

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Interview of: William Holladay

Date of Interview: June 1995

Interviewed by: Pat Ivesdal

Note: This is the second interview of William Holladay. The earlier audio interview is dated February 1985, available as a transcription only.

Pat Ivesdal

Hello, my name is Pat Ivesdal member of the historical committee we're here this afternoon the interview Mr. William L Holladay. Mr. Holladay, I'm glad to have the opportunity to talk to you.

William Holladay

Thank you Pat.

P.I.

I'd like to find out a little bit about your background. Could you tell me how, when you were born, or where and your folks?

W.H.

I was born in 1901 so I'm now 93 years old, approaching 94. I was born in Missouri. My father and my grandfather were partners together in a small hotel at, indecently many years later my wife and I traveled back to Missouri to see if the hotel was still there. We approached the little town of Lafayette, Missouri and there was the Hotel Howard with a sign on it saying 26 rooms all moderate. I think that meant that there was a bathroom at the end of the hall. And when I was three years old my mother tragically died in child birth and the family decided I think as a result of that to move to California where my father was in the hotel business. I was a sickly little runt and it was agreed by the family that I should be brought up by grandparents because my father and later my step mother lived in the hotels which he ran until he retired many years later. So I grew up in Englewood, went to grammar school and high school there. Graduated from high school in 1919 and started college at something called the southern branch of the University of California which occupied buildings on North Vermont Avenue which formally was a normal school. SBUC later became UCLA and the buildings were reverted to a normal school since that time. It had only lower division engineering work and at the end of the first two years I expected to go on to Berkley having become thoroughly indoctrinated into great golden bear traditions and my father said, now look William you know you can't go to Berkley. You're the only member of the family who was in a position to live with ma, my grandmother and there's a little school over in Pasadena called Troop or something and you can learn engineering there. So that was the situation. I went to this little school over in Pasadena which turned out to be the California Institute of Technology. And I learned very quickly - as a matter of fact, at the first midterm examination, what kind of school I was going to. It was one of the luckiest things to ever happen to me.

P.I.

How did you happen to become interested in engineering or choose that field since your father was in hotel work?

W.H.

Well, when I was about ten years old I built my first wireless set and I think I knew very early in life that I wanted to be somebody who could work with machinery and tools, electricity and things like that. My dear father, god bless him, never indicated to me in any way that he was disappointed in me that I did not follow him. And he was a third generation hotel man. But he always accepted my decision as I had accepted the decision of my children as to what their vocation should be and what their lives should be like.

P.I.

So in high school did you just take the normal classes but then you immediately knew that when you went into college you wanted to study engineering?

W.H.

I think the decision was made sometime during high school. Yes, because I became a radio HAM. Any radio HAMs now have call letters which run up to three or four letters and numbers but my call number as I remember was 60B and the people that have to have five letter symbols now don't believe that. But that's the way it was in those days. I had to quit being a radio HAM when World War I came along because that put us out of business but I reestablished that when the World War I was over and continued as a HAM until academic work took most of my attention.

P.I.

I see. Now you're in college and you've decided to major in what field of engineering?

W.H.

Electrical engineering because radio had got me real thrilled with electricity and its many possibilities and I graduated from Cal Tech in 1924 with a Bachelors of Science in double E and was chosen, fortunately for me, as a General Electric test man. So I spent a year in Schenectady testing the equipment manufactured with General Electric Company. And then there came time for a final assignment. I had several possibilities of going into various General Electric departments that were looking for people but the personnel man, and I can still remember his quotations. He said, oh by the way Bill, there's a man named W.P. White who's starting something, a new division called household refrigerator and he's looking for people. And he's over in building two. Why don't you stop and see him. So building two was closer and I went there first and I never went any further. After the boss and his secretary, I was the first employee of General Electric's electric refrigerator division which later became the Electric Refrigeration Department and has grown into the very large department that General Electric now has for the building of all kinds of household appliances.

P.I.

Well that is very, what year did that get started?

W.H.

1925.

P.I.

1925. And you watched that department grow and you were put in charge of the whole?

W.H.

Well I first went to Dallas as the district refrigerator representative selling their very early and not very efficient models, which by the way are described in the paper which was published in the September Journal about the General Electric Monitor Top. And then at my own suggestion I was transferred back to southern California where I joined the newly formed distributorship, the George Belsey Company, that's B-E-L-S-E-Y, as a product manager. I was in charge of warehousing, deliveries, and service. I stayed on that job for 14 years.

P.I.

Now all of this in your work career, how is your personal life? Were you getting involved with your wife or soon to be wife or how did this happen?

W.H.

