

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

EDWARD DONLEY

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

at

Belleair, Florida

on

26 January 1995

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program
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Edward Donley

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EDWARD DONLEY

1921 Born in Highland Park, Michigan, on 26 November

Education

1943 Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering, Lawrence Technical University
1959 Advanced Management Program, Harvard University

Professional Experience

1943-1946 Air Products and Chemicals, Inc.
Draftsman

1946-1949 Continental Aviation
Engineer

1949-1951 Air Products and Chemicals, Inc.
Engineer
1951-1952 Engineering Manager
1952-1954 Sales Engineer
1954-1959 Vice President of Sales
1959-1966 Vice President and General Manager
1966 Executive Vice President
1966-1978 President
1973-1986 Chief Executive Officer
1978-1986 Chairman of the Board
1986-1992 Chairman, Executive Committee

1992-1994 Chairman of the Board, American Standard, Inc.

Honors

1978 Honor Award, Commercial Development Association
1980 Chemical Industry Medal, Society of Chemical Industry
1977 Doctor of Industrial Management, Lawrence Technological University
1978 Doctor of Commercial Science, Villanova University
1978 Doctor of Laws, Lehigh University
1979 Doctor of Humane Letters, Muhlenberg College

1980 Doctor of Laws, Allentown College
1980 Doctor of Science, Cedar Crest College
1981 Doctor of Commercial Science, Drexel University
1984 Doctor of Humane Letters, Wilkes College
1986 Doctor of Humane Letters, Lafayette College
1987 Doctor of Laws, Moravian College
1987 Doctor of Humanities, Lawrence Technological University

ABSTRACT

The interview begins with Edward Donley describing his early years growing up on his family's farm and attending a one-room schoolhouse. After graduating from high school, Donley joined the Civilian Conservation Corps and, after applying to several colleges, attained a scholarship to Lawrence Technological University in Detroit, Michigan. As a senior working towards a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering, Donley began mechanical drafting work part-time for Detroit's newly established Air Products company. Donley describes his college education during the war and compares his life-long experiences with Lawrence Tech and Air Products, watching both institutions develop from fledgling to flourishing. During Donley's early career, Air Products' work involved military contracts to develop portable units for extracting oxygen from the air. With the cancellation of military contracts after World War II, the company declined and Donley went to work temporarily for Continental Aviation and Engineering Company, returning after Air Products moved to Emmaus, Pennsylvania, to rebuild. Donley recalls his professional development as a manager and engineer, and his close relationship with mentor Leonard Pool. As Air Products grew through the contributions of Pool, Carl Anderson, and others, Donley rose through the ranks to take on increasing responsibility, eventually playing a large role in developing liquid oxygen plants first to fulfill Air Force contracts and later for commercial production. Donley next details Air Products' involvement with hydrogen for ammonia production, and eventually with liquid hydrogen. He describes the recruitment and contribution of several engineers and managers, the change in Air Products' work environment from family to professional emphasis, and the reasons and strategy of the company's move into the chemical business. In the final section of the interview, Donley examines his presidency, beginning with Pool's gradual transfer of responsibility, the origins and emphasis of Air Products' environmental division, and the institution of the matrix management system. He discusses his views on the role of engineering in long-term planning, and the importance of recruitment, career development, and safety programs; he also describes several important individuals who contributed to Air Products' later development. He closes with comments on American educational reform and entrepreneurial efforts, scientific innovation, changes in management agendas over the years, and federal regulation of business.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is Professor of Chemistry Emeritus at Wilkes University, where he was a faculty member from 1959 to 1990. He served there as chemistry department chair from 1970 to 1986 and environmental science department chair from 1987 to 1990. He was chair of the American Chemical Society's Division of the History of Chemistry in 1986, received the Division's outstanding paper award in 1989, and presented more than twenty-five papers before the Division at national meetings of the Society. He has been on the advisory committee of the Society's National Historic Chemical Landmarks committee since its inception in 1992. He developed the oral history program of the Chemical Heritage Foundation beginning in 1985, and was the Foundation's Director of Oral History from 1990 to 1995. He currently writes for the American Chemical Society News Service.

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NOTES

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