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Interview with Nelson R. Haas, Sr.

Nelson R. Haas Sr.
NELSON R. HAAS, SR.

Interviewed by
Nicholas Hussong

on
January 17, 1967
NH You ready to start?
NRH Yes.
NH Would you tell me how you first knew Mr. Kettering?
NRH I met, (unintelligible)
NH How did he impress you, when you first met Mr. Kettering?
NRH How did I? How was I impressed with Mr. Kettering?
NH Right.
NRH I, he was in a, he had an office in 1910 in the building at northwest, the northeast corner of Main and Fourth Street. That's the Knox building. And I was anxious to meet Mr. Kettering and I went up there that one day and I saw him in an office there by himself. Some laboratory things that he had, what we had. And we were looking at it. Anyhow, he says, I told him who I was. And I says, I'm Nelson R. Haas and I just wanted to meet you, Mr. Kettering, and we just had an ordinary outside conversation. And I told him at that time, that I was working for V.G. Apple. And that's, that was the beginning that I talked with him. And so he mentioned that they were developing some things that they don't have to, have to take it in a slow way. And so, we, the conversation was, just wasn't too long. But I didn't want to take to much time of his. And he, he says, well, he says we'll have a new location Mr. Haas, and he says if at another time, I, glad to talk to you. And it was then, the no question, no offering or anything it was just simply I wanted to meet him. It was a personal one I told him where I had worked, at V.G. Apple, and he was anxious to know that. And that was, it satisfied me. Well, then as time went on, I was, it was approaching 1912, and so I had a man by the name of, of let me see, John Sheats. And he was at Delco in the laboratory on First Street, at that time, the building there that they're still
in. And then he asked me to come over there, and of, while at the time I didn't know too much what they were doing, at the same time, I, Mr. Apple was, wanted me to stay with him. So I wasn't in a hurry to at that time to get away from Mr. Apple. But as time went on, I had another answer, another question by John Sheats, and he wanted me, he says so. He cornered me on the office and he says, Nelson, I'd like for you to, to come over here, he says at Delco products. So in a very short time then I left Mr. Apple and then early 1912, I went with Mr. Kettering.

NH Go on.

NRH And so that was my, you might say, my real beginning with him, and he was, he was a, his ability to associate with men, it was, it was outstanding. He was, it was nobody was questioned, it was, he was anxious to have the developments had he, if, if somebody asked him, what would you think of this? They called him Boss, I didn't do that. See they called him Boss, and they wanted to, what did he think about it. And he was, his ability for talking to these fellows was, was he never, he never questioned. If it didn't, if it didn't come up to a, what he might think would be a, better do it this way. He didn't question. A man was able to, through his, his wonderful working with them. And hours and hours, it didn't make any difference to him. Six-thirty in the morning until time to get, when he was, when he was then developing far enough along to get the commission or I might say, the permission of some of these early automobile people in Detroit. And so that the men working around him there was of always was just associated with Kettering. And as I told you some time ago, or a little later, little earlier today, were he would have talked to somebody and it was, if it fit his problem well we'd try it, we would try to do it a little bit different. And of course that was the way it was, all the way through. And not having too many in the laboratory why of course, we would be our time, it would became so well, I'd say, for we, we did,
wasn't worried about a whistle blowing or anything like that. It was just simply, Mr. Kettering's ability to have people to develop things for him, was unusual. It wasn't, he wouldn't question these men how much college they went to or anything like that. It was just simply what can we do with what we got to work with.

NH He was good to work for.

NRH That's right. So you, that, that would be to me this, I'd say this all of the things, that we developed there, it was of course, they'd have to then if it looked feasible, well Mr. Kettering then, the next engineers that was going to, like Zerbie Bradford, would develop it and put it on paper. Then he'd develop some of the things and it would, it would maybe work and not work. And then we'd, but never stopped. There was, its any, you have any particular question that you would like to ask me?

NH Can you think of any stories that he might have told, and anecdote, anything that might have happened? Do you remember any conversations you might have had?

NRH No, I'll tell you I believe that I didn't involve very much in that. I was more or less serious on the thing, and he would, there were some of the boys that he'd maybe have little questions, and do you use this for that? However, I believe that Zerbie Bradford could tell you some of those things. Because I was more or less on the serious end of it, because I felt as though this is the thing that I must do, and I had used my mind continuously, and then all at once, it would loom up into a thing that becomes tangible and then as we run our tests and it became, it became, I get a little possibility, then of course the other staff if they're going to make some of these things, we'd have to develop it. And so I would say that the preliminaries of the things that we did in those very early days, in my time not Bradford's, when you go back with him. In my time in 1912, there are operating under conditions like
they did in 1912. And he used that development and they used the, of course there was an awful lot of things that would be put on this car and put on that car, and then we had to, mechanic would have to come in and develop it. Just like your instrument here, see. Somebody had to do come out of a man's brain and somebody had to do it, didn't he?