Very much so. I was learning to play the piano when I was still in high school and I practiced on the piano in the front living room of our little house which was next to the high school. And I noticed this beautiful little brunette which would walk by on the way to high school and wondered who she was. And discovered she was paling around with a sister of one of my closest friends. I got acquainted with her. We were dating before she was 16 and we were engaged for three years. We were engaged during the time I was in Schenectady. We wrote to each other every day. We once tried to telephone each other. She didn't have a telephone and the boarding house where I lived didn't have one either but we arranged to get to a place that had a telephone and I placed a call to her at 12:00. There were storms between the east coast and the west coast and it took three hours for us to get the call through. We shouted at each other for about a half an hour. Neither of us understood a word the other said and we never tried telephoning again. This was in 1925.

P.I.

1925. That was just when you were starting in at W, at GE.

W.H.

Well it was towards the end of my test days.

P.I.

End of your test days.

W.H.

So we made due for 14 months with correspondence. I got home on Tuesday afternoon on the California limited. We had a church wedding that Thursday night. That was September 25, correction September 24, 1925.

P.I.

And you're wife's name?

W.H.

Louise.

P.I.

Louise.

W.H.

She was 4 feet 11 inches tall and weighed 96 pounds.

P.I.

Full of dynamite. So that's, so she helped you along your road to the engineering profession you enjoy.

W.H.

All her life. Yes, she, when I became president of ASHRAE she of course became first lady and I'm told that by other presidential member and other first lady's whom I have seen that she was a model for all of those who followed her. In all seriousness she brought grace and dignity and beauty to the position of first lady and soon became as greatly beloved by ASHRAE members as she was by her family and by me. She was a great lady.

P.I.

Well I should think so.

W.H.

We were married for 69 years.

P.I.

69 years. That's a nice lifetime together. How did you become involved with ASHRAE while you were doing all these other activities?

W.H.

In 1930, ASRE, the American Society of Refrigerating Engineers was a group of ice men. That is men who designed and operated ice plants. And I obtained an application for admission, sent it to the admissions committee and got back a letter. They were very pleasant. They said, we think you are qualified for membership but we don't understand why you want to join. And I explained in my letter that I wanted to join to become a better refrigerating engineer. That seemed like a good reason so they let me in. so sometime in 1930 I became a member of the American Society of Refrigerating Engineers and honestly believe that I was the first member of what is now known as the white goods industry that every joined the society. Two years later I found there were a few other members of ASRE who lived in or around Los Angeles and I was instrumental in establishing the first chapter of ASRE west of the Mississippi River. First, excuse me, first section. In ASRE days they were called sections. And somewhat to my surprise I became the charter chairman, ASRE had chairman instead of presidents. It was the first time I had learned that any person that starts something is nearly always elected as the first president. And actually I became president of the chapter on later occasions when they couldn't get anyone else to serve but that's another story. So I've been president of the Southern California chapter three times in all.

P.I.

Three times. And that makes you a member of ASHRAE since 1930, well it wasn't ASHRAE.

W.H.

They merged in 1959.

P.I.

1959, that's when the regional structure started.

W.H.

I was very happy because I didn't have to go to two meetings a month. I also belonged to the heating and air conditioning group which became the other predecessor society.

P.I.

Was there much controversy at that time when all these groups were talking about joining?

W.H.

The merger in which I was unable to take any part because of my job demands at the time was a highly controversial situation. Each, the refrigerating people and the air conditioning and heating and

ventilating people were suspicious of the other group. Each one was afraid the other one was going to quote, take over, but some very good minds, the late great Arthur Hess, the late great Dan Wyle, I think of two. And there were others whose names don't come to me, worked out the merger in detail and interestingly enough of course, each one of the societies had a group of people just waiting to go up the ladder and be president. And they settled that situation by having alternating presidents in successive years, each one only serving six months.

P.I.

From each society.

W.H.

Yeah, until they got rid of all the potential presidents and then they started working as a merged organization.

P.I.

What was the name of the merge? Was that ASHRAE?

W.H.

That was ASHRAE.

P.I.

In 1959.

W.H.

1959, that's correct.

P.I.

And had you been a member of how many chapters by this time?

W.H.

Well there, I think there was only one chapter in Southern California, the one in Los Angeles. I think the orange empire was San Diego and the inland empire which is the riverside San Bernardino group have all been formed since 1959. I could be in error on that.

P.I.

You were president of one chapter, did you preside in the-

W.H.

No I didn't become president of any other. I was part of the charter party on the orange empire chapter. I have a photograph of the four of us who arranged the first meeting. Mr. Ken Watts of the southern California and orange empire chapter is very out of the letter of the picture of the four of us who established that chapter into a president at its first meeting.

P.I.

Yes, it's nice to have pictures like that. What about regionally experience in 1959? Did you get involved in the region work?

W.H.

