

# **HISTORY OF THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION**

**Interview between:  
L. Lawrence Warden, Retired Food  
and Drug Officer, Los Angeles District  
and  
Robert G. Porter  
Rancho Bernardo, California  
February 3, 1978**

## INTRODUCTION

This is a transcription of a taped interview, one of a series conducted by Robert G. Porter, who retired from the U. S. Food and Drug Administration in 1977.

The interviews were held with retired F.D.A. employees whose recollections may serve to enrich the written record.

It is hoped that these narratives of things past will serve as source material for present and future researchers; that the stories of important accomplishments, interesting events, and distinguished leaders will find a place in training and orientation of new employees, and may be useful to enhance the morale of the organization; and finally, that they will be of value to Dr. James Harvey Young in the writing of the history of the Food and Drug Administration.

The tapes and transcriptions will become a part of the collection of the National Library of Medicine and copies of the transcriptions will be placed in the Library of Emory University.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE  
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE  
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

TAPE INDEX SHEET

CASSETTE NUMBER(S) 1

GENERAL TOPIC OF INTERVIEW: History of the Food & Drug Administration

DATE: 2/3/78 PLACE: Rancho Bernardo, Calif. LENGTH: 22 Min.

INTERVIEWEE

INTERVIEWER

NAME: L. Lawrence Warden NAME: Robert G. Porter

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] ADDRESS: U.S. Food & Drug Administration  
[REDACTED] Denver, Colorado

FDA SERVICE DATES: FROM 1936 TO 1968 RETIRED? Yes

TITLE: Food & Drug Officer, Los Angeles District  
(If retired, title of last FDA position)

CASSETT NO.	SIDE NO.	EST. TIME ON TAPE	PAGE NO.	SUBJECT
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		6	4	Cream Testing
		7	5	Cases of interest - First Notice of Judgment, Elixir of Sulfanilimide, Nu-Ovo Arthritis Remedy, Philadelphia Fish Story, Salmonella in Dried Eggs.
		12	8	Personalities - John L. Harvey, George P. Larrick
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- P. - This is a recording of an interview between Bob Porter of the FDA and L. Lawrence Warden. Mr. Warden retired from FDA in--what year was it?
- W. - It was 1968.
- P. - In 1968. I believe his last tour of duty was in Washington, D. C. and...
- W. - No, it was in Los Angeles.
- P. - Okay, it was in Los Angeles--
- W. - As Food and Drug officer.
- P. - As Food and Drug officer. The interview is taking place on February 3rd, 1978, at Mr. Warden's home in Rancho Bernardo, California. Larry, I think maybe if you will give us a little sketch of your career with Food and Drug as sort of a starting point and the listener will know who you are.
- W. - Well, after my--excuse me just a minute.
- P. - I didn't take off my introduction.
- W. - Well, I majored in chemistry in the University of Montana and I spent about eight years as Chief Chemist of the Commercial Laboratory in Seattle just before I went to Food and Drug. Then I was assigned to San Francisco. The rest of the time I spent at Seattle, Los Angeles, Salt Lake, Denver and finally eighteen years in Washington, D. C. I had quite a varied experience. A great many unusual and interesting events occurred during that time, some which I might mention later on.
- P. - Good.

I'd like to talk about the things that you think would be of interest to the historian and they can be personalities or cases, reorganization, events of any kind that do have that kind of value and the older, you know the further back they go, why the better.

W. - Well, I don't know how much I can contribute to this project of yours. Of course, the programs of Food and Drug now are quite a bit different than when I first went into Food and Drug. Now they're concerned with food additives that cause cancer and artificial sweeteners, safety and efficacy of drugs, and things like that which are quite a bit different than when I first went in. I do recall that when I reported to San Francisco one of my first assignments was to investigate a drug case where sodium chloride had been substituted for bicarbonated soda in a drug store. Several people died. We made quite an investigation. Then we found that the barrels of the raw material had been mixed up on the wharf, and subsequently several of them got mislabeled. Shortly afterwards, they had a food poisoning case involving what they thought was anti pasto, and they had all the inspectors going around to Italian stores checking on cans of imported anti pasto but it was finally found out that this family that had had the fatalities had eaten home canned mushrooms.

