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ASTM Standardization News

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Gladys Berchtold
New ASTM Chairman

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Gladys Beaman Berchtold

An interview with the 1986 Chairman of the Board

You are the founder and chairman of the board of Standard Laboratories. Could you give a little background as to what led you to that position?

From a business point of view, I am probably the least diversified person ever to have served on the ASTM Board. Basically I have had only one job in my lifetime. Five years after graduation from a small West Virginia college I had amassed 1½ years experience in organic analysis, two terms in teaching chemistry, and had acquired three children. In 1947, I entered my first coal testing laboratory as an employee. To this day I have not found my way out, but I have no regrets about my life. Coal is a fascinating subject and so are children.

As for Standard Laboratories, Inc., we began life in 1949, as the testing division of Garland Coal Co. Five years later, a friendly separation from Garland enabled us to become an independent laboratory. Those were lean, hungry years in the coal industry, but somehow, like Topsy, we "jest grewed." Then in the early 1970s, when the oil pipeline from the Mideast was temporarily closed, the world became acutely aware that all fossil fuels were finite, irreplaceable resources, which required careful utilization and conservation. Needless to say, after this time the coal industry and coal laboratories expanded rapidly.

Now our company operates 18 laboratories, an instrumentation development company, a small auger manufacturing company, and is a partner in SAI, which is a company specializing in the sampling of export coal. A few years ago, Standard Laboratories organized the International Coal Testing Conference, which is held biennially and attracts attendees from all over the world. We also founded a magazine, the *Journal of Coal Quality*, devoted exclusively to coal testing information.

Thirty-eight years in coal probably sounds unpleasant and boring to many but I'd be willing to sign up for another 38.

How did you become associated with ASTM?

The fact that I chose "Standard" as my company name should give a clue. It would be difficult to find a group of Americans that are unaffected by standards, but I think it would be impossible to find a group that attaches more importance to standards than the coal industry. The heterogeneous nature of coal makes strict adherence to standards a way of life for the laboratory. Economic necessity is always a strong motivating force.

Another reason for my interest in ASTM membership was curiosity. It is one thing to be able to follow a standard in a testing lab. It is another, and a vastly more important thing to know the whys and wherefores behind the language written into a standard. After sitting through interminable sessions deciding whether to use shall or should in a particular sentence, the rationale behind a standard begins to come clear. ASTM membership is a great educational experience.

These were my initial reasons for ASTM affiliation. There have been unexpected bonuses like friendships, business contacts, career enhancement, and travel opportunities. My life has been greatly enriched through participation in ASTM.

You have been a long-standing member of D-5 on Coal and Coke and E-36 on Criteria for the Evaluation of Testing and Inspection Agencies. What are your thoughts on the directions of these two committees?

D-5 was my first love. It is a very old committee, having been formed in 1903, but it is an extremely spry octogenarian. D-5 membership had stabilized, in 1970, at about 85 members, but the Arab oil embargo brought an infusion of new life. Membership has climbed to around 300. These new members are inquisitive, aggressive, intelligent, and sometimes downright difficult, but they have shaken up the old guard. It is hard for the old guys like me to get a word in these days, but new standards are rolling out and

new subcommittees and task groups are being formed. Watch out for killer bees and D-5. They are both successful life forms.

E-36 is a much younger committee. I have watched it with considerable interest because it had some built-in problems. In the beginning, consensus was difficult to attain on any and every point because there were many divergent interests within the membership. But out of trauma and turmoil have emerged two excellent generic standards. The committee is presently engaged in developing a number of additional standards while several technical committees have written laboratory evaluation standards specific to their fields. However, the time factor does concern me a good deal. Both nationally and internationally, great interest is being evidenced on the related subjects of laboratory evaluation and product certification. If laboratory accreditation standards are needed in industry immediately, and all evidence seems to point in this direction, are we not defeating ASTM's primary purpose by allowing other bodies whose primary purpose is not standards writing to fulfill this need?

E-36 faces a great challenge in meeting the demand for standards to support the Board action of September 17, 1985, which accepted in principle the report of a special ASTM Panel on Laboratory Accreditation. The panel recommended the establishment of a laboratory accreditation system by ASTM based upon an individual technical committee's needs and competence to direct accreditation activities in fields specific to its scope.

