

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Interview of: William Dyer

Date of Interview: August 9, 1988

Interviewed by: Bernard Nagengast, Cass Cassing and Larry Staples

Note: interview is incomplete

Bernard Nagengast

Interview with William K Dyer, August 9th, 1988. I guess Bill why don't you give me a little bit of your background as far to the industry's concerned. When did you first get involved in the industry and what did you do?

William Dyer

Oh, I graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1938. And went to work for the Buffalo Forge Company in Buffalo, New York as an engineer in training to eventually go out and get into sales work in a branch office. Stayed with it until I quit. In 1969 I retired.

B.N.

Okay. And your father also worked for Buffalo Forge you had mentioned.

W.D.

Yes he also went to University of Kentucky. He graduated in 1904. And he went to with Buffalo Forge Company and he stayed there until he died. He was sales manager by the time I was an adult. And that's what he stayed as. He intended to retire but, at 65, but they asked him to stay on because World War II was on.

B.N.

Okay well as far as your father is concerned, what do you recall about the type of work he did or is there anything interesting you can tell us about his career?

W.D.

Well he got a degree in mechanical engineering at University of Kentucky. And they were in, of course the Buffalo Forge Company made forges first and the reason they got into blowers was the forge had a little hand turned blower wheel. And one time somebody asked him to build some kind of a little blower. And the first thing you know they were in the blower business and as forges became unnecessary, why they got into air handling equipment, heating and cooling, humidifying, dehumidifying, cleaning and what not. And as air conditioning came in they got into that of course.

B.N.

How much did your father have to do with the heating, ventilating, air conditioning side of the business?

W.D.

Well that's the only side he was ever in. They were already into that I guess pretty well. Of course I don't know. I wasn't born until ten years after he went there. I guess they were into air conditioning - not air conditioning. They were into heating and ventilating by that time. And he worked as an engineer for some time and then became sales manager and he stayed with that.

B.N.

And what was his association with Willis Carrier?

W.D.

Well I don't know where they met but I think Willis Carrier was there about two or three years before my father which would have been 1901 or so. And he was chief engineer. I don't think they had anyone else in engineering at that time probably. It was a small company I'm sure. And they shared a desk. The whole office was like that. They had these five foot square yellow oak desks and on each side there was a knee hole and drawers and they were the same ones, sales managers and chief engineer. And of course they were looking at each other from five feet away all day. And they lived just about two blocks apart so they knew each other pretty well of course. As chief engineer, Mr. Carrier developed a psychometric chart about, I don't know when, along in that period. Maybe in the teens. He got quite interested in air conditioning and he finally decided he'd like to go up start his own company and get into that field. And they didn't want him to go because they didn't think he could make a living at it. It wasn't accepted of course. I mean air conditioning was unheard of for residential or anything like that. It was maybe for a printer that needed something for matching paper, have to have the same temperature and humidity and that sort of thing. He persevered and they made a deal with him that he'd have to buy the first million dollars worth of fans if he used any from the Buffalo Forge Company. They knew that was enough that he'd never buy them from anybody else. In those days a million dollars was a lot of money. And also that he would come back once a year and put in a couple of days advising their engineering department which he did of course. He was gone by the time I was, I mean he was in his own business. I don't know when they started the Carrier Company but it must have been somewhere in the late teens. I'd say 1918 or something. I don't know exactly. But he wanted my father to go with him but my father wasn't that adventurous. He figured they'd never make any money at it. You know that funny thing was that he was right. If he'd have gone with him they wouldn't have had much success because my father died before they really got going and that was after World War II when they really started to go big. I know the stock, my father had bought some of it and it wasn't all that hot either. Of course he died in, let's see, 1945 when the war was still on.

B.N.

Well then as far as Willis Carrier is concerned, how long did you know him yourself?

W.D.

Well I remember as a child I lived on Russell, which was a block from Amhurst and he lived another block down the street so about a block and a half away. They had a social life between the two families and I knew him that way as just one of my parents friends, Mr. and Mrs. Carrier. I can't remember if that was his second or third wife at that time but she died whoever it was. And he married, he had three wives and survived them all so it was either the second or third one I think. I didn't know them other than to see them as Mrs. Carrier of course.

B.N.

And what, you know, you of course recall some interesting things about him as a person and everything.

W.D.

