

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

JOHN W. JOHNSTONE

Transcript of an Interview

Conducted by

James G. Traynham

at

Norwalk, Connecticut

on

11 February 1997

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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This project is made possible through the generosity of Society of Chemical Industry member companies.

John W. Johnston

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JOHN W. JOHNSTONE

1932 Born in Brooklyn, New York on 19 November

Education

1954 B.A., chemistry and physics, Hartwick College
1970 Harvard University Advanced Management Program

Professional Experience

Hooker Chemical Company

1954-1957 Sales Representative, Oldbury Electrochemical Company, New York, NY
1957-1963 Sales Representative, Cincinnati, OH
1963-1965 District Sales Manager, Philadelphia, PA
1965-1968 Industry Marketing Manager, Niagara Falls, NY
1968-1970 Manufacturing, Sales, and Marketing Manager, Tacoma, WA
1970-1971 Assistant General Manager, Electrochemicals Division, Niagara Falls, NY
1971-1973 Vice President, Electrochemicals Division, Niagara Falls, NY
1973-1975 Group Vice President, Niagara Falls, NY

1976-1979 Airco Inc.
President, Airco Alloys Division

Olin Corporation

1979-1980 Vice President and General Manager, Industrial Products,
and Senior Vice-President, Chemical Group
1980-1983 Corporate Vice President and President, Chemical Group
1983-1985 Executive Vice President
1985-1987 President
1988-1996 President, CEO, and Chairman of the Board

Honors

1990 Honorary D. Sc., Hartwick College
1996 Chemical Industry Medal, Society of Chemical Industry (American Section)
1995 Silver Beaver Award, Boy Scouts of America
1996 Winthrop-Sears Medal, Chemists' Club

ABSTRACT

John W. Johnstone begins the interview with a description of his childhood days in the boroughs of New York City. While in high school, he was encouraged by John McManus to study chemistry. After graduating from Far Rockaway High School, Johnstone attended Hartwick College, receiving a B.A. in chemistry and physics in 1954. He sought a career in the petrochemicals industry. After interviewing with several companies, Johnstone's physics professor set up an interview for a sales assistantship with Oldbury Electrochemical Company. He began working there in 1954. When Hooker Chemical Company acquired Oldbury Electrochemical Company in 1957, Johnstone joined the staff of Hooker. Johnstone rose through the ranks at Hooker from a sales representative to Group Vice President in Niagara Falls. While employed by Hooker, he attended the Harvard Advanced Management Program. Occidental Petroleum acquired Hooker in the early 1970s, and in 1975, Johnstone made the difficult decision to join Airco, Inc. He served as president of their alloys division until 1979 when he left Airco, Inc. to join the Olin Corporation. While with Olin Corporation, Johnstone worked for successful re-engineering and expansion of the company. He developed the Olin Moral Rock and Responsible Care programs in order to address rising environmental concerns. Johnstone concludes his interview with a discussion of the future of research and development in the chemical industry, reflections on winning the 1996 Chemical Industry Medal, and thoughts on his family.

INTERVIEWER

James G. Traynham is a Professor of Chemistry at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. He holds a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from Northwestern University. He joined Louisiana State University in 1963 and served as chemistry department chairperson from 1968 to 1973. He was chairman of the American Chemical Society's Division of the History of Chemistry in 1988 and is currently councilor of the Baton Rouge section of the American Chemical Society. He was a member of the American Chemical Society's Joint-Board Council on Chemistry and Public Affairs, as well as a member of the Society's Committees on Science, Chemical Education, and Organic Chemistry Nomenclature. He has written over ninety publications, including a book on organic nomenclature and a book on the history of organic chemistry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Family Background and Early Education
Growing up in New York. Boy Scouts. High school years. Playing basketball.
Influence of John McManus in education.
- 5 College Education and Early Career
B.A. in chemistry and physics. Looking for a job in petrochemical industry. Sales
assistantship at Oldbury Electrochemical Company. Acquisition of Oldbury by
Hooker Chemical Company.
- 8 Career Advancement
District manager at Hooker. Promoted to manufacturing, sales and marketing manager
and then assistant division manager. Attending Harvard Advanced Management
Program.
- 14 Airco
Leaving Hooker Chemical Company for Airco Inc. Customer relations. President of
alloys division. Traveling. Love Canal. Decision to leave Airco.
- 19 Olin
President of industrial chemicals. Corporate shift from agriculture to chemicals.
Research and development. Electronics. Executive Vice-President. Company
restructuring.
- 26 Service and Environmental Concern
Olin Moral Rock. Responsible Care. Chairman of Chemical Manufacturers
Association. Environmental issues.
- 31 Management in a Global Business
Downsizing. Chlor-alkali and biocides. Research and development. Chemical
innovation. Winning Chemical Industry Medal. Leadership. Research Corporation.
Hartwick College board.
- 38 Final Thoughts
Reflections on career and family.
- 41 Index

INDEX

A

Air Products, 22, 33
Airco, 15–19
 Alloys Division, 15–17
 plant in Sweden, 15
Albright & Wilson, 6, 8
 Erco, 8
Allen, Booz, 22
Allied Chemical, 7
American Brands, 38
American Chemical Society, 6
Annapolis, Maryland, 38
Antwerp, Belgium, 32
Ashland, 22
AT&T, 3
Atlanta, Georgia, 37
Atlantic Richfield Chemical Company (ARCO), 6, 31, 33

B

Baldwin, James, 11, 13–14, 16, 35
Barnes, James, 13
Bay Ridge, New York, 1
Ben & Jerry's, 36
Berry, Richard, 23
Boy Scouts of America, 7, 34
 Fairfield County Boy Scout Council, 39
Boyd, Robert B., 10, 35
Breeze's Department Store, 4
British Oxygen, 16, 18
Brooklyn, New York, 1, 8

