CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

ROBERT D. KENNEDY

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James G. Traynham

at

Danbury, Connecticut

on

4 February 1997

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history is one in a series initiated by the Chemical Heritage Foundation on behalf of the Society of Chemical Industry (American Section). The series documents the personal perspectives of Perkin and the Chemical Industry Award recipients and records the human dimensions of the growth of the chemical sciences and chemical process industries during the twentieth century.

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

Robert Kennedy

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program
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Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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ROBERT D. KENNEDY

1932 Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 8 November

Education

1955 B.S., mechanical engineering, Cornell University

Professional Experience

Union Carbide Corporation

1955-1956	Edgewater Research Laboratory, National Carbon Division
1956-1963	Sales and Marketing, National Carbon Division
1963-1971	Marketing Management, National Carbon Division
1971-1975	European Products Director, National Carbon Division
1975-1977	Senior Vice President, Union Carbide, Europe
1977-1982	President, Linde Division
1981-1982	Senior Vice President
1982-1985	Executive Vice President
1985-1986	President and COO, Chemicals and Plastics
1985	Member, Board of Directors
1986-1995	President and CEO
1986-1995	Chairman of the Board

Honors

1991	International Palladium Medal, Société de Chimie Industrielle, American Section
1995	Chemical Industry Medal, Society of Chemical Industry, American Section
1998	Henry Laurence Gantt Medal, American Society of Mechanical Engineers

ABSTRACT

Robert Kennedy begins the interview with a discussion of his family and growing up in Pittsburgh and New York. Kennedy initially considered a career in journalism, but his family persuaded him to pursue engineering. He entered Cornell University as a mechanical engineering major, receiving his B.S. in 1955. After graduation, Kennedy was offered several jobs in his field. He chose to work for Union Carbide Corporation due to his interest in Union Carbide's metallurgical industries; he worked in this area for twenty years. He began a management career with Union Carbide in the company's European division in Geneva, Switzerland. Upon his return to the United States seven years later, Kennedy became head of Linde Air Products Company, a division of Union Carbide. After the Bhopal incident, Kennedy adjusted his corporate management style as Union Carbide found itself in a transitional phase. The company embarked on a massive restructuring program. As CEO of Union Carbide, Kennedy helped to rebuild the image of chemical industry by serving as a representative with the Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA). He helped to instill the Responsible Care program into CMA's agenda. He concludes the interview with reflections on education 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.

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