

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

J. LAWRENCE WILSON

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James G. Traynham

at

Rohm and Haas Company
Philadelphia, PA

on

30 August 1999

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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James G. Traynham on 30 August 1999

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



J. LAWRENCE WILSON

1936 Born in Rosedale, Mississippi, on March 2

Education

1958 B.S., mechanical engineering, Vanderbilt University
1963 M.B.A., finance, Harvard University

Professional Experience

1958-1961 Officer, U.S. Navy

1963-1965 Vice President, Nyala Properties, Inc.

Warren-Teed Pharmaceuticals

1967-1968 Treasurer
1968-1969 Vice President

1970-1971 President, Consolidated Biomedical Laboratories, Inc.

Rohm and Haas Company

1965-1967 Staff Associate
1971-1972 Executive Assistant to the President
1972-1974 Treasurer
1974-1977 Regional Director, Rohm and Haas, Europe
1977-1986 Group Vice President and Director
1986-1988 Vice Chairman
1988-1999 Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer

Honors

1999 Chemical Industry Medal, Society of Chemical Industry, American Section

ABSTRACT

J. Lawrence Wilson begins the interview with a discussion of his childhood and early education. Wilson grew up in Rosedale, Mississippi, and attended Culver Military Academy in Culver, Indiana. After high school, he received a Naval Reserves Officer Training Corps scholarship to attend Vanderbilt University, where he majored in mechanical engineering. Wilson graduated in 1958, and then served in the Navy for several years as a member of the SEABEES, stationed in Bermuda. When he returned, Wilson attended Harvard Business School, receiving his M.B.A. in 1963. After graduate school, Wilson came to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with a friend to start a private equity firm. Two years later, he joined Rohm and Haas Company. Wilson discusses his experiences in operations research and as treasurer for Rohm and Haas subsidiary Warren-Teed, as well as his views on scientific innovation. He further addresses the company's electronics business, his time in Europe, and the changes in Rohm and Haas, and the chemical industry, generally, over the past three decades. Wilson concludes the interview with a discussion of the chemical industry's environmental concerns, Rohm and Haas' acquisition of Morton International, his work with the Chemical Manufacturers Association, and 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 Education
Growing up in Mississippi. Parents. Attending Culver Military Academy. NROTC scholarship to Vanderbilt University. Decision to study mechanical engineering.
- 2 Early Career
Naval service in Bermuda. SEABEEs. Graduate school at Harvard Business School. Setting up private equity firm in Philadelphia.
- 4 Rohm and Haas
Decision to join Rohm and Haas. Operations research. Running operations for Warren-Teed. Chemistry courses at University of Pennsylvania. Assistant to Vincent Gregory, Jr. Views on scientific innovation. Photoresists. Running the European businesses. Becoming Chief Financial Officer. Reorganizing company.
- 11 Industry and the Environment
Regulation. Superfund. Developing Responsible Care. Importance of public attitudes.
- 12 Changes in Chemical Industry
Becoming global. Consolidations within the industry. Future of chemical innovation.
- 16 Conclusion
Role in Chemical Manufacturers Association. Winning Chemical Industry medal. Retirement plans. Family life.
- 23 Notes
- 24 Index

NOTES

1. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, 1962).

INDEX

A

Akett, John, 17
Albright and Wilson, 15
Annapolis, Maryland, 3
Atlanta, Georgia, 21
Atlantic Ocean, 21

B

Bayway, New Jersey, 2
Biotechnology, 15-16
Boston, Massachusetts, 21
Bristol, Pennsylvania, 12

C

Calarco, Vincent A., 18
Carson, Rachel, 11
Celanese Americas Corporation, 14
Chemical Industry Institute of Toxicology (CIIT), 11
Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA), 11, 16-17, 19
 Advocacy committee, 16
 Executive committee, 16
 Responsible Care, 11-12, 16-17, 19
 Management Systems Verification (MSV), 11, 17, 19
Chemical Transportation Emergency Center (CHEMTREC), 11
Clean Air Act, 11
Columbus, Ohio, 6-7, 9-10
Crompton and Knowles Corporation, 14
Culver Military Academy, 1, 3, 20
Culver, Indiana, 1

D

Dow Chemical Company, 14-15
Duke University, 7

E

Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), 11
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 11
Esso. *See* Exxon Corporation.
European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC), 19
Exxon Corporation, 2, 17

F

Fayetteville, North Carolina, 10
FORTRAN, 5

G

Georgia Institute of Technology, 1, 21
Georgia State University, 22
Greenbrier Conference, 11
Gregory, Vincent L., Jr., 7, 9

H

Haas, Otto, 13-14
Hadden, Laura L., 6, 11, 17
Hall, John, 21
Harvard University, 4
 Harvard Business School, 4

I

Intel Corporation, 8
 Pentium 2, 8
International Council on Chemical Associations (ICCA), 17, 19

L

London, England, 9

M

Mississippi River, 1
Morton International. *See* Rohm and Haas Company.
Murphy, Don, 14

P

Pennsylvania, University of, 2, 6
Pennwalt Chemical Corporation, 14
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 4, 7, 9-10, 13, 22
Photoresists, 8

R

Rodel Inc., 8
Rohm and Haas Company, 2, 4-18, 20
 adhesives, 15
 biocides, 15
 coatings, 15
 electronics, 8, 16
 fibers, 9-10
 fungicides, 10

health products, 10
Morton International, 14-15, 20
plastic additives, 15
Warren-Teed, 6
Rosedale, Mississippi, 1

S

Sevaso, Italy, 11
Simeral, William, 11
Society of Chemical Industry (SCI), 18, 22
 Chemical Industry Award, 18
 Executive committee, 18
Superfund, 11-12

U

U.S. Army, 1
U.S. Naval Academy, 3
U.S. Navy, 1-3
 Civil Engineer Corp, 2
 Naval Reserves Officer Training Corps (NROTC), 1
 Holloway scholarship, 1
 SEABEE, 2
Union Carbide Corporation, 14-15

V

Vanderbilt University, 1-4, 20-21
 Board of trustees, 20-21
 Executive committee, 20
 Owen Graduate School of Management
 Corporate advisory committee, 20
Verband der Chemischen Industrie (VCI), 19

W

Wilson, J. Lawrence
 daughters-in-law, 21-22
 father, 1
 grandchildren, 21-22
 mother, 1
 sons, 21-22
 wife (Barbara), 9, 21
Witco Corporation, 14
World War II, 1, 3