
in memoriam



Dr. Jerry Taborek, 1922–2008

Dr. Jerry Taborek, a Founding Editor of Heat Transfer Engineering and the first Technical Director of HTRI, died in Sedona, Arizona, USA on October 21, 2008, just eight days before his 86th birthday. Jerry was born October 29, 1922, in Klaster, Czechoslovakia. Between those two sets of dates and geography, Jerry inserted a remarkable record of personal and professional accomplishments, and more living than is allowed to, or forced upon, most of us. He was born in a newly created country after the First World War, maturing and achieving his education under the wartime Nazi regime, escaping from the post-war Soviet domination of Czechoslovakia to West Germany, Canada, and eventually the United States, and playing the critical role in the formation and flowering of the definitive research and design organization in his professional specialty. It is a tale few of us could — or would choose to — match.

For the readers of this journal, two parts of this story are of particular interest. Jerry was largely responsible for the creation of Heat Transfer Research, Inc. (HTRI) in the early 1960's and for its rise to its present central role internationally in the development and utilization of advanced design methods for heat exchangers in the process and energy industries. And he was a major contributor to the literature on heat exchanger design, particularly as a member of the Editorial Board of the Heat Exchanger Design Handbook and as a Founding Editor of Heat Transfer Engineering. Jerry was very active in the (then) Heat Transfer and Energy Conversion Division of AIChE and participated in teaching short courses on specialized topics in heat exchanger design to engineers in industry. These activities were carried out simultaneously with a full family life — Jerry and Ella were parents of Peter, Professor of Physics at UC Irvine, and Eric, Vice President of Chelsio Communications. Ella died in 1980, and Jerry later married Edith Laier.

HTRI is Jerry's signature creation. He was a heat exchanger specialist at Phillips Petroleum in 1960 when he observed the successful launch of Fractionation Research Inc., a cooperative proprietary applied research organization dedicated to the better selection and design of distillation equipment for the process industries. He initiated conversations with Don Kern of "Process Heat Transfer" fame, Al Mueller of DuPont and other industrial heat transfer experts about starting a similar program for heat exchangers. A dozen major users, fabricators, and engineer/contractors were soon signed up, and an HTRI research facility was established at C. F. Braun in Alhambra, California. Jerry became Technical Director until his retirement in 1985, when HTRI's world-wide membership had reached 160.

Jerry brought to the job his strong interest in the use of the computer to do design logic as well as rapid computation, and he had the ability to integrate other people's skills into a united effort. Some of us were lucky enough to be able to work closely with Jerry in relaxed and productive circumstances — typically, a few of Jerry's closest associates questioning, arguing, comparing, and answering around the swimming pool, with Ella providing refreshments. I particularly recall the early days of developing the first computer-based design codes, where some of the correlations and design logic had to be created based on very skimpy source data. Everybody would put in their best models, interpolations, extrapolations, and guesses, and Jerry would decide. It was challenging, it was exciting, and it was fun. And it gave results — and still does.

And the journal you are reading came to fruition in a small meeting at the New Otani Hotel in Tokyo with Jerry, Geoff Hewitt, Ernst Schlunder, Bill Begell and the undersigned in attendance at the International Heat Transfer Conference in 1974. We agreed upon the need for a journal that would encourage the publication of applied heat transfer knowledge while meeting the quality standards of archival literature. The increasing reputation and publication frequency of Heat Transfer Engineering is testimony to the validity of this vision.

After retirement, Jerry and Edith sampled living in several locations before settling on a home in Sedona, Arizona, looking out upon the massive trees along Sedona Creek. Those familiar with the area know that this is a choice vantage point from which to celebrate one's life.

In summary, Jerry's life was well-lived and his reputation well-earned. Jerry will be missed, but above all — Jerry will be remembered.

With gratitude for Jerry's friendship,
Ken Bell

(I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Jerry's family and Dr. Joe Palen, Jerry's closest associate at HTRI, in preparing this memorial.)

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