

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)  
Transcription

Interview of: Richard Perry

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Interviewed by: Mike Kearney

Mike Kearney

Good afternoon. My name is Mike Kearney and we're here in the beautiful city of Indianapolis, Indiana and it is my pleasure this afternoon to interview for Leadership Recall purposes, Mr. Richard Perry, president of Perry Engineering out of Vancouver, British Columbia and past president of the ASHRAE Society in the years '83-84. I think we'll start perhaps with letting you start a little bit about your career and how you got into engineering and what your story is?

Richard Perry

Thanks Mike. I started off actually in machine design way back in 1946 I guess. Got into that after the war. I was in the war, let's say flight lieutenant in the New Zealand Air Force, flying Lancaster's over Germany.

M.K.

Now wait, you mentioned New Zealand. You're from New Zealand?

R.P.

I came from New Zealand. I was born in a town called Lower Hutt which is just north of Wellington in the north island of New Zealand. That's where I did my initial training and became a member of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers which is the equivalent of a BSC degree in engineering. And that's how we came to Canada. We decided to move, came to Canada and tried to find a job in machine design. I walked into an office and the people in there asked me, do you know anything about heating and I said no, we don't heat in New Zealand.

M.K.

Outstanding qualifications for a heating engineer.

R.P.

That's right and he said, well that's fine. He says we're just starting out here too. And he says maybe you would like to learn with us. And so in 1952 I got into heating. No such thing as air conditioning and in those days of course we were talking coal. Coal fired units. Steam. Everything was steam. There was no such thing as hot water and no air conditioning which was an interesting way to start particularly as we are now getting back into steam systems again and nobody knows how to do a steam system. It's also interesting.

M.K.

Well so what types of jobs did you work on with this?

R.P.

In the early days they were mostly government buildings, university buildings, that type of thing. Cold storage, cold storage we got into very early in the game. We did large cold storage plants for salmon. We did processing plants for chicken, beef, all along that line anyway. A lot of fish plants, fish processing, fish meal plants. We got into mining, we got into pulp and paper and every case I did all the mechanical work in connection with those particular jobs.

M.K.

So from very early, though you were into refrigeration.

R.P.

Yes in ammonia. That was the refrigerant at the time and now we're getting back into ammonia again.

M.K.

You're a renaissance man. Now this was not your firm at the time.

R.P.

No it was in a partnership, a partnership of eight which I was the mechanical end of the partnership. The rest were all structural and electrical and as such of course, I took care of everything that was mechanical doesn't matter whether it was putting plant in or whether it was doing the heating system or plumbing. All of that came under my jurisdiction. So it was very interesting particularly when you got into mining, for instance this type of thing, very enjoyable.

M.K.

Very challenging I would think.

R.P.

Yeah. I sold out of that firm in 1974 and it was a firm that was composed of companies. It was a partnership of companies. Perry Engineering went right back to the time when that partnership was formed and when I broke away I stayed as Perry Engineering and went into design and construct. We did a lot of buildings in partnership. I was in partnership with a construction man that had been with one of the construction firms. We did whole buildings. We had two architects working for us and created the whole thing and hired ourselves an electrical engineer to do the electrical part of it.

M.K.

So you designed and built the whole building, not just the mechanical system?

R.P.

We did it all.

M.K.

The whole works.

R.P.

And we're still doing somewhat of that. We're doing a lot of layout for buildings for architects all on CAD systems and it's paid off in the long run because you get a feel for what's required in buildings and you can do layouts for them.

M.K.

Now where in this process did you first get involved with ASHRAE?

R.P.

I got involved in ASHRAE in 1953. I joined them right after the merger had taken place. Our chapter was put together in 1952 so the year after it was chartered I joined it. And I guess my first touch of Society as such was when one of our past presidents, Bill Hole, one of our Canadian past presidents who was with

American Air Filter, he happened to be in town and I went to lunch with him. And he said, are you interested in being a member of a Society committee, and I said what is it about. And he said, don't ask me what's involved, he said, would you be interested? And so I said sure and the next thing I knew I was on the Program Committee. That's how I got into the Society and things and became a member of the Program Committee.

M.K.

You had experience in your local chapter.

R.P.

Yes, I've been right through the chairs locally, being president of the local chapter.

M.K.

