

Champlain Valley Chapter – Region I – 2006-07 Gold Ribbon Submission

History of Gordon “Gordie” Root, Sr., P.E and Lois Root

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This article was compiled based on past chapter documents and an interview with Gordie Root. Gordie and Lois have a long history with the Champlain Valley Chapter (CVC) of ASHRAE. Gordie was one of the charter members of the chapter and Lois was the first female chapter president.

Gordie and Lois both grew up in Massachusetts; Gordie in Northampton and Lois in Springfield. Gordie’s interest in buildings and architecture began before he graduated from high school. His father was a Civil engineer and had a close friend who was an architect. As a result of this friend’s influence Gordie became interested in architecture. After graduating from high school in 1939 Gordie apprenticed with an architect who was also a college professor at Smith College. Smith was and is an all girls school however the professor allowed Gordie to sit in on some of the architectural classes that he taught. It was during this time that Gordie met Lois.

Gordie & Lois met on a blind date in 1940 and as Gordie said they “hit it off”. Lois was born and grew up in Springfield, Massachusetts where she earned her high school diploma. Lois and Gordie dated for about a year before deciding to get married in November of 1941. This of course was just a month before the attack on Pearl Harbor and when the United States joined World War II. Lois and Gordie were 18 and 20 respectively when they got married.

Gordie, like many of our young men, joined the Navy to serve his country in WWII. When he returned home he found a job with an architecture and engineering firm, Alderman and McNeash. The University of Massachusetts was starting a program as part of the GI bill. Through this program Gordie attended extension courses and worked at the same time. During this time he studied in what he said was the Architectural Engineering program. Not too long into his career with Alderman & McNeash the partner that was the architect died suddenly. The engineering partner, Archibald McNeash offered to keep Gordie on as long as he would go into engineering. Gordie

decided this would work for him and Mr. McNeash was an excellent mentor. Gordie then graduated from UMass and after 4yrs of practice he applied and was authorized to sit for the Professional Engineering license exam in Massachusetts where he passed, this was during the 1950's.

In 1959 Gordie and Lois decided to move their family to Vermont from Massachusetts primarily due to the poor school system where they were. So Gordie, Lois and their 5 children (Earl, Allen, Rosemary, Judy & Bill) moved to Williston, VT. As a family they agreed that they would try Vermont for 1 year and at the end of that year they would all sit down and decide if they liked it here or not. At the end of that first year, they all decided that they would stay. Lois and Gordie lived Williston for about 15-16 years before moving to Shelburne.

At this time Gordie worked for Jennison Engineering until about 1968-69. During his time at Jennison Gordie met Robert "Bobby" Miller who worked for him as a draftsman. Bobby Miller is a Past President of the Champlain Valley Chapter. After leaving Jennison, Gordie had to choose between working for VT State Buildings or Vermont Heating & Ventilating (VHV) where Bobby Miller was VP. Gordie said that VHV would give him a chance to see the contracting side of the HVAC business as he had always worked for a consultant. So he went to work for them. During this time Lois was working for the University of Vermont in the bookstore. After leaving VHV, Gordie went to work for Wiemann Lamphere to start a mechanical division. He left WL around 1985. Gordie remembers telling Lois he was thinking of quitting, as he really wanted to get back to the actual engineering rather than the management side of things. Lois said..."I don't mind if you retire, just as long as you go away every morning." Those of you that know Gordie and Lois understand just how funny this comment is. They were always a team and Gordie came home for lunch every day. So in 1985 Gordie started his own company, GWR Engineering. Gordie was so well respected in the industry, that within a short time of starting his business, in his words, he had "plenty of work".