Well he was a very friendly type of person. Anybody with, very common type of guy, I mean anybody can come up and talk to him. He had no errors at all about him. But he was, you could tell he was very brilliant as an engineer. And of course he was always asked to make talks here and there. But he could never stay on the subject. He would wander off on a tangent and then another tangent. Nobody cared because he was interesting no matter what he talked about. He was a good speaker but he just couldn't stay on the subject. I remember that about him and he was interested in people. Even the Buffalo Forge Company when I was first there had all the engineers sitting on high stools, drafting type stools on a sliding drawing board. And he'd come over and pull out the stool and talk with you about engineering for a while. And the first thing you'd know, you'd be off on something else. He stayed in the field at least but he wouldn't be on the subject he started on. You'd always learn something. I never could figure out how he developed the psychometric chart. At that time it was quite an accomplishment to get all these different factors on the same page. Of course we got a lot of them like that ever since. I remember his first, I think the Carrier Company's first job was air conditioning I guess they went with a printing plant and it worked fine they always had trouble with it, especially in the summer I guess with the good printing matching up from one day to the next. The paper would shrink or expand over night. Or the humidity would change. It wouldn't match up with what they printed the day before when they were trying to put things together. And they didn't have any more troubles when they got the system working. All of a sudden all of the big printing companies across the United States wanted to have air conditioned shops. And I think that was their first place. Then they got into theaters I think next. About the only air conditioning back in the pre-war that I knew of was in the air conditioning, I mean in the theaters which are almost all movies. They had to cover vaudeville while it was still going. Usually each city had about one of those and the rest were movies. I think the war kind of interrupted air conditioning anyway. It didn't really get moving until up in the mid 40s. I don't know what you asked me now.

B.N.

Oh I was really asking about Carrier and him as a person. Some of the things you remember about him. Some of the interesting things that he did and so on.

W.D.

I remember he called me Billy. Nobody else ever did. I don't remember whether he had a family or his children, they were older enough that I wouldn't have known them I guess. So I just knew him and Mrs. Carrier but as a kid. I didn't pay much attention. He was just another person of course at the time. You can know the president and you wouldn't pay much attention when you're five, six years old.

B.N.

Did you continue any type of association with him, friendship wise or anything after he left Buffalo Forge and established his own company?

W.D.

Well only when he came over from Syracuse to do his engineering deal. Each year, I was there I guess probably twice when he did that. He knew who I was of course so he talked to me. But he tried to make it the same as the others so it wouldn't look funny. We had about 17 engineers in those days. They were all young fellows. He would talk to the chief engineer and assistant chief engineer and then sort of

just walk around and chat with other people. He's put in a day or two as I remember. He enjoyed it apparently. I think he enjoyed everything that he did.

B.N.

Do you remember any interesting stories about Carrier that you yourself were familiar with or your father may have told you anything about him? Some of the things that you don't read in the history books about him.

W.D.

I really don't. Most of the friendship between the two families was when I was real small when before he had left Buffalo to go to Syracuse, New York with his company. So when I was old enough to remember these things he was not really over very much from Syracuse to Buffalo I mean. I saw him only occasionally then. I really don't remember much. Of course I knew what he looked like. It's surprising. I just don't remember much after I was about eight years old until I was doing engineering at work and knew him then. He was older of course. And I don't know he must have been up in his 60s or so, maybe 70s. And I was early 20s. Heard a lot about him but that wouldn't be anything everybody else didn't know I'm sure.

B.N.

What did you hear about him?

W.D.

Well he had trouble with the company I guess. He was a terrific engineer and I don't know if he was all that big as a salesman. I think he had a fellow named Thornton Lewis that used to be with Buffalo Forge Company. And he went over to work on sales I think.

B.N.

Logan Lewis?

W.D.

Thornton. And his son and I was in college together. Thornton Lewis Jr. and I think he went to work with Carrier. But they were a pretty big company by the time the early 30s came around I guess. I don't know how big but they were well known. I just didn't see him an awful lot after I was a boy. One of the, the Dean of Engineering College at the University of Kentucky was F. Paul Anderson and as it pertains to ASHRAE they had an award named after him. The F. Paul Anderson award obviously. I haven't seen it lately, maybe they renamed it but I knew him pretty well. He used to come to Buffalo from Kentucky with a senior class of engineers to visit some of the industrial areas. They didn't have much of that in Kentucky, Lexington. And I think he visited Detroit, Buffalo, and maybe other places with this group. Of course it wasn't a very big group in those days. The senior class of mechanical would be maybe a dozen or something like that. And he would stay overnight with us because he and my father knew each other pretty well. And when I went to the university he was still there but he died after I was a freshman. I think I had one year before he had died. I remember he was about five feet two and kind of chubby and a very nice person. And everybody knew him. I guess he was a president of ASHVE we call it, ASHVE. I went to a lot of conventions with my father I suppose probably six or eight in the summer, annual conventions with ASHVE. He was the president of the local chapter in Buffalo but he didn't get into, well no I guess he was. He was on the national nominating committee, that's right. He nominated some pretty good men. I think two of them were Carrier and Anderson. There was a fellow that wrote a text book. I can't recall his name. It was a classic of its day and I suppose it's out of date by now. He was