I got on the board probably about 1962 or 3. And I served two or three years on the board and by that time somebody apparently thought that I was a presidential timber and asked me if I would be interested in going further. Obviously I was. The nominating committee was worried because I was by that time getting pretty elderly, I was 65 and so they allowed me to skip the office of treasurer and made me an immediate vice president, then president elect, and I went in as president in 1968 and served for one year. The president who proceeded me was the late, great P.N. "Peanut" Vinther, V-I-N-

T-H-E-R, who gave me full responsibility during my year as president elect. Every time some chapter wanted me to come and address it, Peanut would always turn the job over to me because he didn't like to travel. I did the traditional job as president elect of going to the Ontario chapter and addressing them at their first meeting of the year. During the meeting they of course gave me the usual city tours and took me out on the battlefields and I well remember one of the Ontario chapter members explaining how these battles occurred, how our forces were over here and the enemy was over here and so on. Took me about five minutes to realize that the enemy he was talking about was really us. So we were at that time having a war with Canada but we don't have one of those anymore. Canada by the way plays and has always played a very important part in ASHRAE affairs. It represents approximately 10 percent of the ASHRAE membership and the people who got appointed, who appoint the members to committees are very careful to see that there is nearly always, I correct that, always a Canadian member on every committee. And at least once every ten years there is a Canadian president. And the Canadian contingency is very important in ASHRAE affairs and I strongly suspect that the new international chapters will become equally important.

P.I.

Yes. Thinking back the year that you were president can you think how the times around you affected your presidency? It seems like, I remember '68 was kind of a volatile year with assassination and political trouble. Did that-

W.H.

Curiously enough I don't remember any of those things. I was pretty busy. Well in 1968 ASHRAE had about 30,000 members. It now has nearly double that. It had only about 100 chapters it now has over 150. But still for the year as president elect and the presidential year, Louise and I traveled about 50,000 miles each year. And my partners were not always happy with the fact that I actually spent over 90 days away from the office during each of those two years. Nowadays a president has to give you his job in order to serve as ASHRAE president for at least a year. But I still worked managed to put in at least 30 or 40 hours a week on my job to keep my partners happy.

P.I.

Did you go overseas with ASHRAE at that time?

W.H.

Uh, no. We did not have any overseas chapters. In 1982 or 3 Clint Philips called and asked me if Louise and I would like to go to South America to present to the association to Bogotá, Columbia, an association known as ACAIRE, A-C-A-I-R-E. I can't tell you, what they mean in Spanish. A certificate of association with ASHRAE, we were delighted to do so. We made good friends down there that we still have, whom we still have. We also went on to Lima, to Cusco, to Machu Picchu, which was one of my of my childhood ambitions. I will interject here that the three things I wanted to see when I studied geography in grammar school were the great Acropolis in Athens, Stonehenge in south east England, and Machu Picchu in South America. Eventually we got to see them all.

P.I.

Now that we reflect back on your time with ASHRAE, what would you say to future ASHRAE people about becoming members, or future potential members?

W.H.

The thing which has always impressed me with ASHRAE is not its great research program or its technical advancements by papers and meetings or even its chapter activities and its national activities but the quality of the friendships that are formed by this group. I have belonged to several other technical organizations and they don't have the same spirit that ASHRAE does. And I am very sincere, if anyone has followed me around over the last few days here and seen my welcome by our old friends because I have not been active for the last seven years because Louise's illness and death, you know it's absolutely right. This organization creates friendships as well as engineering papers and research projects and meetings and things like that. And I think it's one of the important things about it.

P.I.

That's an interesting view. Can you explain to me about the Louise and Bill Holladay award and how it came about?

W.H.

Well yes, and I'll be a little bit more specific than I was at the meeting Saturday. I had been a partner in an engineering office starting in 1952 which operated as a design office in Los Angeles over a period of about 20 years and then we came on pretty hard times due to the aerospace depression. And in 1972 we threw in the towel and went broke and so I went home and thought I was through with engineering but the phone began to ring. And for another 16 years I operated a little consulting office out of my home and did very well indeed. And one day I was explaining to Louise where all these jobs came from and the fact that 75 to 80 percent of them had come either from my association to ASHRAE or from direct ASHRAE recommendations. And Louise said to me, Bill, we've got to do something to pay ASHRAE back. And so we decided that, Fellows that had already been elevated to a higher grade of membership, I'm getting ungrammatical here but we thought we should pick out the Fellows who even after their elevation continued their research and technical work and to give them this title of Distinguished Fellow along with a little bronze medal which reads the Louise and Bill Holladay medal. And the first as I said from the platform Saturday was the late great Carlisle Ashley. Others have been Dan Wile, Ole Fanger, Frank Faust. Oh there have been about 60 and I can't remember the names of all of them. What is the name of the man who is chairman today?