How was your experience on the Program Committee? Did you get an introduction to ASHRAE volunteer spirit there?

R.P.

Yes, first meeting I went to Tom White, one of our old Regional Chairmen, happened to be chairman of the committee and the meeting was at Las Vegas and I thought, by gosh this is the sort of Society that you can belong to where you go to places like Las Vegas for meetings. So I enjoyed that and it was very, very rewarding and got to listen to a lot of interesting papers and talks. But of course the program was nowhere near what it is now. About half as many papers, if that. It's expanded enormously.

M.K.

Just an anecdote, Bern Nagengast showed me a program from Willis Carrier's days that was this big. It was a pocket sized, about six pages including all the lady's activities. We have come a long way since then haven't we?

R.P.

Well we always said that it was going to get too big, we could never handle it. Here we are.

M.K.

Here we are, too big and we're handling it. From the Program Committee?

R.P.

Program Committee, I became Regional Chairman of Region X and Region X went from Alaska down to the Mexican border. And that included how I went clear across to Arizona and right on up to Idaho, British Columbia, took in the whole of the western states and Canada.

M.K.

And how many chapters?

R.P.

Was 17 chapters.

M.K.

And you were to visit each one once a year.

R.P.

That is correct I visited, made 17 visits every year for three years.

M.K.

And doubtless they paid you a lot for this, did they?

R.P.

Nothing. I think on the average we used to average out about the same cost every year. I used to take my wife ? around with me. She enjoyed it. So it was part of the cost of course.

M.K.

Describe the routes that you took to visit the chapters. I found that interesting.

R.P.

Okay. We would try to work them so that we would get three chapters in any one month. We'd get them lined up so that they would be one after the other. Doesn't matter the distance apart as long as we had three that were on consecutive days. So for instance we would go to Anchorage to a chapter meeting there and then we'd come on down to Honolulu to a chapter meeting there with the Hawaii group. Then we might flip over to Portland for instance and pick up the third one and then come back at home. And the next time we would go down, Phoenix, Tuscan, and San Diego something of that type of trip. It's nice the way we work it so we could pack three into a week.

M.K.

You must have created a very interesting circle of friends with those trips.

R.P.

Oh yes, they're still around. They're still coming through that's for sure.

M.K.

Well that's great. Then from Regional Chairman that, of what was then the largest region in the Society was it not? Certainly geographically it was the largest.

R.P.

Most chapters too.

M.K.

Most chapters, okay. And others might recognize that as something of a logistics problem and they looked for Richard Perry to solve it so.

R.P.

That that is correct. Bill Chapman who was president at the time asked me to be chairman of the Regional Reorganization Committee and of course I went to town to try to reorganize the whole of ASHRAE's world. And one of the things we tried to do was to cut the border so that we would bring Canada and the United States closer together. So we cut the border at Ontario and Michigan. We went across there and we also cut it again in Nova Scotia and Maine. And immediately we ran into problems with the Regional Chairman on both sides who didn't want to go that route. So in the end we had to back off and the only place we cut it was where it was before, across the border at British Columbia, at British Columbia and Washington. But we did manage to cut down on the size. We cut Region Xin half so that we had Region X and Region XI. Still a big region in Region XI but less chapters and still great distances and we produced a new region which was Region XII which was down in Florida. And that was the end of it. It was interesting during the time because I learnt a lot. I learnt that football was a big thing. For instance I tried to split Little Rock away from Region VIII. I got told I couldn't do that because they play football between the two and I said well what's that got to do with ASHRAE. Oh you don't understand how important football is to us. And then El Paso, I tried to split that away from Region VIII, no from Region IX and put it back in Texas and I soon found out that El Paso is not a part of Texas it's part of up and down. It really should have been in New Mexico. And this sort of thing cropped up all over the place. So it was interesting and I learned an awful lot.

M.K.

Probably learned the art of compromise in that.

R.P.

You bet. I had a big map of the United States in Canada with type on it and every week I would be a moving tape. I just threw it away the other day. It was interesting.

M.K.

Interesting. Alright from the Regional Reorganization Committee, what happened next? Where did you go next?

R.P.

