

2-8-1967

Interview with Edmund B. O'Leary

Edmund B. O'Leary

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WRIGHT BROTHERS - CHARLES F. KETTERING
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

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DR. EDMUND B. O'LEARY

Interviewed by
Nicholas Hussong
on
February 8, 1967

EL Fine, do you want me to start? Charles Kettering, Charles F. Kettering, was born in Loudonville, Ohio.

NH May I interrupt you, sir?

EL What?

NH Would you give your name and today's date once more...

EL Yes.

NH We might have erased it.

EL My name is Dr. Edmund B. O'Leary, Distinguished Service Professor of Economics and Business Administration at the University of Dayton. Dayton, Ohio.

NH Fine, and today's date is February the eighth.

EL This is Wednesday, February the eighth, 1966, '67

NH Fine.

EL Yes. I'm going to comment on the life and some of the contributions of Charles F. Kettering. Dayton, Ohio. Charles F. Kettering was born in Loudonville Ohio, a community near Wooster. He graduated, after he finished his early education in Loudonville, from Ohio State University where he studied electrical engineering. He was influenced at Ohio State by many of the professors including one, the name of Jimmy Boyd. After graduating from Ohio State Mr. Kettering returned to Loudonville and became associated with the telephone company where he stayed for a short time. He came to Dayton, Ohio. Became associated with the National Cash Register Corporation and worked in the engineering department and did create experimental and research work. While at National Cash Register he was responsible for a number of successful products. He also became the close associate of Charles Deeds, a business man and financier at Dayton and with the Cash Register. During his stay in Dayton, he and a few associates created what was known as the Dayton

Research Laboratories. It was here that Mr. Kettering did some of his early creative and research work. While at the Dayton Research Laboratories, he developed the self, the Delco Lighting System, what later became known as the Delco Lighting System. His system became the forerunner of the establishment of the Delco Corporation in Dayton, Ohio. Along with Mr. Deeds, Bill Chryst, O. Lee Harrison, and a few others. During this time, Durant was making plans for the organization of an enterprise that would consolidate into a large corporation a number of competing automobile producers and manufactures. Mr. Durant wanted a far-sighted and capable research executive. So he induced the owners of the Delco Corporation to become part of what later became the General Motors Corporation. And this was the forerunner of the creation of a number of other plants of the General Motors Corporation in Dayton, Ohio. It was his, representative of the General Motors Corporation that the Delco Lighting System was not only perfected but likewise, the self-starter for automobiles which early became a part of the standard equipment of the Cadillac motor car, was developed and perfected. The big contribution of the Delco Corporation is the dev, was the development of power-saving equipment. The Delco Lighting System was not only a, a power facility for the providing of electiic lighting, but also was a facility for generating power, which had far reaching uses in various areas including farming, and later in terms of other applications, in the American economy. While at General Motors, Mr, Kettering, of course, increased his research efforts having the opportunity to concentrate on the work exclusively in the developmment of numerous other patents and products. But probably a more important contribution that came in his long association with the General Motors Corporation was the development of the diesel power engine. Mr. Kettering not only improved and perfected the diesel engine, but it was done as a part of a yacht which he owned and

where he spent considerable of his time in the engine room in the perfection of his diesel motor. And this today has far and extensive use in American enterprise in terms of the operation of much equipment, but it probably has revolutionized the railroad motor power facilities. Most American railroads today utilize diesel equipment and of course it's used in many, many other areas. This diesel was the forerunner of the establishment of the General Motors plant in the production of diesel equipment at Hinsdale, Illinois. But Mr. Kettering's interest was not exclusively in terms of perfection of motor power equipment. He was always searching for ways of finding sources of power that would have use in other parts of the American economy and in this direction, he owned and used a laboratory in his basement in Dayton, Ohio. And later this laboratory became the Kettering Research Laboratory at Yellow Springs, Ohio. And here currently a number of trained scientist are directing their efforts in the improvement of photosynthesis research and it is hoped that out of it will come the answer to a great number of what are now unknown questions that are raised by research people but likewise a source of productive power. This laboratory at Yellow Springs, also directs its efforts in terms of allied research work, and it is hoped that many constructive and productive ideas will come from that operation. Now Mr. Kettering again, his interests was in the improvement of mankind, a better way of life. And in this direction he contributed as a philanthropist, millions of dollars to the American Educational System and facilities. He contributed substantial sums of money to hospitals and contributed a substantial sum for the, with Mr. Sloan who was a president of General Motors Corporation in the creation of the Sloan-Kettering Hospital and Sloan-Kettering Foundation in New York, devoted primarily to research in medicine and particularly in the area of cancer research and in terms of internal medicine. Mr. Kettering's contributions in aid and assistance, personal and financial and otherwise, was

devoted also in other areas and he played a part in the, in the work of the Southern Research Institute in the south, the southern part of the United States. Mr. Kettering had a son, Gene, and whose, has a family of a young man named Chuck and two daughters and a very vivacious and attractive wife, who has with Gene considerable energy and a great amount of skill and interest in furthering research efforts in a wide area of American life. Mr. Kettering, the sons are now carrying on the foundation work and play an important part in the continuation of his welfare contributions and work in, in the light of his research interests. Mr. Kettering was a great scientist, humanitarian, a philosopher, an economist, and a good business man. His judgement was, was excellent and very freely given to those that sought it out. He was a great reader, a great thinker, a great philosopher, a great doer, a great man, and I would classify him really as a fine citizen and a genius. There are many other things that could be said about Mr. Kettering and his life, but, and I have merely mentioned a few in the few minutes that have been allotted to me in this discussion. Thank-you.

NH Would you care to elaborate on his personality in many of his chief attributes and characteristics?

EL Well I think I, I did that.

NH Right, really good. Fine, do you remember any special incidents, or...

EL He was a warm, gently, personal, gentleman, very humble and very reserved in his way of life and always anxious to help and a very great worker, and a, a, a fine man, every with tools and in tinkering.

NH You worked with him in the Kettering Foundation, is that right?

EL Oh, yes. But I'm not going to put that in there. I have known Mr. Kettering over probably a period of twenty-five years. Been associated with them in the financial business and with the Winters National Bank, an institution that he served as chairman, and the Kettering Foundation. In the educational

business, or educational life, Mr. Kettering served on a number of educational boards, including the Ohio State University Board of Trustees, which he was chairman for a great number of years. And I'm proud to tell you that he signed my Bachelor's degree at Ohio State University and also the Doctor's degree from, which I also received from Ohio State University.

NH Fine, Thank-you, Doctor, is there anything you want to add?

EL Or anything like that?

NH Would you like to listen to it?

EL Yes.

(Break in tape)

(End of tape)

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