E-36 must play a vital role in this endeavor by supplying the technical committees with guidance in the development of standards for their special needs. Many technical committees can expect a resurgence of interest in accreditation with accompanying problems and opportunities. E-36 must move expeditiously to fulfill its purpose to clarify the confusion now existing in accreditation circles by development of standards that address the real needs of laboratories.

ASTM has had a successful track record as a management system for the development of voluntary standards. In recent years we have looked to the possibility of using our management system in other areas. For instance, in 1984, we began a series of Standards Technology Training courses. What are your thoughts on Standards Technology Training? Do you feel there are other areas where ASTM could use its management system?



In my opinion, the Standards Technology Training courses are the best thing to have come down the pike in many years. New members, interested in the educational opportunities afforded by ASTM, can get a crash course by attending one of these training sessions. Industry too, will benefit enormously from quicker employee training in standards for the bench technician whose job is the application of standards in day-to-day operations. I hope to see this already successful program expanded and diversified.

As for the ASTM management system, I, personally, am so impressed that I think al-

For more than 20 years, Berchtold has been active in ASTM committee work. This year, in addition to being the ASTM Chairman of the Board, she will also be the vice-chairman of Committee E-36 on Criteria for the Evaluation of Testing and Inspection Agencies.



Berchfeld looks over a copy of *Coal Quality*, a magazine founded by her company, Standard Laboratories, and devoted exclusively to coal testing information.

most any group, including government, could profit by using the principles developed by the late William Cavanaugh and his excellent staff. The expansion of ASTM management into other areas is a decision that rests with the whole ASTM Board and not with any single officer, but I confess to a great deal of pleasure at the recent action of approving the extension of ASTM management into the laboratory accreditation field.

I know you are a great supporter of The American Council of Independent Laboratories (ACIL). What are your thoughts on the future of ACIL and its relationship to ASTM?

ACIL has been quite important to the development of my own laboratories. It has given us many things other than excellent fellowship—financial and personnel management techniques, marketing strategies, quality control practices, and the like. This organization has been the leader in the development of one of our national accreditation systems. ACIL does an excellent job of presenting the viewpoint of the independent laboratory. Both ASTM and ACIL have profited by a congenial relationship, and I have no doubt that this relationship will continue, and perhaps, expand.

I do have a general question to ask the membership of both organizations. That is, is there a need for an organization that could speak for all laboratories? There are more common problems than there are differences among the types of laboratories. Could

ASTM and ACIL jointly investigate the need for such a group and, if the need is found, assist in the birth of such an organization?

In 1985, you went on a People-to-People trip to China. Could you tell us about that trip?

It was a wonderful experience! People-to-People is an organization set up by Eisenhower to integrate American citizens with their counterparts around the world. The Chinese government, I believe, indicated that it would like to have a People-to-People program based around standards and accreditation. There were 28 ASTM members who went to China on that trip, all good men and true, except that eight of the ASTM men were ASTM women members. In our group there were three major areas of expertise: textiles, nondestructive testing, and standardization and accreditation. The group leader was Richard Goodemote, a past chairman of ASTM.

We met with our Chinese counterparts in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, in the Peoples Republic of China, and in Hong Kong. I attended the standardization and accreditation sessions at the Bureaus of Standards and Metrology in each city and at the Academy of Building Sciences in Beijing. We had excellent interpreters for these meetings, but there was one word that was not necessary



to interpret "ASTM." However, the Chinese found it difficult to understand how a system such as ASTM's could be developed by the private sector without governmental assistance. There were many questions about the interrelationship between government, industry, and ASTM. They seemed eager to receive all the technical materials we had been able to bring, and I returned with 27 individual requests for further information on American standardization and accreditation systems. Fulfilling these requests, with ASTM and ACIL staff assistance, generated further correspondence, and in March, a letter from Bob Meltzer, ASTM vice-president, publications and marketing, translated into Chinese, and outlining ASTM's services, was sent to 400 leading individual scientists and technologists and to 1,200 related organizations in the Peoples Republic of China.

I understand we have already had over 200 replies. If this response and my 27 friends in China are examples of the Chinese desire to establish working relationships with the scientific community in the United States, we have a glorious opportunity before us to contribute to world peace through mutual effort.

Going on from there, how do you think we could form stronger relationships with other standards organizations around the world?

I hope this will become one of our priority projects. During the selection process for our new ASTM president, I was surprised at the frequency with which two topics surfaced—accreditation and increased international activity.