At that time I was still Regional Chairman at that time and then I went through the chairs of course. Treasurer, vice president, president elect, and president. And during that time when I was treasurer I again was asked to be chairman of the Headquarters Relocation Committee. So I had a lot of work there. We had to decide on a city that we wanted to go to which I ran a computer program on. And we visit the cities. We started off with 28 cities and brought that down to five in the end of which three of them were dropped and eventually ended up with Dallas and Atlanta being the two that were left. And we visited both of those and finally decided on Atlanta. One of the reasons we decided on Atlanta was we found a building there, the one we are in which was a good buy and the people wanted to sell it at the time. We approached Hugh McMillan and said, he happened to be president at the time, and said well this is a good buy. We should move to Atlanta and buy this building. And we did. That's how we got into it. We did most of the cities in the U.S. and Canada, looked at them.

M.K.

What kinds of parameters were you evaluating?

R.P.

We had a 18 different items we were looking at. There was weather for instance. There was even down to churches and schools and the availability of transport. How easy it was to get in there, whether they had good airports. Whether they were central. So a lot of those things came into it. How easy was it for the membership to reach the city in which a headquarters building was located. And of course the cost of the building and if we were going to rent, the cost of renting it.

M.K.

And looking back that's been a very helpful thing for the Society and turned out to be a very good move.

R.P.

And Atlanta seems to have being a good choice because it's growing. It's becoming more of a hub city every year now. As is evidenced by the fact that when we want to have our ASHRAE show there we find that the convention center was booked out for years. It's very difficult to even get a hold of it.

M.K.

Well it was a very nice meeting we had in Atlanta about a year ago. It was nice accommodations we thought.

R.P.

That's right.

M.K.

Okay, as you were in the presidency and I know that it's just officially one year but it's not really one year, it's a progression of years and it's not just Richard Perry. There's a team of people that you're

involved with. As you look at those years what kinds of things do you particularly focus on as highlights or milestones?

R.P.

Well on we went through the Standard 90, the old Standard 90 at that time and Standard 62, they were both going at the same time.

M.K.

Now 90 is the one on energy.

R.P.

Energy conservation in buildings.

M.K.

And 62 was the indoor air quality.

R.P.

That's right. So we finalized those during that period. We also I got into the 100 standards at that time. And those went on beyond my presidential year. But they were well established during that period and then moved those ones along. So we did that. They were really the key issues during that period I guess. And we were well into energy conservation at that time. We were into solar as well which is a dirty word now. We don't seem to talk about solar anymore.

M.K.

I remember those years readily. Much more highly visible term in those days. Your presidency, what theme did you select for that?

R.P.

The theme was "International Year". I followed on from Dave Rickleton who was for a number of years earlier anyway, he had the first international year and I carried it on, had a second international year. And during that year we were six months away from home, traveling around the world to various countries and visiting everybody. And also during that period we chartered the first of the overseas chapters, the Singapore chapter. And got the Hong Kong chapter off the ground and started and it was chartered shortly after my presidential year. It was very successful. We had a big meeting in Atlanta, an international meeting and we got a large number of international business at it. We had international gatherings, international dinner. And we tried to promote this whole international concept at that time and it's carried on. And it's surprising how much we've done in the interim period. There's no doubt about it.

M.K.

You said you traveled six months out of your presidential year. What was the effect on your business back home?

R.P.

Well it was rather disastrous. We had quite a number of architectural clients for instance before I became president. I tried to get them interested in going with the employees that I had and my partner. I tried to pass everybody over to him but it didn't do any good. The clients all said no, they wanted to Dick Perry there and he wasn't there and he wasn't going to be there for a year. And it was no good and they went to other consultants. So I lost most of the clients that I had had during that year. However right after in the year after I was president, the government put out a big contract for energy orders right across Canada and in every province they picked one consultant to handle the energy orders for

the whole providence. And in the end we did 1200 energy audits I guess. But we applied and I put down the fact that I was, had been ASHRAE president and showed pictures and news cutting about energy conservation and what I had gone towards Standard 90 and this sort of thing. And they were tickled pink and they gave us the contract just like that. And I wouldn't have got it I'm sure if it hadn't been for the fact that I had been so heavily involved in ASHRAE.

M.K.

Looks good on the resume.

R.P.

