



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MINING,
METALLURGICAL, AND PETROLEUM ENGINEERS

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

James R. Jordan: Reflections on AIME's History & Years of Volunteer Leadership

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with AIME 2006 President from SPE, James R. Jordan, conducted by AIME Executive Director Michele Lawrie-Munro on October 4, 2022, at SPE's Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition. This interview is part of the AIME Oral History Program.

ABSTRACT

James "Jim" Jordan earned his bachelor's degree, with honors, in petroleum engineering from the University of Tulsa in 1957. Upon graduating, Jim joined Shell Oil and held petrophysical engineering positions in the company's research and operations organizations. He became chief petrophysical engineer in the company's corporate headquarters before branching out and working with Quicksilver Resources, Inc. as an occasional consultant. Jim's true passion as a petroleum engineer, however, was not the work he did in industry but the collaborations he had with other engineers through SPE, UEF, AIME, and AIME's Member Societies. Since his initial involvement with AIME in 1956, Jim has held over 40 society-wide positions on administrative and technical committees and has acted as an AIME trustee for three terms. He supported AIME during its relocation from NYC to Colorado, led the digitizing process of the organization's files, causing the formation of OneMine.org and OnePetro.org, and directed the organization to become a pioneer of the ESG movement. He served as AIME president in 2006, helping to ensure the financial and organizational stability of AIME and to create Constituent Societies and programs focused on supporting the organization's four Member Societies. Jim earned the Society of Petroleum Engineer's Distinguished Service Award in 1988, the DeGolyer Distinguished Service Medal in 1991, and an AIME/SPE Honorary Membership in 1995. He is revered in industry for his devotion and service to engineering organizations.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 00:10 Introduction
- 01:38 Joining AIME in 1956, During a Time of Transition
- 03:23 AIME and Its Constituent Societies - Redefining the Mission
- 09:54 Returning to the AIME Board in 2000
- 12:45 AIME - Leaving the Big Apple and Moving to the Mile High City
- 15:53 Establishing the Colorado Office and Focusing on Mission, Vision, & Values
- 23:40 Personal Recollections
- 26:50 The Value of Volunteerism - Gaining Personal Benefits from Leadership Roles
- 28:55 The United Engineering Foundation - Learning the Value of Diversity

00:10 INTRODUCTION

Lawrie-Munro:

This is AIME Executive Director Michele Lawrie-Munro, and I'm at the Society of Petroleum Engineer's Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition on Tuesday, October 4th, 2022. In honor of the conclusion of AIME's 150th anniversary celebrations over the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I'm pleased to have with me AIME 2006 President and SPE 1984 President Jim Jorden. Jim was a longtime Shell employee and owned a formation evaluation consultancy. He's one of the most extensive servants of AIME and its member societies I've come across in my nineteen years with the organization. He's a three-time AIME trustee from 1983 to 1984, 2000 to 2001, and 2004 to 2008, and represented the groups on the board of the United Engineering Foundation from 2005 to 2009. Jim received the Society of Petroleum Engineer's Distinguished Service Award in 1988, DeGolyer Distinguished Service Medal in 1991, and AIME/SPE Honorary Membership in 1995. Jim was already selected by SPE to be one of a handful of folks to have his audio oral history captured in 2019, which you can access on AIME's website. Today, Jim has agreed to share with us not only highlights from his impressive service with the organizations but also reminisces of important milestones in AIME's legacy since he became a member.

01:38 JOINING AIME IN 1956, DURING A TIME OF TRANSITION

Lawrie-Munro:

Thanks so much for agreeing to speak with us today, Jim. You joined SPE in 1956, just before AIME'S divisions became Member Societies. Do you remember how or why you joined? And do you have any recollections of what AIME and its member societies were like at that time?

Jorden:

Thank you, Michele. You know, I joined AIME, and that's what it was in those days, in 1956, because it was very obvious that petroleum engineering students at the University of Tulsa needed to be a member to help their professional career that was laying just in front of them. So, that's why. Here's an incident that I remember that helps perhaps explain the dominance of AIME versus SPE in 1956. That year, there was a student paper contest held at Oklahoma A&M, now known as Oklahoma State University, but then it was A&M. And I was a participant in that student paper contest, and I think won third place, not first place, but third place. We had AIME officers, and the president, there at that event. And the award for third place was a little miniature slide rule, and on the case was embossed AIME 1956. AIME was the dominant organization, as we'll talk in a moment. And, just one year later, there were big changes in the organization.

03:23 AIME AND ITS CONSTITUENT SOCIETIES – REDEFINING THE MISSION

Lawrie-Munro:

Excellent. So, your first term as AIME trustee was right before you became SPE President and just before AIME's former Member Societies became separately incorporated from AIME. What was that like?

