

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
RELEASE FORM

This document contains my understanding and agreement with Chemical Heritage Foundation with respect to my participation in a tape-recorded interview conducted by James G. Traynham on February 4, 1997.

I have read the transcript supplied by Chemical Heritage Foundation.

1. The tapes, corrected transcript, photographs, and memorabilia (collectively called the "Work") will be maintained by Chemical Heritage Foundation and made available in accordance with general policies for research and other scholarly purposes.
2. I hereby grant, assign, and transfer to Chemical Heritage Foundation all right, title, and interest in the Work, including the literary rights and the copyright, except that I shall retain the right to copy, use, and publish the Work in part or in full until my death.
3. The manuscript may be read and the tape(s) heard by scholars approved by Chemical Heritage Foundation subject to the restrictions listed below. The scholar pledges not to quote from, cite, or reproduce by any means this material except with the written permission of Chemical Heritage Foundation.
4. I wish to place the conditions that I have checked below upon the use of this interview. I understand that Chemical Heritage Foundation will enforce my wishes until the time of my death, when any restrictions will be removed.

- a. _____ No restrictions for access.
NOTE: Users citing this interview for purposes of publication are obliged under the terms of the Chemical Heritage Foundation Oral History Program to obtain permission from Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia, PA.
- b. _____ My permission required to quote, cite, or reproduce.
- c. _____ My permission required for access to the entire document and all tapes.

This constitutes my entire and complete understanding.

(Signature) *James G. Traynham*

(Date) Feb 7, 1998

This interview has been designated as **Free Access**.

One may view, quote from, cite, or reproduce the oral history with the permission of CHF.

Please note: Users citing this interview for purposes of publication are obliged under the terms of the Chemical Heritage Foundation Oral History Program to credit CHF using the format below:

Robert D. Kennedy, interview by James G. Traynham at Union Carbide Corporation, Danbury, Connecticut, 4 February 1997 (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, Oral History Transcript # 0154).



Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106



The Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF) serves the community of the chemical and molecular sciences, and the wider public, by treasuring the past, educating the present, and inspiring the future. CHF maintains a world-class collection of materials that document the history and heritage of the chemical and molecular sciences, technologies, and industries; encourages research in CHF collections; and carries out a program of outreach and interpretation in order to advance an understanding of the role of the chemical and molecular sciences, technologies, and industries in shaping society.

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 **Early Years**
 Growing up in Pittsburgh and New York. Going to boarding school. Family's influence on studying engineering. Attending Cornell University.
- 3 **Career Beginnings**
 Decision to work for Union Carbide. Chemical innovation. Scientific teamwork. Working at Union Carbide's European Headquarters in Geneva. Returning to the United States.
- 6 **Union Carbide**
 Becoming head of Linde Air Products Company. Management styles. Research and funding. World War II innovations. Growth of petrochemical industry. Developing process technology.
- 10 **Industry and the Environment**
 Bhopal incident. Stock market changes. Company reorganization. Becoming CEO of Union Carbide. Bhopal settlement. Chemical Manufacturers Association. Responsible Care program.
- 20 **Conclusion**
 Winning Chemical Industry Medal. Involvement with education. Goals 2000. Thoughts on family.
- 24 **Index**

INDEX

A

ABB Surface Combustion Coalition, 22
Acetylene, 6-7
Acheson, Edward G., 14
Air Liquide, 12
Akers, John, 21
American Cyanamid, 18
Anderson, Warren M., 11, 14, 16-18, 21
Aramco, 9
Arizona State University, 17

B

Baekeland, Leo H., 8, 14
Bakelite, 8, 14
Bloomfield, New Jersey, 8
Boesky, Ivan, 10
Boron nitride, 4
Bound Brook, New Jersey, 8
British Oxygen Corporation (BOC), 12
Bush, President George H. W., 21-22

C

Callahan, Lord --, 16
Canadian Chemical Producers Association (CCPA), 19
Carborundum, 14
Charleston, West Virginia, 20
Charlottesville, 21-22
Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA), 18-21
Chromium catalyst, 8
Clendenin, West Virginia, 7
Community Awareness Emergency Response (CAER), 18-19
Connecticut Business-Education Coalition, 22
Cornell University, 1-2
 Business School, 22
Curme, George, 7

D

Dow Chemical Company, 9-19
DuPont, E. I. de Nemours and Co., Inc., 9

E

Edgewater, Ohio, 3
Epoxies, 8
Ethanol, 7
Ethylene, 3, 7-9
Eveready, 6, 9-10
Exxon Corporation, 9, 18
 Exxon *Valdez*, 20

F

Ferro-alloys, 3, 6, 11
Flamm, Alec, 21
Flanigen, Edith M., 14

G

GAF Corporation, 11
Geneva, Switzerland, 21
 International School Board, 21
Ghandi, Rajiv, 16
Glad Wrap, 9
Goals 2000, 21

H

Holmer, Edwin C., 18

I

Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), 8-9
Institute, West Virginia, 7
International Business Machines (IBM), 21
International Red Cross, 17

K

Karol, Frederick J., 14
Keenan, Judge --, 15
Kennedy, Robert D.
 boarding school (New Hampton School), 1
 children, 21-23
 father, 1-2
 grandchildren, 23
 wife (Sally), 23
Kirkpatrick Award, 14-15

L

Lend-Lease Program, 8
London, England, 16

M

Massachusetts, University of, 22
Mellon Institute, 7
Milkin, Michael, 10
Minneapolis, Minnesota, 16

N

New York City, New York, 1, 5
New York Times, The, 16

O

Oak Ridge National Laboratory, 3-4, 6
Oreffice, Paul F., 19

P

Paducah, Kentucky, 4
Phenolics, 8, 14
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1, 3, 7
Polyethylene, 8-9, 14
Polypropylene, 9
Prestone, 8-9
Prohibition, 7

R

Responsible Care, 19-20
Roland, Robert A., 18
Roosevelt, President Franklin D., 8
Rubber, 9

S

Sella, George J., 18
Seveso, 20
Society of Chemical Industry, 14
 Chemical Industry Medal, 20-21
 Perkin Medal, 14
South Charleston, West Virginia, 7-8
Styrene, 9
Synthetic graphite, 4, 7, 14

T

Thermosets, 8
Tonawanda, New York, 8

U

U.S. Supreme Court, 17

Union Carbide Corporation, 1-3, 5-15, 17-18, 20-21, 23

 Acheson Graphite Company, 14

 Bhopal, India, 10-11, 13-22

 European Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland, 5, 14

 Linde Air Products Company (now Praxair), 6, 8-9

 National Carbon Company, 14

Unipol process, 14

United nations Environmental Protection (UNEP), 19

W

Weicker, Lowell, 22

World War I, 7, 14

World War II, 1, 8

Z

Ziegler-Natta catalyst, 8