

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

FRANK R. NISSEL

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James G. Traynham

at Welex, Blue Bell, PA

on

March 20, 2002

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program
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FRANK R. NISSEL

1926 Born in Berlin, Germany on 2 July

Education

1945 B.S., American University, Cairo, Egypt

1946 M.S., chemical engineering, Virginia Polytechnic Institute

Professional Experience

1946-1956 Union Carbide Corporation

1956-1966 Co-Founder, Vice President, Prodex Corporation

1967-present Co-Founder, President, CEO, Welex Corporation

Honors

1992 SPE Extrusion Division Distinguished Service Award

1993 Fellow of the Society of Plastics Engineers

1995 SPE International Award in Business Management

2000 Plastics Hall of Fame Inductee

ABSTRACT

Frank R. Nissel begins the interview by describing his early childhood and schooling in Berlin, Germany, and subsequent move to Egypt due to the emergence of Adolf Hitler's policies. Arriving in Egypt at the age of seven, Nissel continued his multi-lingual education. After a six-month escape to Jerusalem until the end of World War II, Nissel returned to Egypt to attend the American University at Cairo. He continued his education in the United States, studying chemical engineering at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. He began a successful decade of work with Union Carbide Corporation after earning his M.S. in 1946, finally leaving to become co-founder of Prodex Corporation with Albert Kaufman. At Union Carbide, Nissel focused on vinyl calendaring, but returned to his more mechanical instincts by building extruders in his new business venture. The machinery built at Prodex revolutionized plastics machinery by being more efficient, yet less expensive, than its competitors, making waves with companies like Dow Chemical Company. Nissel continued to improve his products, while ensuring customers a good value. In 1955, Prodex was sold to Koehring Company, and after a brief time of consulting, Nissel joined forces with Welding Engineers Company to form Welex Corporation. At seventy-six years old, Nissel is not ready to retire, but has confidence that when that time comes, the company he founded will be well taken care of. For his innovation and contributions to the plastics industry Nissel has earned many honors and awards, including membership in the Plastics Hall of Fame. Nissel concludes the interview by sharing a bit about his family today, as well as interests outside of the work sphere, especially the jazz music scene.

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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