Jorden:

Well, as I said just a moment ago, in 1957, that was a major milestone for the AIME governance. And, ever since '57, at which time the three constituent societies were formed, ever since that time, I think AIME has been on a trajectory of redefining its mission and downsizing its activities. And so, at this particular point in time, I automatically became a member of the AIME board, ex officio, by virtue of my office in the SPE. And, you know, these major milestones, I think it's worthwhile to highlight that they are the result of several years of study by the AIME board on what needs to be done to address perceived problems. So, the study goes on, and then decisions are made and actions implemented, and that's what happened here. 1984, all three societies solidly approved a change in governance. The member societies were separately incorporated. The AIME board structure changed from directors to trustees, and each society had five representatives on the board, those people in the presidential rotation for their society, plus some at-large folk. And, this was a time of great change for AIME, perhaps exemplified by the fact that in 1983, AIME had twenty million dollars in financial assets, and at the end of 1985, two years later, they had seven million.

What happened to the other sixteen? They were distributed to the member societies. An example of the changing focus from, and to, what I think is today the major mission of AIME to support its member societies. Now, in those days, the AIME board focused its time and energy on three major topics, I think. A devolution of the authority to the member society that's what it was all about. From that, change in governance, perpetuation, and of the awards and the ceremonies that had long been practiced, and then an upward-looking relationship to umbrella organizations like the AAES, American Association of Engineering Societies, or ABET, Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. So, those were sort of the business focuses of the society in those days. But, you know, one personal recollection that I have from then was the annual awards banquet held in New York City. Usually a very formal affair, just like Downton Abbey. The men all wore tuxedos. The women all wore evening gowns, not just the head table, but everybody in all was dressed to the nines. It was elegant. And the honorary members that were there, and I'm thinking of SPE people like Claude Hocott, John Bell, and Mark Krause when they arrived in New York, they put their honorary member medallions in the hotel safe deposit box. On the day of the awards banquet, they would retrieve that from storage, put it on their neck, and wear it proudly to the banquet. It was impressive. That was a fond, fond recollection.

Lawrie-Munro:

Oh. And as a fan of Downton Abbey, maybe we need to bring that back.

Jorden:

I got back yesterday to the room; Shirley's in there watching the second, the first movie where the King comes, you know?

Lawrie-Munro:

Yes.

Jorden:

That was a separate movie after the TV was done.

Lawrie-Munro:

Yes.

Jorden:

She found that on some channel and was watching it like crazy.

Lawrie-Munro:

Wonderful. Yes. We love that as well. One thing I will say is that you're absolutely right. I think, back in that time, it did kind of bridge us to where we are today with AIME's current mission. Starting with Member Direct and overarching support for the member societies and trying to find the common thread amongst them that we, AIME, can give funding for. And that ties to our mission today. I really encapsulate AIME as a quasi-foundation, quasi-historical society, and we're still very much focused also on legacy preservation and promotion. Those awards and scholarships that we have as endowment funds to support and oral history captures like this to preserve and promote the legacy and the experiences of AIME. So, yes, definitely thank you for sharing that history and how we've kind of evolved from those days, but still, it's a reflection of where we are today in some ways.

09:54 RETURNING TO THE AIME BOARD IN 2000

Lawrie-Munro:

What drew you back to AIME for a second term in 2000-2001, and what challenges and opportunities were in front of you?

Jorden:

Well, I joined the AIME board, at that time, really in response to the persistent urging of Dan Adamson, who was the Executive Director of SPE. He was just on my case all the time to join the AIME board. So, I did that. The governance had changed from the one I just described earlier, a few years prior to that. And, at this time in 2000, why, there were three, no, sorry, yes, three representatives from each of the now four Member Societies. We, the board, met twice each year, always in February or March for the official board meeting and then later in the summer for an interim board meeting. So, that was the structure. Then, it had changed, and we will see it changed more in the future.

I mentioned earlier the financial support that happened when sixteen million dollars was distributed to the societies. Well, in the early 2000s, they had a couple of programs. One was called Member Direct. And, in this particular program, financial assets were given to a particular Member Society based on an application that they had made to AIME. The board decided, based on those documents and those recommendations, they would distribute money directly to the particular Member Society. But also, in addition to that, they had some so-called overarching programs, which were perceived to be a benefit to everybody. So, those programs were funded through AIME. The beneficiaries were all four societies at the time. So we had some interesting experiences deciding how to allocate the dollars between Member Direct and overarching programs. Board meetings often became lively.

Lawrie-Munro:

Luckily, I followed those “lively” board meetings. So, it’s been less lively, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing.

