHRAE are the finest people the world.

C.H.

I would agree with you a hundred percent.

W.C.

When I first joined ASHRAE the president would come around and visit every chapter throughout the year. And of course we learned a little bit Saturday about change, the way things have changed over the years. And what I've found with my committee work since I started early on committees that there was never a president I couldn't go up and talk to ask questions and get an answer and within just a few minutes we would be on a first name basis. It was never one and I can't say that about a number of the other societies that I belong to. And I hope that situation exists today. Although today's president is a lot busier than he was back in those days.

C.H.

I think it's still pretty much the same. Most of them you can still go up and talk to. It continues on. Are there any closing remarks you'd like to say? Anything else you'd like to express today?

W.C.

Well all that I can say is that I've enjoyed my work in ASHRAE and I hope I can continue it.

C.H.

Well thank you very much Bill. We'd like to thank you for participating in the Leadership Recall program that the Historical Committee is conducting, thank you again.

W.C.

Thank you.