

John Roth Connection to Trane Company

By Sherm Sweeney, MVC 123 Historian 3-03-2020

As ASHRAE Region VI Historian, I came across a *History of Reuben N. Trane* written by La Crosse Area Chapter Historian James Ritter in 1993. The history of the Trane Company has a local Mississippi Valley Chapter connection that many of you are probably not aware of. Local ASHRAE retired member John Roth of Le Claire was a sales engineer for Trane for more than 40 years. In fact, the Roth family has a very long commitment to Trane—John's son Bob Roth still works for Trane's chiller division in La Crosse, and John's uncle Art Roth worked directly for Reuben Trane.

Uncle Art was the 3rd employee of Trane when Reuben founded the company in 1913. First as part-time, later full-time, Art was charged with setting up machines that made parts for steam traps that Reuben had patented. John relates a story of the first hermetic refrigerant compressor being made in La Crosse. Uncle Art was part of the fabrication team. He recalled the impeller was made by riveting blades to a disc with a hub. Art told John they gave him the impeller to be delivered on Monday morning to the Louis Allis motor plant in Milwaukee, where they had agreed to balance it at 3600 rpm. Art wrapped the impeller in a blanket and drove his Studebaker from La Crosse to the plant in Milwaukee. Art was disappointed to find the plant was 'old-fashioned' with dirt floors where the machine was located. Louis Allis was happy to oblige because they were developing the first motor to be operated in a refrigerant environment vs external drive. The motor was probably in the range of 50-75 HP according to John. Louis Allis went on to furnish motors to Trane for many years.

Another story John related to me involved development of a new model of Unit Heater by Trane. Reuben often relied on Uncle Art to work 'separately' on 'secret projects'. He called (or wired) from an east-coast trade show that their competitor Herman Nelson had a new style of unit heater with a 'round coil' and it discharged vertically toward the floor. Reuben told Art: "Build one!" Art misunderstood the concept Reuben intended for the heater, and built a unit with a round coil that was like a conventional flat coil, but bent into a flat circle such that all the tubes were different lengths and bent into concentric circles, similar to an electric stovetop burner. It was very difficult to fabricate considering the fins on the coil tubes. Reuben laughed when he saw what Uncle Art had made—it was intended to look like a doughnut, not a pizza!

As told by John Roth 2-04-2020