12:45 AIME — LEAVING THE BIG APPLE AND MOVING TO THE MILE HIGH CITY

Jorden:

I'll go on to say another recollection I have of that particular time was, the board at that time was really concerned with the performance of its investment portfolio. And that, of course, was a function of the general economics in the USA. But nonetheless, although we spent a lot of time on finances in the era, I think one of the most significant things that ever happened to AIME occurred during this period, at which time a Strategic Directions Committee was created in August 1999 and was charged at the board meeting in March of 2002, and I'll quote here, "To obtain a legal opinion regarding the ramifications of relocating the headquarters from New York City, to examine the most cost-effective operational location, and report the findings and recommendations." That report was made, the recommendations were made, the decisions were made. And AIME left New York City after a long, long time.

Lawrie-Munro:

Absolutely. A couple of the sister engineering founder societies had left prior to that, left New York City prior to that. So I think that was just following the trend. When AIME was able to get out of its expensive lease in New York, it did. And I think that was a good thing for AIME to scale back operations, but it was a big change. That's when I got hired. Luckily they came to the Denver area where I was. And we had an entirely new staff that was hired at that time. So, it definitely changed the trajectory of AIME.

Jorden:

And, I want to insert here a memorial, a remembrance, and honor my colleague George Sawyer, who was with Exxon and was a member of the AIME board when I came on in this particular time. He subsequently became AIME president in 2002. In my opinion, he was the driving force to make those changes happen. And, it was not without resistance, and heartburn, and anxiety, but George persevered, and the AIME that we know today, I give him a lot of credit for making that happen.

Lawrie-Munro:

Absolutely. I agree. I was able to meet George, lucky enough to meet him. He was a great man.

15:53 ESTABLISHING THE COLORADO OFFICE AND FOCUSING ON MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

Lawrie-Munro:

So, then you volunteered to become an officer for the group. Your leadership in strategic planning for AIME helped ensure its financial stability and organizational survival into the 21st century. So, tell us about that term.

Jorden:

Okay. Well, there was just a two-year gap when I left the board as a trustee until I returned in the

presidential rotation. And, it didn't take persistent urging from Dan Adamson to make that happen because I saw the progress that AIME was making. My sense was that their operational efficiency and effectiveness was just increasing by orders of magnitude. So, I thought I can come back and help continue to contribute to this progress that has already got started. So, at that time, with another reorganization, the board was only two representatives from each of the four Member Societies. And one of those persons was, like me, serving in the presidential rotation, and a second person from each society at large. So, those were the two. The AIME Executive Director was a non-voting trustee at that time. Again, highlighting the efficiencies of the organization and the cost-effectiveness, in-person meetings were just once each year during the summer. We conducted the rest of our business through teleconferences, generally in the spring and the fall, but also as needed if some emergency arose, which seldom did, really.

Lawrie-Munro:

Absolutely.

Jorden:

So, I was on the board, then, four years in the presidential rotation. And I like to think of those four years as divided into two periods. [During] the first two years, the focus of the board, the energy of the board, was directed towards implementing the operations from the new office in Littleton, Colorado. AIME was a tenant in SME headquarters in those days. Newly hired staff, of which you were one, converted a lot of the historical records to a digital format, which, of course, reduces space and allows access and search incredibly better than pulling books off a shelf. So, they also, continuing in the digital or electronic theme, upgraded the website. [The] website became, I think, the primary conduit of communication with the membership. So, those were the things that happened in the first half of my four-year period in the presidential rotation.

During the second half, I think the board focused on two things: developing a new mission statement, strategies for implementing the mission, vision, and values. We hired a consultant, and I well remember learning a lot from that man about what mission, vision, and values are all about. And, all of this discussion on strategy and mission, I think, led to two multidisciplinary initiatives. One was an Emerging Leaders Alliance, a workshop where young, emerging leaders from all societies gathered together to support each other and learn from each other and learn from their mentors. The second initiative was an Engineering Solutions for Sustainability, talking about materials and resources, another workshop and that brought together technical experts. The first initiative was more about governance. The second was more about technology experts from government, from NGO partners and to talk about what are the challenges for society going to be in the 21st century. That workshop resulted in some large grants from the United Engineering Foundation. So, I like to think that AIME was one of the pioneers in what we now know as the ESG Movement. That particular workshop, to my knowledge, was one of the first ever in the minerals, mining, and petroleum fields that talked about what are societal challenges. [During my time on the board as president, those two initiatives, they sort of made AIME a forerunner, a pioneer of the ESG initiatives that we see pervasive in society today. So, that was, I think, an important step that AIME took at that time.]

Lawrie-Munro:

I think the thread that I've seen in my years with AIME is definitely one of trying to find that

commonality amongst all the groups. And, definitely, young leaders and supporting young leaders and sustainability were two themes that ran for many years within AIME, and we worked on specific programs for that and contributed to specific programs for that. So, that was a pleasure to be able to do.

The one other thing I wanted to mention, too, was I think the transition from New York to Colorado for the headquarters office; although it was difficult, I think it was probably helpful in a way. It helped facilitate the streamlining of AIME operations. Because we, honestly, the board was set up. I mean, they were streamlined when that happened, and they were really of a mindset to roll up their sleeves and do that governance streamlining and support that operation streamlining at that time. So, that was very helpful.