P.I.

Are you speaking of Mr. Hayter? Or Press McNall? Press McNall.

W.H.

Yes, Press McNall received the award just last year. And he's been very active in highly technical and research work and he received it for that reason. That was how that came about. I've had a couple of projects with ASHRAE that have interested me and if you don't mind maybe I can chat about them for such time as we have left. I became interested in the 50s about the problem of design temperatures. A design temperature is a temperature chosen by the engineer to use in his calculations of size of both cooling and heating equipment. I was working for a company that was making a product that was peculiarly sensitive to outdoor temperatures. It's known now as an air, off the record for the moment as I think of the right word. An air-source heat pump. And so from that time I studied that, wrote a number of papers on possible design temperatures and eventually with a great consulting meteorologist in Denver named Lauren W Crow developed a method of establishing design temperatures which has been accepted by all of Region X, by the state of Washington. And because of Lauren Crow's activity, located in Denver by the Rocky Mountain group, it has never been accepted by the rest of society largely

because activities of a group, a military group and the weather data committee has stuck to a method proposed back in the 40s or very early 50s by the late William T Smith of the Air Force. William T Smith's method was an extremely good one at the time. It coalesced and established a quite good method in comparison to half a dozen different and conflicting methods for establishing design temperatures. Mr. Crow and I think that we have improved that somewhat and we published a book in 1982 for establishing design temperatures in Region X at that time consisted of four states, Arizona, California Hawaii, and Nevada. That booklet has been accepted completely throughout Region X and is in general US in design offices and contract offices. That's a project that I am somewhat proud. A second project which I am now involved is the matter of financing scholarships which are established by the Southern California chapter. In 1955 the chapter had built up a fund of about \$55,000 almost entirely in bonds and was occasionally giving a few thousand dollars a year in scholarships to students who said they were interested in the field of air conditioning. Some inspired individual on the board of directors said one day at a meeting, look the stock market is going great. Why do we keep all these bonds? Why don't we put our money into stocks and have this fund actually built up to something and give some scholarships that amount to something. Holladay heard the cry and volunteered to take over such a fund. And his offer was accepted by the way, and the committee and I took over this \$55,000 about the middle of 1988 and in a period of four years we built it to something like \$120,000. The method used was very simple. I happened to be the trustee of my family trust. And I only put into the ASHRAE funds the very best companies in the Holladay family trust. The result of which in four years we had a total annual return of almost exactly 20 percent. Now maybe some of you heard of the Dearborn, is that right? I don't think that's quite right. (Ed. Note: probably the Beardstown Ladies) You may have to look this up and edit it. Ladies club which does, get's a total return of 23.4 percent and they've even published a book explaining it. But never the less, 20 percent is within reaching distance of it and from that fund we have now disbursed nearly \$40,000 to students who say they're interested in this business of air conditioning. Our, the fund now varies between about 100,000 and 110,000. What we do each year is to allow it to build up to 110,000 and give 10,000 in scholarships, bring it back to 100. Then we start all over again. And we worked with the scholarship committee who chooses the students. We think we have done pretty well in that area. Actually I think our record has been somewhat better than that of the headquarters office which also has a scholarship program. So those are my two big projects.

P.I.

That is a very important thing to mention. Before we wrap up I guess I missed your children. You mentioned you had children. And are they in the industry?

W.H.

No. I followed my father's footsteps and allowed our children to do as they pleased. We have two boys and a girl. The older son is a world authority on the book of Jeremiah and is a professor of Old Testament at Andover Newton theological school near Boston. Our second son is a computer programmer for a manufacturing company that builds production lines. Our daughter is married to a teacher who used to teach architectural drafting and the design of buildings. So we have ten grandchildren, ranging in age from 15 to 40. We have 7 great grandchildren and there may be others coming that we don't yet know about.

P.I.

Well that's a wonderful family that you've formed. Do you have any other last comments that you'd like to make about ASHRAE, what influenced you in your career, or what plans you have for the future?

W.H.

I think it would be fair to say that ASHRAE beginning about 19-, yes beginning as early as 1930 and up to 1988 was the major hobby in our lives. It was our service club, it was our church, it was the thing we were most interested in. Louise and I for many years attended the two big meetings a year plus my activities in the local chapters. The chapters as well as headquarters, as long as the Society I should say certainly honored me highly. They have richly repaid me in honors and other rewards for everything I was able to do for them. They have given me some of my finest and closest friends and they have had a great influence on my life.

P.I.

And you're going to continue coming to the meetings now?

W.H.

I hope to continue.

P.I.

That would be great for everyone to see you. Thank you.

W.H.

Thank you Pat.