Oh absolutely. They were tickled pink all the way through. They kept promoting the fact that, oh look how British Columbia is doing. It's doing so well and these energy audits because of the fact that they have a past ASHRAE president running the whole thing. I guess we had about three teams out there. Two energy buses, all of the equipment for testing buildings. We did about 1200 or 1500 energy audits.

M.K.

That's really, in what span of time are you doing this?

R.P.

It took us two years. Two years to do them.

M.K.

What else was the effect on your business afterwards? You're saying it's a tough year as a president.

R.P.

Well we got into, at that time we got into CAD in a big way. We set up service bureau for computer aided drafting way before it's time. But architects, you know, were going that route. We've done a lot of architecture work, a lot of engineering work particularly electrical and we carried that on until 1995 I guess. And we've really carried that on ever since. Not as a business but oh, we had to ring it as a business too. We had a number of fairly large contracts during CAD work for architects and government work. This type of thing.

M.K.

Just doing the drafting as a service to these other organizations?

R.P.

Yeah that side, that what we tackled. Everything, particularly government, has to be done now on computer. You can't find people that can do it so we set ourselves up that way. We're doing a lot of training now. Training of people on computers of all kinds. We've got courses going on design, architectural design, mechanical design, electrical design, using the CAD system. Because this is what's you're missing at your high schools and your technology institutes. They come out of there. They can use computers but they don't know design things. We've been building that up and on top of that I get a lot of design work, building approvals, this type of work now.

M.K.

What would you say to a consulting engineer in one of the chapters about the conflict? He sitting there worrying about cash flow and whether or not he should become active in his local chapter and perhaps active on a committee in the national organization. What would you say to that young architect or consulting engineer?

R.P.

Well I talk to a lot of them, I talk to them particularly if they look like good ASHRAE candidates. That are going to move in ASHRAE and I usually try to downplay the cost of it because you can get over that cost particularly now. A lot of this is picked up by the Society where it wasn't picked up before. The big factor is the time factor. They just have to somehow come to grips with the fact that it's going to take time if they're going to do the job properly and if they can beat the time factor they can do it. We've had a number of, in fact right now the British Columbia chapter has more Regional Vice Chairmen from the one chapter than I think from any other Society chapter. We've got one, two, three, we've got three and a Director At Large, all working for ASHRAE right now. All because we talk them into it.

M.K.

You're a good mentor and persuader.

R.P.

Well it's not that bad once you get your feet wet and into it, it's not that bad. It's not difficult. Just takes a little time. You've got to keep at it.

M.K.

We talked a little bit about, just a little bit about highlights and things you are particularly pleased with during your presidency. What about people, experiences with people that you might want to recall?

R.P.

I guess I would have to look at the people that really brought me along, the ones that wanted me to go on. Bill Chapman was behind me. Bill Collins was behind me. Keep on telling you, now don't quit just keep on going and they keep feeding you work that they would like you to do. In fact these are the people who got me onto these different projects. And I guess they're all trials to see how you're going to work out. So those people I look back and think that without them I may not have gone through. And of us they are all the people that were working on the committee. I worked on committees with most of them. Neil Patterson for instance. I was on a committee with him and here he is coming up through the chairs now. All of these people, they eventually get there. They are the ones that you see who are working hard and can do a good job.

M.K.

That's the primary ticket isn't it? The hard work.

R.P.

I've often told people that. It's no use getting on a committee and thinking you're going to have a free ride. No way. It just won't work. I know people of, in the past have got bitter because they've been thrown off committees and my answer to that is you weren't work working obviously. And ASHRAE, it's too busy a Society to sit back and do nothing.

M.K.

Without our attention to detail, I heard at dinner last night the relation of a story about the argument in committee about the name tags at this show. And that the lady's name tag needed or perhaps could be or should be different. And we got into the details of name tags for the ladies. So no detail escapes our attention.

R.P.

Well that's one of the things of course that we've been battling all along is to try and stop, well the board for instance, try to stop the board from doing committee work. And it's very difficult when they

get something in front of them that's been through all of these committees and then they get to the board level and start to do it all over again. It happens. People like to do this.

M.K.

Well that's how they get to the board anyway, examining the details of all these things. And so everybody's an expert. Well we've mentioned some technical things that were part of your presidency, a couple people. What other things might you, looking back when you got out of the presidency then you have continued in certain chairs and you might describe where that has led you now.

R.P.