And then, the digitization you mentioned, I think, was a particularly kind of bright light, too, in that period of time because there were latent funds that were sitting at AIME, latent endowment funds. We discovered those. And one of them, in particular, the James Douglas Library Fund, was focused on supporting the technical library. And literally, AIME archives, when I pulled them off the shelves, were falling apart in my hands. And, I thought, my goodness, can we not get these digitized so that more people can access them, and we don't lose some of this physical inventory that we have here at the headquarters offices? So, I think that was, again, a bright light, and it led to the birth of OneMine.org, the digital library in the mining disciplines that is administered by SME, one of the Member Societies. It actually enhanced OnePetro.org, too, that SPE has because they received all of AIME digital archives in the petroleum field. So, thanks for those recollections. Those were bright lights, and your leadership during that time was critical to lead us through those efforts.

23:40 PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF AN ERA LONG GONE

Moving to maybe more personal recollections of this particular era, long gone are those formal AIME awards banquets that I spoke of earlier. Awards were now presented at the individual society meetings of the Member Societies. One task of the AIME president, and I did my share of it, was to travel to those various Member Society meetings and present the AIME awards in conjunction with the Member Society awards that were presented there. So, that was a fun time, to get to know those people, to see how the other three member societies— I was well aware of what SPE did, but it was an educational experience for me to see, well, AIST does it this way, and there's nothing wrong with that and et cetera. So the AIME president traveled to the other Member Societies' [conferences] to present their awards. But, as far as our own internal process, our annual meeting, which was usually a casual summer meeting, at the time of the rotation of the board officers and members. And, during those more casual summer meetings, in the off hours, you might say, well, we'd do some really fun things like tour the boutique wineries in Napa Valley, wonderful. Horseback ride in the Colorado Rockies to look at the scenery, look at the animals, look at the wildflowers; also, wonderful. Some of it, later on, I think perhaps maybe after I got off the board, those extracurricular activities were a little more focused on business, like touring of mines or drilling rigs, but, again, always expanding the various participants' knowledge of the larger universe of AIME, not just petroleum, but the other things. Not just mining but the other things.

Lawrie-Munro:

Absolutely.

Jorden:

Expanding. Expanding our— increasing our diversity.

Lawrie-Munro:

That's right. And, that's one of my favorite parts of my job is planning that summer meeting. It's always a pleasure to be able to, like you said, expand people's knowledge, especially of the industries that we all love so dearly.

26:50 THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERISM - GAINING PERSONAL BENEFITS FROM LEADERSHIP ROLES

Lawrie-Munro:

So, how has your involvement in AIME and UEF, if you'd like, and SPE benefited you, or what has been the most meaningful to you, Jim?

Jorden:

Well, it benefited me, I think, in the fact that the opportunity for leadership resulted really in a significant gain in self-confidence and self-esteem, and also, maybe, saw the value of volunteerism. I guess that's the way I'd phrase that. Working with SPE for a long time, AIME for a shorter amount of time, and the UEF for an even shorter amount of time. All of that reinforced the notion that, in our society, volunteerism can make a difference. And I saw that personally. I saw myself grow personally by being privileged to be offered the positions of leadership.

Lawrie-Munro:

Absolutely. I think one of the things that I've seen with trustees coming through AIME is that your perspective gets broadened because you're now interacting with people from different disciplines. Especially at the United Engineering Foundation, where you interact with mechanical engineers, civil engineers, and electrical engineers. So, we're going to need all those engineering disciplines to tackle some of the big world problems now and in the future, obviously. So, thank you for your service in that regard.

Jorden:

My pleasure.

28:55 THE UNITED ENGINEERING FOUNDATION - LEARNING THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY

Lawrie-Munro:

Is there anything else about the United Engineering Foundation service that you would like to relay?

Jorden:

No, I think you just said it. The opportunity to become acquainted with people from other disciplines. My employer, Shell Oil Company, in the late 1990s, went through an organizational effectiveness

exercise for the upstream segment. One of the things that we learned in that experience is diversity results in better performance. And, of course, UEF couldn't be more diverse: electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, and petroleum engineers. So that UEF experience was— helped me reinforce what I had also learned from my company about the value of diversity.

Lawrie-Munro:

Oh, excellent. So, is there anything else in closing that you'd like to share with us from your extensive volunteer experience that we haven't highlighted yet?

Jorden:

No, I think not. We've pretty well covered it.

Lawrie-Munro:

Okay. Well, it's always such a pleasure spending time with you, Jim. Thank you so much for your willingness to share your thoughts and experiences with the AIME and its Member Societies yet again.

Jorden:

Okay. Thank you. My pleasure.