While working for Jennison Engineering in the late 1960's Gordie met Loran Appleby, a manufacturer's sales representative. Loran encouraged Gordie to become active in ASHRAE and in 1969 Gordie became one of Champlain Valley Chapter's charter members. Loran later served as Chapter Historian for CVC. Gordie and Lois were both very active in the chapter and Gordie served in both Region I and Society positions. It may seem unusual that Lois became active in the ASHRAE chapter however; Lois liked to travel and attend meetings with Gordie, both local and regional. While, as Gordie said, she "tagged along" she would ask questions about the topics and discussions. The others in the chapter and region came to know Lois well and suggested that she join ASHRAE as an Associate Member. In 1979 she did and continued to attend meetings as it was a good opportunity to spend time with Gordie doing something together. Through ASHRAE she became familiar with the terms and the industry which was helpful when they agreed that Gordie would start his own business. Lois was right there with him as the bookkeeper for GWR Engineering.

While Lois didn't serve at the Regional or Society level she worked very hard for her chapter. Her principal contributions were as Chapter President (1986), Chapter Historian and Membership Chair. As Membership chair she did an exceptional job, reducing delinquencies to zero. In 1992 she was presented a second place award for the Lincoln Bouillon Award. This is a Society award and it is very unusual to have a second place plaque presented as typically only the winners received awards. Lois was also presented the Thomas Brown Regional Award for membership.

Yet again Loran Appleby had a hand in Gordie's ASHRAE career. At a CRC in Boston Loran introduced Gordie to Carl McPhee who, at the time, was the editor of the Handbook Committee. Carl asked Gordie if he would be interested in being a member of the Handbook Committee. Gordie served on the Handbook Committee for 10-12 years. Gordie became the Chair of the committee after about 4-5 years of service. Gordie has received numerous awards during his service to ASHRAE but one of the most distinctive is being made a Fellow of ASHRAE. The status of Fellow is in recognition of accomplishments, achievements and service to the HVAC&R industry. As of 2007 only 1% of ASHRAE members have earned the membership status of Fellow.

On a more social ASHRAE note, Gordie remembers a time when the real fun happened *after* the ASHRAE meeting and business was done. The Roots, Browns, Millers and a number of others would have a grand time after the meetings. The meetings at the time were held at the Rooster Tail, which was both a restaurant and club. The club portion had bands in the evenings and after the meetings were over the wives would join their husbands for dancing and make a night of it. This helped establish friendships and bonds that have lasted a lifetime. ASHRAE is not only a professional society it is also a network of *people*.

Gordie remembered that one of the years that the Champlain Valley Chapter hosted a trade show at the Sheraton hotel, he and Gus Mastro were "manning" the ASHRAE booth when Governor Madeline Kunin stopped by. Gordie made the comment that they were probably the only ones at the show that weren't selling something. Gov. Kunin said, "Well you are selling something." Gordie of course asked, "What's that?" She replied "Competence."

One of Gordie and Lois' favorite things was traveling together throughout their marriage. Lois was also a great spoon and antique bottle collector. Gordie says they had "hundreds of bottles" at one point. They had a camp up on Brown's Mtn. in Starksboro and there were many old farm houses/ruins in the area and Lois would seek them out and go sift through the ruins for bottles, milk bottles, fancy liquor bottles, all kinds.

Gordie has been very active in Veterans organizations and helped start the Shelburne VFW. He had been a member of both the VFW and the American Legion. He also helped start the Optimists Group in Shelburne. This organization has since died out but it was a community service organization, serving the needs of the local community. They also helped start the Shelburne Business and Professionals Association, and Gordie

served as the president for a time. Gordie and Lois have always being interested in and participated in civic minded organizations. Gordie is currently active in the Shelburne Rotary.

In August of 2006 Lois passed away, after a long illness, at her home, with her family. When leaving meetings Gordie would often excuse himself by saying "I need to get home to my bride". We should all be so lucky to have a life and marriage like theirs. Lois is greatly missed by all that had the privilege to know her.

A quote from Gordie that I liked is "you never know if you leave a good legacy or a poor legacy, you just leave it behind." I think we would all agree that both Lois and Gordie have left a good and special legacy.