



Women's History Month

March is Women's History Month. Female participation in ASHRAE has certainly changed over the decades. On August 16, 1972, Andrew T. Boggs III, Executive Director of ASHRAE Society, wrote a letter to all chapter presidents stating that the society wants to consider activities which will interest women to become active in our industry and join the society, and that they are looking for feedback from the chapters. The letter asked how many women are members of our chapter? Our chapter president, Earl McKinney wrote back: "*Our chapter has 0 women members.*"

The Oklahoma Chapter, chartered in 1935, was run exclusively by men for approximately 5 decades. Believe it or not, but I have a photo in our chapter archive from a 1977 chapter meeting where there is a poster hanging on the wall behind the speaker's podium that has a girl in a see-through bikini. The poster was an advertisement for the metric system! It listed the model's measurements as "92-61-92". I have another photo from a chapter meeting sometime in the 1980's where, apparently, someone hired a "stripogram" woman to come to the meeting and sing happy birthday to a member. Times were different back then.

The Central Oklahoma Chapter didn't have any women members at the time of that 1972 letter from Society, but apparently the call to action in the letter got Membership Chairmen Bobby Vermillion going because just two short months later, the chapter got our first female chapter member: Carolyn Rae Crawford, a sales engineer at a Besco Sales.

Carolyn went on to work for R & B Equipment Company, and it was while she worked there that she became the first ever female Central Oklahoma Chapter President in 1984. She was also the first female chapter president in all of Region VIII. Our second female chapter president was Diana Grundmann in 1988, a Building Engineer at Southwestern Bell Telephone. Our third is our current president, Madison Schultz.

The Central Oklahoma Chapter elected our first female president long before Society did. Lynn G. Bellenger was the first Society-level female president, but she didn't hold that office until 2010.

Society, however, did have at least one female member long before our chapter did. Mary Engle Pennington (known as "The Ice Lady") was born October 8, 1872, attended the University of Pennsylvania in 1890 and earned her Ph.D. in 1895 with her study ultimately leading to refrigeration engineering and safe handling, storage, and transportation of food. She became a member of ASRE in 1920 and was elected ASRE Fellow in 1948. ASRE merged with ASHAE to become ASHRAE in 1959, thereby, in my opinion, making her the first female ASHRAE member as of 1920. She died in 1952 and was inducted into the ASHRAE Hall of Fame in 2007.

Today, almost 50 years since getting our first female chapter member, our member database shows that we are still only about 7% female chapter members. That's very low. In 2017, approximately 22% of undergraduate engineering students were women. This has to make you wonder, what keeps women from entering the HVAC&R industry in general, and ASHRAE in Oklahoma specifically?

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