

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

JAMES A. FISHER

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Marjorie Gapp & Lloyd DeWitt

in

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

on

19 December 2001

(With Subsequent Corrections & Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION  
Oral History Program  
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Chemical Heritage Foundation  
Oral History Program  
315 Chestnut Street  
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JAMES A. FISHER

1920 Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 15 March

Education

1942 B.A., chemistry minor, Yale University

Professional Experience

1942-1944	Alcoa Niagara Works Engineer
	Fisher Scientific International, Inc.
1945-1950	Sales Staff
1950-1960	Sales Manager, Director
1963-1981	Senior Vice President and Director
1981-1985	Assistant to the President
1985-present	Chairman and President, Kipling Corporation

## ABSTRACT

James A. Fisher begins the interview with a description of his family and early years in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After graduating early from Yale University because of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Fisher secured a position in a smelter plant making aluminum for warplanes at Alcoa Inc. In 1945, Fisher left Alcoa to work for his father, Chester G. Fisher, at the family business, Fisher Scientific International Inc. While at Fisher Scientific, Fisher became fascinated with his father's collection of alchemical art. Fisher's interest grew to the extent that he began to purchase paintings, engravings, and photographs relating to alchemy to add to the growing Fisher Collection. After the death of his father, Fisher was instrumental in the creation of the Fisher Museum, which was used to display the Fisher Collection, and the Pasteur Room, which was dedicated to the achievements of Louis Pasteur. Fisher concludes the interview with reflections on his role in the donation of the Fisher Collection to the Chemical Heritage Foundation.

## INTERVIEWERS

Marjorie Gapp is the Curator of Fine Art at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia. She comes from a fine-arts background and was awarded both a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant. As part of her work with the collections, she has mounted many exhibits including, *Spinning the Elements: Wallace Carothers and the Nylon Legacy*, *Dow Chemical Portrayed*, and *Transmutations: Alchemy in Art: Selections from the Eddleman and Fisher Collections*. She recently coordinated a yearlong research project of the Eddleman and Fisher Collections of alchemical art.

Lloyd DeWitt is a Ph.D. Candidate in Art History at the University of Maryland, College Park, and is currently a Museum Fellow working at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He was the 2001-2002 Price Fellow, and collaborated with Lawrence Principe on *Transmutations*, the CHF guidebook to the Fisher and Eddleman Collections. His area of specialization is Dutch and Flemish painting of the seventeenth century. In 1993, he received his MA in Art History from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

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