one of the presidents there. One of the other men on the committee was Kirk Campbell from Kansas City. And my father's name was also Kirk. K-I-R-K. They were about the same size and shape, same name. And they got to know each other pretty well. They both had a son named Kirk. I'm one of them. That's my middle name and Kirk Campbell, I don't know where his is now, but I guess he's still in town. I haven't seen him in years. I'm running out of memory I guess.

B.N.

Were there any other people that you got to know in the industry that, you know, that were fairly famous within the industry for one reason or another?

W.D.

Heating and ventilating, you mean and Air conditioning?

B.N.

Yeah.

W.D.

Of course I knew everybody in the Buffalo Forge Company and they were pioneers in that field. I don't know if they were very well known but Bill Heath was the assistant chief engineer at the Buffalo Forge Company. I think he was a pioneer but I don't know if he'd be remembered now. He, funny thing, he went from assistant chief of engineer to president of the company in one step because a fellow name Al Criqui was the chief engineer at the time and he was a good engineer but he never finished anything past high school. And Bill Heath was a graduate of I think Cornell. He was a better engineer than Mr. Criqui but he didn't want to hurt his feelings. Well he took a bigger salary but I guess the old man didn't know it. He served as assistant chief engineer. He's really running the company pretty much. So when the time came they made him president. It seemed normal that he was the guy to do the job. I don't know if Mr. Criqui was known. In his field I think he was. Because he was a pioneer, well I guess Mr. Carrier developed the backward inclined blade blower and I think the curved blade too. And the double curved blade, S shape because they had, as you may know, power characteristics which were very desirable and pressure characteristics. And actually a double curved blade is of course a lot stronger than the flat laid back blade which has a tendency to kind of belly out at high speed. So they had to build a very heavy blade to keep from bending then you had to build a heavy back plate and flanges to hold it and first thing you know is you have too much weight. So that why he developed the curved blades. Mr. Heath, I mean Bill Heath was involved in that along with Al Criqui. I guess they were also involved in the elementary air conditioning they were doing when Carrier was probably in charge of it before he left. He was of course chief engineer. He was interested in anything to do with air but obviously air conditioning, air cooling was one of the things. And he could see ahead that that was going to be tremendous. But it was a very slow developing and I think World War II held it up about five years probably. I know when I got here the department stores hadn't been air conditioned yet and weren't until 1950 or something. I wandered off again.

B.N.

No, that's fine. No, the things that you were saying were interesting.

W.D.

I think Roger Campbell is still a member there. Roger was Kirk Campbell's younger brother as I recall and he took over the company. But they, as a lot of brothers, didn't see eye to eye on a few things. I think Kirk went off as a manufacturer's agent on his own and Roger took over the Company when E. Kirk

Campbell, his father retired or died. I know Kirk used to come around the meetings for a long time. I don't remember his last year here. But he lived to be quite old here.

Cass Cassing

Did your son go out to school in K State, Kirk?

W.D.

Yeah and he went to school with your son.

C.C.

Yeah, did you get involved in the K State activity? Educational labs and things?

W.D.

Well no. They started a crew though. You know, the eight man rowing crew. They were the first ones in the big eight to have a crew. And my son was interested in that and he was, a little fellow named Rose was the, I think his name was Rose, was the coach. And this was unofficial. The university did not recognize them and they got no letters, no money. So they were looking pretty poor and then with the fathers and what not gave money to buy the boats and the oars and that sort of thing. And they came over here several years and had meets with some of the bigger schools right here in Johnson County on Charlie Mission Park Lake which wasn't really long enough. I think they got a thousand meters in. But they had Alabama and, let's see, I can't remember. But some of the big ten. One of the Ivy Leagues at one time came in here in the first maybe three years that they were rowing. Of course they were on a river but it wasn't all that good and then when the lake came in they were on the reservoir there. It got pretty good size waves though. I think those little ladies don't take too much of a wave successfully. I know they sank a few times.

Larry Staples

Did you know Ralph Nevins pretty well?

W.D.