NH That's right. Do you remember any particular incidents?

NRH Incidents?

NH Yes.

NRH Well, the, it, it had, it, the things of course, were, had to be developed to, to have for instance here, you can have your lights here anyway you want them. But you, where you have an automobile, just like your automobile, your voltage that you have to have has to be in a condition that's to run your car. And otherwise if you'd have two, some of the slashes, why of course, where automobile wouldn't work under those conditions. See, you do have a narrow range. For instance in your ignition in your automobile. Your, you know that you're going to have a relatively low voltage to take of it. See, but here in your house you have, well some people will have maybe something running, furnace runs maybe two hundred and twenty volts in the lines, Dayton Power and Light maybe a hundred and ten. But you don't have that condition. You have a rather narrow range in your automobile. So, it's just like in the early days, where they'd have cranking, and somebody would have something wrong with the ignition, and the wheel would slide back and hit you in the face or break an arm, some of you've see that?

NH Yes, they were dangerous.

NRH Been done with thousands of times, until people was able to throw away the handle and let the automobile develop into a self-mobile all right. So I'd say that my association with Mr. Kettering for all the years I was with him, he was outstanding. He was outstanding at, just like you've heard the voice speaker in college, now they would ask him things and he'd know it. Without
even possibly the instructor asking him.

NH This was back in the years of the electric start?

NRH Back in the early days, yes. He was, the things that they had in their school that I don't know, what they had. But anyhow men who were very capable, and of course I don't know the situation that, where, Mr. Kettering came in out of college into his job. I never knew that. I, I talked to the boys and Derwood Rashner especially, he, they would be, have a condition where, they would get something done, but my association with Kettering was, was just on the development in the early days. And then building up to something that would be a perfect job. And of course, we do have our records to show how some of our things had developed and very, very good. Even say through World War I. And of course that was the period that I myself had the some of the development and so seemingly why I, I think it's, it hadn't, I don't know of people that have the knowledge that he did. And he was a, he wasn't looking up books in mathematics and stuff like that. It was just simply association with people and his development. And other things. I, I, from the time that I met him, in 1910, before I ever worked for him in 1912, I'd say that he was one of the grandest man that I ever had a chance to work with. He was not, not trying to make things lighter than he did. Of course now, as he, as your records will show, where General Motors, then later on went in to these various lines, and they of course, under those conditions, why we'd have lots of men, very capable to go along with it. But the association of his ability to technical men and to people that will have, you ought to know about this, not no, no it wasn't that. His, no, was just exactly like he would be with me. Some of my work, he would say, Nelson, he always called me Nelson, Nelson, what do you think about today? I says, well, I'd always say Mr. Kettering, I, it didn't suit me and I'm sure it won't suit you. And then that's that was the time, time, I forget. He says, good, good.
I say, Okay, he says, so that was it. It was just, it was one of those things, always through I've talked to him at the Engineers Club sometime before he died. And he'd maybe go back and talk about some of things. It was part of his fundamental. I don't know what he did. I think, I think it's been told to me that he went with Mr. Deeds, I understand had that I don't understand, but it's been told to me that he wanted Mr. Kettering down at NCR. And somebody told me, which I don't know either, somebody told me that he developed a little mower for opening a refrigerator. I, not a refrigerator but your...

NH (unintelligible)

NRH Yes, for where instead of pulling the, what were, ches...what did you call those?

NH (unintelligible)

NRH Yes, yes. So all I can say is Mr. Kettering is, I would say was a foundation of, of Dayton Engineering Laboratories. And it could reach out a long, long ways for of course, the development from that on up. And I'd, I'm sure that it goes right back to Mr. Kettering, the early days. I, I think this is both, I believe that if you would spend just certain amount of time with Zerbie Bradford, to give you some of the fundamentals of Mr. Kettering, I'd, maybe at the NCR, and then of course I know, in Deeds barn, that would be very valuable for you.

NH Yes, how long was he at Delco before then?

NRH How's that?

NH Do you remember when he left Delco?

NRH When I left Delco?

NH When he left Delco?

NRH When he left Delco? Or me you mean?

NH Both.
NRH Oh, well I left in '52. I was asked to stay on after I was sixty-five, because we were developing some things there that was, that they would like me to stay, which I did. And for just a short time about not too long I'd say less than a year. Because my time was up, and, but that would be I'd say, I think I had about thirty- some years, thirty-three, thirty-four years all total. And I think it's, that's meant a lot to me.

NH Did you see Mr. Kettering off and on during this time?

NRH Well, yes. When, before he moved back and forth to Detroit and places, of course I would see him. Everyday. And because he was interested in the research. And so I, they, as time went on, when he'd be away from Delco and they had other, other top men was running it, from a management angle stuff like that, and then associated with all of the other divisions that became General Motors then.

