

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

MELVIN S. DAY

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Robert V. Williams

at

Washington, D.C.

on

15 July 1997

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

Melvin S. Day

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION  
Oral History Program  
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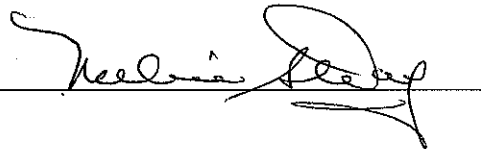
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MELVIN S. DAY

1923 Born in Lewiston, Maine, on 22 January

Education

1943 B.S., chemistry, Bates College

Professional Experience

1943-1944 Chemist, Metal Hydrides Inc.

1944-1946 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Atomic Energy Commission

1946-1948 Science Analyst

1950-1956 Assistant Chief, Technical Information Services Division

1956-1958 Chief, Technical Services Division

1958-1960 Director, Technical Information Division

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

1960-1961 Deputy Director, Technical Information and Educational Programs

1961-1967 Director, Science and Technology Information Division

1967-1970 Deputy Assistant Administrator, Technical Utilization

National Science Foundation

1970-1972 Head, Office of Science Information Service

1972-1978 Deputy Director, National Library of Medicine

1978-1982 Director, National Technical Information Service

1982-1984 Vice President, Information Technology Group, Inc.,  
wholly-owned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Corp., Netherlands

1984-1986 Vice President, Research Publications,  
wholly-owned by International Thompson

1986-1988 Senior Vice President, Herner and Company

1988-1997      President, M. Day Consulting  
1991-1994      Executive Vice President, BIIS Corporation  
1994-1996      Executive Vice President, GlobeNet Corporation

#### Honors

1960      Sustained Superior Performance Award, Atomic Energy Commission  
1971      Exceptional Service Medal, National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
1974      Miembro Correspondiente Extranjero de la Academia de Ciencias Fisicas,  
            Matematicas y Naturales, Republica de Venezuela  
1975      Director's Award, National Library of Medicine  
1976      Superior Service Award, U.S. Public Health Service  
1982      Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science  
1992      Honorary member, International Council for Scientific and Technical  
            Information (ICSTI)  
1997      Distinguished Service Award, ICSTI  
1997      Honorary Fellow, National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Societies

## ABSTRACT

Melvin Day begins the interview with a discussion of his family and childhood years in Boston. Day grew up during the Depression and often worked in his father's oil company after school to help ends meet. Day attended Bates College as a chemistry major, receiving his BA in 1943. After graduation, Day immediately accepted a position with Metal Hydrides, Inc. in Beverly, Massachusetts. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1944. Recognizing Day's background in chemistry, the Army sent him to serve at Oak Ridge National Laboratory as part of the Corps of Engineers for the Manhattan Project. In 1946, Day was assigned to work for the Atomic Energy Commission [AEC] under Major Alberto Thompson, reviewing newly declassified documents from the Manhattan Project. Day involved himself in all aspects of the AEC documentation program from abstracting and indexing to publishing. By 1947, AEC was producing *Abstracts of Declassified Documents*, which later became *Nuclear Science Abstracts*. In 1958, Day transferred to AEC headquarters in Washington, D.C. to be the Director of the Technical Information Office. Day and the AEC pioneered the use of the computer as a primary tool for document production and searching.

Day joined the newly established National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA] in 1960, and developed the plans for NASA's information program. After months of deliberation, NASA chose to contract out the management of technical information, which proved to be very successful. NASA's program became the model for documentation programs around the world. NASA formed a database of unpublished technical documents called *STAR, Scientific and Technical Aerospace Reports*. Later, NASA merged *STAR* with the Institute for Aerospace Sciences' [IAS] database of published literature called *International Aerospace Abstracts [IAA]*, forming NASA RECON in 1965. Day recognized that NASA was heading towards an online system. By 1966, Lockheed developed the software and NASA RECON was available online at NASA centers across the country. Day was a member of many information societies, including COSATI, which was a White House committee. Working through COSATI, other government agencies, like NASA, and AEC, could establish a common ground on formats and standards in information science. Day also headed the U.S. delegation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]. In 1970, Day served as chairman of COSATI. That same year, Day began working for the National Science Foundation [NSF]. There he worked on the funding end of developing information systems. He left NSF in 1972 and became the Deputy Director of the National Library of Medicine [NLM]. There he helped build the Lister Hill Center and to develop MEDLARS and MEDLINE as online systems. During this time, Day served as president of American Society for Information Science [ASIS], from 1975-1976. Day left NLM in 1978 and became the Director of the National Technical Information Service [NTIS], and turned the government-sponsored organization into a self-supporting organization in just one year. Day also was responsible for making the NTIS database available for online searching. In the face of much adversity, Day accomplished his goal of obtaining better computers and successfully training the staff at NTIS. Day retired from NTIS in 1982 and accepted a position with Thyssen-Bornemisza Information Technology Group. In 1984, Day left Thyssen-Bornemisza and became Vice President of Research Publications. After leaving Research Publications in 1986, Day became Senior Vice

President of Herner and Company. Day concludes the interview with a discussion of his communications venture, influential teachers during his career, and the future of information science.

#### INTERVIEWER

Robert V. Williams is a professor of library and information science at the University of South Carolina. He holds a Ph.D. in library and information studies from the University of Wisconsin, Madison; an M.S. in library and information science from Florida State University; and an M.A. in history from New York University. Before joining the University of South Carolina in 1978, he was an archivist and information services manager for the Ford Foundation, and the Georgia Department of Archives and History. Williams has also been an information consultant for many organizations including Appalachian Council of Governments of Greenville, South Carolina, and Pontifical Catholic University Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic. He came to the Chemical Heritage Foundation as the Eugene Garfield Fellow in the History of Scientific Information in 1997. He is a member of the South Carolina Historical Records Advisory Board, the American Library Association (ALA), and the American Society for Information Science (ASIS), where he served as chair of ASIS History and Foundations of Information Science Special Interest Group in 1994-1995. Williams is also a member of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) and Chair of the SLA Membership Committee. Williams has numerous publications on the historical role of information science.

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