Yeah. Yeah, he died quite young. What about 45 or something? Yeah he used to come over here to meetings, I guess every meeting just about. And he would talk occasionally. He brought a bunch of K State engineer students in. Sometimes a pretty good size crowd. I mean 20s maybe. They were the student chapter I'm sure. Before that we had a KU student chapter. And for one year I was the chapter advisor that got to go over to the meetings and they came over here too. But they weren't as big as the K State, I think maybe a dozen at the height, maybe 20 at the height of their...There wasn't very many years. Maybe five years they operated. I think they're back in the business though. Haven't we got one a KU again?

L.S.

They'll be starting this year.

W.D.

I know they were the only ones - K State never had it. It was two or three of them that were very interested in ASHRAE. When they left I guess the student interest faded at KU. Which is a lot handier for the student advisor to go over.

B.N.

Well is there anything else interesting from a historical standpoint that you recall about, you know, your early days with the industry or anything?

W.D.

Well when I got out of the army in let's see, '45 after the war, well after the war I suppose. I couldn't get out. I came out here. I went back to the Buffalo Forge Company for a short training period. See what had happened when I was gone. I came out here to reopen the office, which they had closed at the time of the war started. Our man here was drafted and so they had no one here for four or five years and I remember at the first couple of meetings I'm at, let's see, Carl Kleg who was the American Blower representative and one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet and he sponsored me as a member of ASHRAE. And a funny thing, I rented an office in the Dwight building on the third floor and the first day I was there I walked around, the hall was a circle. When I walked around to see who was all on the floor, American Blower was right around the corner from me. About 50 feet away, of all the places in town. And Ted Harriman just started working with Carl Kleg. And Carl was forced to retire at 65 I guess. Ted Harriman took over the office. Then later, shortly after that he was promoted to national sales manager. But he didn't like it and came back here. And of course Carl went with the boiler company and they didn't have retirement requirement at 65 and I think he stayed with them about 15 years, didn't he? The same company owned it but they had a different arrangement on retirement ages. I think he did as well with the boilers then he ever did with the blowers. He was just the worst possible salesman. He was so good and everybody liked him so much. He was the worst competition you could have. Go to lunch with the guy and then he'd beat your ears off at two o'clock. He knew everybody and everybody liked him. He was a hard worker. Always took a bag of stuff home with him at night. God, he was tough competition. Yeah, we used to go down and have coffee together at Vi's on the first floor there. Right here in town I remember was only one engineer, Bill Castle, and he had all the business except, I can't remember the name of the fellow he worked for before the war and then left to start his own company. He quit in about 1946 or 47. As far as I know Castle was the only engineer in town. It seemed like everybody that was here later had worked for Bill and took off and started their own. But he had all the business. So you had to get along with him and get him to specify some of your material if you want to sell anything. I guess Bill's still, is he still working, do you know?

L.S.

His name's still there but no, he's retired. But his name is still there.

W.D.

I remember he told me

(Unknown)

Cooper Smith I believe that's it.

W.D.

Yeah, his father lived to be, I think, is it 92 or 98 or something. It looks like he's now doing the same because he looked about the same 40 years after I first saw him. I remember he was, one time he took a trip over to Japan for several weeks I think. And this is about 20 years ago perhaps and I went in to go to lunch with Paul Reno and I was sitting there waiting and Paul was finishing up something and Bill saw me and he says, come on and talk a while. I guess he didn't eat or what for some reason he wasn't going to go to lunch. He gets so interesting I sat there for 40 minutes while Paul was waiting. He told me about his trip to Japan. But one thing I remembered was, and boy was he right, he says, you know Bill they're going to bury us in the next 20, 30 years and he knew about their work ethics and how efficient they were and he could see it coming. Boy was he right. I guess there wasn't anything we could do about it.

C.S.

Bill did you know Leon Mart

W.D.

Oh yeah. I remember when I first went to the few meetings , we were meeting in the old balcony of the old union station. And we had 25 in attendance, would be a good month. And Leon Mart was one of the 25. And let's see, well he was one of the boys. I guess the company is a pretty good size now. This was back in the late 40s but of course he got a lot bigger. But he was a very nice person to have at the meeting. Everybody seemed to be real chummy and talk together and he was, you know with three tables of people you get to know each other pretty well. I was just a young kid compared to some of those fellows but he was there and very active. When I think Bill Castle had been a past president and I started going to meetings pretty faithfully in 1947 and until about 35-40 years later I never saw him at a meeting. I remember just a few years ago he was invited as, I don't know what they were going to give him, a presentation I guess. And I told him this was the first time I ever seen you at a meeting. He wasn't real happy about that but 35 years, never seen him. But I guess like a lot of past presidents he got burned out maybe and didn't go back. Seemed like that was usual deal for past presidents with the exception of Cass of course and Rusty Wrigley and perhaps a few others I don't remember.

Tape interrupted - incomplete