NH Did you notice any change in Mr. Kettering as you went along?

NRH No, no he was. I, I could say not. I say that the last year before he died, he, he was the type that people no matter how many was around there they'd like to, he, he would talk to them, Hi Bill, Hi Jim, something like that. I just, just ordinary man that was wonderful. And I'm sure that his ability to associate with the people and make a million dollar corporation, it was, Mr. Kettering was outstanding. I'm sure of that. Never, he never questioned, he well of course naturally if he would, might ask his opinion of things, he'd give it to you.

NH Do you remember any special problems he may have run into? (unintelligible)

NRH Any what?

NH Any problems or incidents or any stories you can tell about working over at Delco?

NRH No, there was, there would always be developments in any organization undoubtably where you would have, you would build up and maybe some little
factors would come in and it wouldn't, why I'd say, it didn't quite fit into this program, or into this development, and he'd always have some little thing. And then as too, when you got developments so much of, oh things at one time, well of course you have, you have men that's capable of, of changing this and that, General Motors I think were very well, they are today. Developing everything possible that would avoid accidents. Because accident of today is becoming an unusual factor. And it's they, many, many wonderful men are trying to say, what can we do to relieve some of that? It was just, it was just like a beginning as I've always mentioned, this company hadn't nothing to do with maybe with the automobile or anything like that. No, it wouldn't, it wouldn't be. But to me, I've thought that the grandest time that we are living in a world, in the United States, we'll say. I always come out this, I think that they, the eighteenth century when, from eighteen hundred to nineteen hundred was an unusual century. And you can, as, as things developed from oh, just a nutty you might say, from that time on up through and in Dayton where you have your development, and then of course you build up a little bit. 1796 you're all up through. And then your canal and your earlier railroads and all those things. That century was unusually good. And then as you go on further, why then of course you have so much to have there, that are being developed. And it's, it's, doesn't have the iron workers the solidity of it in that other century. Of course you come up here, people say, well, I can make this thing now for ten cents and it costs us about a dollar before, because they have means of doing that. But my feeling towards, my association, I was born in '86, 1886 and I'd, as I moved up and when I got into, I'd say, get into 1900 early 1900, then I, things began to develop. And then as it went up, Mr. Ketterings's time, up in I don't know exactly what year it was, that he left school and went out there to NCR, I don't know that. But it was maybe I know. Mr. Bradford can tell you that, and without me
questioned that. But I do know this, that I met him in 1910, and he was unusual then, and in 1912 I went with him. It was Mr. Kettering then all the time. But it didn't to me, I didn't, I was, he might have had any number of places to go to and help other people help other manufactures for development, but to me at 1912 until he died. And all I can say, he was an unusual man, very capable, and if his history is actually shown you'll find that the same thing was thought that as when he started if he did start at the NCR. Never know, never questioned and there was always the Engineers Club, he was, he developed that in 1914. And so its, he'd down at the club, and he'd talk and he'd, he'd associate with any one of them. And then of course you'll find any number of pictures, I know we have lots of pictures. I have pictures of, taken of, I appreciate very much. And so I have them developed, I...
(break in tape)
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NRH I, have you seen the two books that he had, that he had, that Tom Boyd had written?
NH I've seen one of them.
NRH What?
NH I've seen the one.
NRH You saw the one. The other one came in later, in what about four years later maybe longer. And anyhow it was, Tom Boyd was fine. He was, he developed this and his you'll find many, many things in these books that will, he has, maybe some of the jokes or some of the things that, that would be a flashlight in there.
NH Yes, do you remember any of them yourself?
NRH No. I, I never did, no, no. I was always pretty much on the serious end of the
thing, because my development was such that it was part of me. And I didn't question whether I was, it was, it was just one we entered, it is yet, I might way from my personal viewpoint I've been writing for twenty years of little things at Christmas time. That of course doesn't pay any attention to General Motors or anything like that. And, but, that's what I do. I like to write. I got a nice set of laboratory and a little laboratory, was a little place upstairs where I, I do my writing. And I have been I'd say at least four years on developing from 1800 to I'd say, I've carried my thought through to what, 1914 when the Engineers Club was real. I, because if I'm talking about the early century, from 1800 to 1900 I don't want to carry too much beyond that, because he, but I was very much impressed with the way Mr. Deeds and Mr. Kettering had brought in the Dayton Engineers Club.