C

Calgon, 14
Cavan, Ireland, 1
Celgene Corporation, 34
Charleston, Tennessee, 20
Chemical Bank, 34
Chemical Industry Medal, 34
Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA), 26–29, 35
 Business Roundtable, 30
 Chlorine Council, 30
 Community Awareness Emergency Response, 28
 Superfund Committee, 30

Superfund Reform Committee, 30
Chemstar, 30
Cheshire, Connecticut, 33
Chlor-alkali technology, 18
Chlorine dioxide, 8
Ciba-Geigy, 32
Cincinnati, Ohio, 5, 8–9, 11
Coey, Jack, 17–18
Colgate-Dardin, 38
Columbus, Mississippi, 8
Conoco, 13
C-SPAN, 37

D

DDT, 30
Decker, Sherman, 4
Detroit Pistons, 38
Di-nitro-toluene, 33
Doe Run, Georgia, 20
Dow Chemical Company, 11–12, 18, 21
Drexel University, 38
Dunlap, Al, 25
DuPont, 11, 32

E

East Alton, Illinois, 24
Electronic chemicals, 22, 32
Environmental Protection Agency, 27, 31

F

Far Rockaway High School, 1, 3
Fuji, 22

G

General Electric Capital, 38
GEON, 32
Gevuris, Russ, 23
Grand Central Station, 8

H

Hammer, Armand, 11, 14, 23
Hand, Learned, 31
Hartwick College, 4–7, 36
 board, 37
 curriculum, 37

Harvard Advanced Management Program, 13
Harvard Business School, 11
Head & Shoulders, 32
Henske, John, 18, 20, 23–25
Hirl, J. Roger, 18, 24, 35
Holland, Robert, 36
Hooker Chemical Company, 8–11, 14–15, 17–19, 21
Horniman, Alex, 26
Houston, Texas, 23
Hunt, Philip H. Company, 22

I

IBM, 13, 32, 38
Iowa State University, 10
Irani, Raymond, 18–20, 23–24

J

Jackson Hole, Wyoming, 37
Jamaica, New York, 2–3
James Madison University, 20
Johns-Manville Corporation, 30
Johnstone, John W.
 basketball, 3–4, 6–7
 children, 38–39
 father, 1–2
 industry marketing manager, 11
 mother, 1–2
 P.S. 156 (elementary school), 1
 scouting, 3
 wife, 6, 18, 38
Judy, John W., 12

K

Kennedy, Robert D., 35

L

Lake Charles, Louisiana, 20, 33
Laurelton, New York, 36
Lawrence, Dale, 24
Levinson, Art, 3
Lewiston, Maine, 11
Liebermann, Joseph, 37
Little, Arthur D., 34
Lloyd's of London, 29
Long Island Railroad, 1

Long Island, New York, 1–2
Los Angeles, California, 14
Louisville, Kentucky, 10
Love Canal, 17, 30

M

MacIntosh, Alabama, 18, 31–32
Madison Square Garden, 4
Maisonette Restaurant, 11
MAPCO, 13
McDermott, 38
McFarland, Norris B., 15
McManus, John, 2–4
Mobil, 6
Monsanto Chemical Company, 34
Motorola, 22

N

National Science Foundation, 20
Navy, United States, 38
New Canaan, Connecticut, 38
New Haven, Connecticut, 20
New Haven, University of, 4
New York, New York, 1–3, 6, 10
Niachlor, 32
Niagara Falls, New York, 7–8, 10–15, 25, 32, 35, 38
Norwalk, Connecticut, 34

O

O’Leary, Kevin J., 19
Occidental Chemical Corporation (OxyChem), 24
 Occidental Petroleum, 14, 17
Oldbury Electrochemical Company, 6–10
Olin Corporation, 5, 16, 18–35, 38–39
 Chemicals divisions, 21
 Olin Moral Rock, 26
 TDI plant, 21, 33
Oneonta State Teachers’ College, 4

P

Pace University, 34
Pebble Beach, California, 35
Pennsylvania Salt, 11
Pentagon, 38
Pentaire Paper Plant, 25

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 9, 38
Phoenix Home Life, 38
Phosphorus, 6, 8, 15
Phosphorus sulfides, 8
Proctor & Gamble, 5, 32

Q

Queens, New York, 1, 4, 8, 36

R

Raynier, 12
Research and Development, 20, 25, 27, 32
Research Corporation, 35, 37–39
Responsible Care, 28, 35
Rohm & Haas, 22

S

SAC operation, 33
San Antonio Spurs, 38
Sarni, Vincent, 14
Schaefer, John, 35
Schneider, William, 16
Schnerstein, Bud, 12
Shane, Irving, 20
Shays, Dolph, 7
Siemens, 20
Sinclair, 6
Singapore, 13
Society of Chemical Industry, 35
Sodium chlorate, 8
Sorgenti, Harold A., 35
Spellman College, 37
Squibb Research Institute (Bristol-Myers Squibb Company), 20–21
St. Lawrence University, 6
St. Regis, 12
Steel industry, 15–16

T

Tacoma, Wahington, 12–13
Taft, Louisiana, 14
Towey, James, 18
Trotsberg, Germany, 16
Tuscarora Reservation, 38
Tuscon, Arizona, 38

U

U.S. Defense Policy and Trade Organization, 38

V

Vancouver, British Columbia, 12

Virginia, University of, 26, 38

W

Wake Forest University, 38

Washington, University of, 11, 20

Willers, Thomas, 14

Y

YMCA, 2–3

Yohe, Robert, 21

Youngstown, Ohio, 11

Z

Zinc-omidine, 32