The success of the China People-to-People trip leads me to the belief that there is no substitute for personal contact. I would like to see every ASTM member who travels abroad do whatever he or she can to further the cause of international cooperation in standardization. I would not be unhappy if an organized program to sell ASTM and the voluntary consensus system would be developed for use by individual members.

We also need to consider more structured methods. It is important that top management at ASTM be given the opportunity to have face-to-face discussions with their counterparts in other standards organizations.

In September, the Committee on the Voluntary Standards System (COVOSS) recommended to the Board that ASTM take a more positive role with other standards organizations, such as Deutsches Institut für Normung (DIN), the British Standards Institute (BSI), and the Association Française de Normalisation (AFNOR), and that the President and the Chairman of the Board be encouraged in the immediate future to visit these other



The 1985 Board of Directors included (from left, standing) D. R. Johnson, Emanuel Horowitz, J. A. Blair, R. W. Macdonald, W. P. Dugan, K. E. Benson, P. E. Schilling, Conrad Zellweger, David Greason, T. P. Pritsker, Roman Serra, F. G. Clarke, J. G. O'Grady. Seated from left are: W. D. France, Jr., R. H. Goodemote, G. B. Berchtold, L. E. Steele, Robert Baboian, R. G. Redelfs, and N. M. Trahey.

Berchold began her career in the coal testing field with Goodwin Labs in 1947. Two years later, she established a laboratory for the Garland Coal Co., covering this field. The forerunner of her company, Standard Laboratories, this lab functioned for the first five years as an organ of the Garland Coal Co. In 1954, Standard Laboratories emerged, under Berchold's guidance, as an independent laboratory and became the first permanent coal testing laboratory operating commercially in Eastern Kentucky.

standards organizations to discuss mutual concerns and opportunities. Cementing such relationships will be one of ASTM's goals for 1986.

This month you will become the 78th Chairman of the Board of ASTM. All those preceding you were men. Does that in any way intimidate you?

For 40 years I have been a part of the coal industry, which is strongly male dominated. If those gentlemen have ever noticed that I had an "x" chromosome instead of a "y," they failed to bring it to my attention. However, I am intimidated by the 77 gentlemen who have preceded me, intimidated by their stature, not their gender. I am acquainted with at least a dozen former chairmen and I count it a privilege to know each one. My experience in technical committees and on the Board has convinced me that there are no unilateral decisions made in ASTM. It is a comforting thought as I begin the year that not only will I have assistance from past chairmen, other officers, a strong Board, a superb staff, but also from the 30,000 members who will not hesitate to point out the error of my ways should I veer from the straight and narrow.

What are your goals as chairman for this year?

As an elected representative, I am deeply aware of the responsibilities allocated and of the honor accorded to me by the volunteer membership. I would hope to preside over the Board in such a manner that the majority will of the membership is paramount in every action taken by the board.

Since this is the first full year of direction under a new President, Joe O'Grady deserves understanding and support from the Board of Directors and the technical committees as he begins the task of management of one of the unique institutions of the world. He will have many problems. No change of command is free of difficulties particularly when the predecessor inspired the confidence and respect that William Cavanaugh did. To preserve and enhance ASTM's integrity will be his goal. Our goal must be to assist him to accomplish his goal.

I am not sure that as Chairman I should have personal goals, but there are three areas that seem to me to be of prime importance. First and most important is increased assistance to the technical committees to relieve some of the more arduous clerical work of standards production. Second is the oppor-



COURTESY, ASTM

tunity to lend ASTM management skills to the convoluted and troubled laboratory accreditation field, and third, to take advantage of increasingly favorable circumstances for cooperation in international activities.

If you could be remembered for one thing that you have accomplished in your very busy, very diversified life, what would that be?

That is a surprising question. I have never thought about it. In fact, I do not plan to leave any time soon but assuming, by some chance, I do not live forever and assuming that I will be remembered more than a week by persons other than my own progeny, I guess I would like to be remembered for whatever contribution I may have made to honesty, reliability, and integrity in the laboratory. I agree with Pasteur, who expressed the hope that laboratories be multiplied and adorned. He called them the temples of the future and predicted that there mankind would grow stronger, greater, and better.

I believe this is true and I could ask for no higher calling than that of a worker within the laboratory producing reliable test data for this protection of national and world resources and the safeguarding of public health.

In case I have not made a point with my laboratory contribution there is one other possibility. Recently one of my granddaughter Stacey's friends described me as "Stacey's really 'in' grandmother." That would not be too bad an epitaph. ●