Yes, I usually make a point of trying to get onto a committee anyway of some sort and I think people realize that they've got a hard worker there and I don't have too much problems. Since I was president I've been on committees and being chairmen of committees. Honors and Awards. I'm on International, chairman of that now.

M.K.

That must be an exciting committee, that International Committee for you.

R.P.

It's one I wanted to get on. I've wanted to get on for years. And being a follow on really from the international year. And one of the things that we are doing this year is we've set up a group that we call international liaison members and they're in specific areas of the world, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, not the Far East because we got chapters, Europe, and the Middle East, and India. And the idea is that we would have representatives in those different countries that we could send literature to and that would promote ASHRAE. And so we have that going now. So we're going to have the equivalent semi-Regional Chairman out there who are busy doing work for us in all these various areas.

M.K.

Describe a little bit about a chapter in Hong Kong. Now is that a chapter of ASHRAE or is it a chapter of a Society similar to ASHRAE in-

R.P.

No it's a chapter of ASHRAE. They're all ASHRAE members, a lot of ASHRAE members too. In fact the last year I was there I went to the chapter, their annual meeting and they had 400 at meetings in which a large percentage of them were ASHRAE members. The same goes for Hong Kong too. There's a tremendous number of ASHRAE members.

M.K.

Okay now when they become an ASHRAE member do they send their dues in to ASHRAE in the United States or is it ASHRAE Hong Kong?

R.P.

That I'm not sure how that works. I never figured, I never asked that.

M.K.

Do they get a Guide? Do they get a Handbook?

R.P.

Yeah, they get a Handbook I believe.

M.K.

And it's in English.

R.P.

Yes it's a English and they all speak English. They're British countries so they're all English speaking.

M.K.

Okay that was, I guess I was driving at, you know, when there is a language or, yeah a language difference, you know, how does that work? How do the mechanics of that work in a chapter overseas?

R.P.

Yeah well we've decided, we'd been through this, is that language wise there are only two languages. Two of them that are really important. One of them is English and one of them is Spanish because of the fact that we've got so many Spanish speaking people in South America. The rest of the world practically all of it that is using ASHRAE Handbooks speaks English.

M.K.

They use English as the language of commerce then.

R.P.

They don't speak English necessarily but they can read English. So the English Handbooks for instance are the ones that are most useful to them. No point in translating even French, you know.

M.K.

As you look back Richard, what kinds of changes in systems that you've designed have you seen?

R.P.

Well we were just talking about that this morning. We went through the year of heat pumps. I did a number of heat pump systems. Water source and air source heat pumps. We went through the era of total energy systems and I put in a number of engine driven and turbine driven generating plants and then all of those went out of favor. And we had a period when we did none of that. In fact a lot of the engine systems were taken out because of the upkeep on the engines and one thing or another. They work well but the maintenance was higher than what people wanted. Now we're back in it again you see. We sort of go through cycles and the engine driven systems are coming back now. There is a difference however in that when we did them you couldn't parallel the hardware systems. They wouldn't let you. For instance if you put an engine generating system in that building they wouldn't allow you to hook up to the local utility. It was not allowed and as a result if you had a breakdown of an engine something happened to your system you were down and nothing you could do about it. Now that's all changed. If you're generating you can actually feed back off of the grid and sell the power that you're not using. So that's made quite a difference to the energy systems. And heat pumps of course, we've gone right back to using heat pumps on practically every building now. That's something that's come back with us.

M.K.

What goes around comes around. Well I think we have this time for us to look for a close here and if in looking back at our conversation, not so much our conversation but your years here, is there anything you'd like, any point you'd like to make or focus on?

R.P.

I don't think so other than I've really enjoyed it. ASHRAE's been great to me. I don't think I'll give up until like John Fox, I'll keep coming.

M.K.

Keep coming as long as they'll let you back, you're going to come. Well Richard it's been a joy knowing you. I think you and I first ran into one another at a CRC in Jackson, Mississippi.

R.P.

Yeah, that's what you said.

M.K.

And I don't know how many years ago for me, I guess about 15 years.

R.P.

It's got to be.

M.K.

Yeah, 15 years or so and it's been a pleasure knowing you and interviewing you today sir, and thank you for coming by.

R.P.

Well thank you Mike, enjoyed it.