NH Can you tell me anything about the early days of the Engineers Club?
NRH About what?
NH About the early days of the Engineers Club?
NRH Well, how it it was developed you mean?
NH Right.
NRH Well, that I couldn't tell you, I don't, I know that it when it came out, to develop a club, why they had there about fifteen or so many men. I don't know how, many were the development. Very capable men, but, then when the first year, 1914, oh, we had a temporary place on the northwest corner of of let's see, it think it was Patterson, and well, I'm not so sure. It was a temporary thing before they built, before they built. They built the other one, the, the the company, I mean the Engineers Club was formed in 1914, and I don't know for sure what the date was when it was developed as it is today. As you know now, they're going to have a much larger Engineers Club. For they've just recently, there's been just a couple days ago, I guess there's something, fellow came to the Engineers Club will be enlarged and more land to
St. Claire Street. And so that, the Engineers Club, it was a fundamental of course as I say, Mr. Deeds and Mr. Kettering. I don't, I couldn't repeat, I don't know how, how many were, maybe fifteen or something, that really start, started that up, under their name too, it helped. And then of course the other was, wasn't too many in it the first year. 1914. But I'm, glad that they, that I came in that first year, but not as a member that started it. I was just simply one of the, one of the...

NH How well do you remember Mrs. Kettering?

NRH How's that?

NH How well do you remember Mrs. Kettering?

NRH I, I couldn't, I don't remember her. I, she would come in I think at times at certain divisions, maybe at Delco, that I don't know. But I, I in fact I don't believe I ever met her. I, I'm sure I didn't. And so I know where they come in they were living out there in that place, but I don't know. No. Because Mr. Kettering was, was the one that I associated with.

NH Do you know when he left for Detroit?

NRH When he left...

NH To go to Detroit.

NRH And, and went to Detroit, do you mean, he went to Detroit part of the time?

NH Yes.

NRH No, I don't believe I do that. No. I was, I was more or less, of course associated with him from an engineering angle, and when it phases outside for him to have to do and go do, why I, I wouldn't know. I wouldn't even know, I, where he mentioned from maybe from Detroit, the other plant, they'd come down with him and we'd be running tests, but I didn't know any of, Kettering was the one that I associated with.

NH What type of an employer was he?

NRH What?
NH What kind of any employer was he? How as he to work for?
NRH Wh...I don't, I didn't get that.
NH How did you like working for Mr. Kettering? What type of man was he to work for?
NRH To, to, working for him you mean?
NH Yes.
NRH Oh, it was, it was working for him whatever he asked for it was just, it was just outstanding. Glad to have somebody, glad to have somebody ask you to do something. Whatever it was, it was never, we never turn it down. None of, none, I think the rest of the boys that was either working for me or working with me, and could always felt this was, Mr. Kettering was just unusual to know. And so, I don't know.
NH Fine, is there anything else you remember about Mr. Kettering?
NRH No, I other than, that this, that the technical information that I have, that is I've accumulated, that is, that is not for to leave out unless somebody, that is that I've associated with would say, yes, you may do this, or do that. So I feel as though that anything that we did, it was done for the development. What in the early days Dayton Engineering Laboratory as it developed, well that was each one that went in there, it's a job. Even before he went in as a toolmaker or whatever it was, well he was part of it. And I'd say that my association, with Delco was unusually wonderful place to work for. As I could say it, I'd would never want to do anything other than, I could if time, if you can have time to do particular things all over again, well that's fine. The life I'd say I have a high regard for the wonderful things that was done by people in 19, in the 19th century, from 1800 to 1900. That to me is the most outstanding hundred years, because there was development, there. There was, there was wonderful things there in where my son was during a good many years, and during World War I and in Florence, Italy and stuff like that. Well,
there was wonderful things there, but my line of reasoning was my thought from 19...from 1800 to 1900, I think that that is one of the finest centuries, because, if I wasn't associated, I was associated with one of those great men, that pictures himself in over there in Florence, Italy and all those other places, why that is, I couldn't know nothing about it, other than I would appreciate it.

NH What do you compare Mr. Kettering's achievements, to the things that came about in the 19th century?

NRH I don't believe, I don't know believe I would know. No. I don't know what his association was with other than to me. I, I'd associate Mr. Kettering as a technical man that was unusual. Very unusual. So I, I believe that that's why it was fourth grade now. The other thing I just don't pay attention to it. That is like me. I, I would, my association with steam locomotives, was one of the outstanding things, I never will live it down. Because to me the steam locomotive was something unusual. And it started in the early part of, from shortly after 1800, a long development of steam locomotive. And I'd, and the developments they've made, I, is outstanding to me. Magnificent developments, horsepower today, and it was to me, it meant so much and it was developed shortly after eighteen hundred. The library will tell you exactly when they had the first little ones and then on up. And then later on, there was other developments that, just like we have today. We don't have the steam locomotive today, but they have horsepower that's able to do it, other means. And it always will be. What the next development will be is pretty hard to say. But our means of transportation in the air why, it looks as though it's outstanding. So I believe that it just, my, my, my talk to you today is just only I, I, was my personal viewpoint of Mr. Kettering.

NH Fine, thank-you very much, Mr. Haas.

NRH Yes.

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