P. - That was botulism.

W. - That was botulism, yes.

Then during my tenure in San Francisco, I worked with George Daughters a great deal on frozen eggs and cream. Those projects were later to become, take considerable amount of time in my work. When I was back in Washington, I conducted seven or eight training courses for inspectors to enable them to detect decomposed frozen eggs that might be on the market. It started back in San Francisco when we inspected an egg breaking firm and found they were using incubator rejects and were straining out the embryo. It was just disgusting. So we tried putting up small packs to try to be able to identify by organoleptic means whether an egg was fit for consumption or not. So this was carried on in great depth later on. We would take over, for example, during the later years, take over an egg plant and crack the eggs ourselves and put up about 100-30lb. cans made up with different types of inedible eggs. We would drill them and try to recognize the odors that we got from the drill. Along with that they made chemical and bacteriological tests because sometimes on organoleptic examination it wouldn't hold up in court, and with the aid of the chemistry and bacteriology they could substantiate it better.

P. - But with these training courses and the special packs that you put up, you actually got the inspectors qualified so they could testify in court.

W. - Yes, yes we did. They would confirm the bacteriological and the chemical, and we knew exactly what went into the sample cans the authentic samples that we were drilling or using so that it made, it was adequate evidence to hold up in court.

One interesting thing happened because of the unusual character of examining eggs in this matter. Al Barnard was a hound for publicity. He called in to the local television station in Kansas City. So we made set ups to take care of them so they would get the best of it. It was a pretty good arrangement, I think, because any way the next morning the TV show that they had filmed at this plant was on the Today Show from New York under Dave Garoway.

P. - Is that right.

W. - One other aspect that was unusual, and I don't suppose they do much now is cream that is used for making butter. I spent some time trying to fabricate a whole can cream tester. We worked on that together with the Division of Microbiology and the field. It would so happen that if we'd take a small sample from a can of cream you wouldn't find anything; but if you filtered the whole can of cream, of course it's real thick so that unless you have special equipment to do it, it wouldn't work. This way we were able to filter whole cans of cream. I don't suppose they do that anymore.

P. - I don't think so. Not to my knowledge. In fact, they don't do any egg examinations that I know of either.

W. - One of the interesting experiences I had was that I by a strange coincidence happened to collect the sample that resulted in the first notice of judgment for food under the Food and Drug Cosmetic Act. You'd be surprised what the article was. It was sauerkraut juice that I collected when I was a resident in Salt Lake City.

P. - Now was that the first notice of judgment after the 1938 act?

W. - Yes. No. 1. I still have a copy. Sometimes I thought maybe I'd frame it because it's kind of unusual.

P. - Yes.

W. - Of course, there have been a lot of amendments to that original act now, but an entirely new act hasn't been passed. I suppose it will be some day like the 1938 act replaced a 1906 act.

I participated in a number of investigations. One of the early ones was the exixir of sulfanilamide when we had to run all over interviewing doctors to try to keep them from prescribing this product made from radiator antifreeze and sulfanilamide. That was a tremendous investigation. That happened in 1937.

P. - What did you do personally, Larry? Where were you in the...

W. - I was in San Francisco.

P. - Did you work day and night, things like that. I think maybe...

W. - Sometimes we did work nights trying to run it down before somebody would start to take it. We would trace shipments from Massengill Manufacturing in Tennessee. They would be reported to us, and then we'd try to run them down before any of them could be used.

P. - Right down to the patient?

W. - Right down to the patient or the doctor.

Another one of the big investigations we had while I was in Seattle was the Neu-Ovo Arthritis Remedy. In that case we had to contact various doctors and treated patients who had taken this proprietary remedy, and then we would call on these people themselves-- some that had given testimonials that they had been completely cured from arthritis by taking this Neu-Ovo or were badly crippled in wheel chairs and beds. Some of them were even dead and they were still using their testimonials. Then when we had the trial in Tacoma, Washington--it was about 1941--it was my responsibility to get some of these victims into the court so that they could testify and the jury could see just what condition they were in in the face of these testimonials that the manufacturer had distributed to the public.

P. - You did get some in successfully?

W. - Yes, we won that case. It was quite a landmark for Seattle District at that time. I spent a good many months running down some of those patients there.

One of the unusual situations that I ran into back in Washington was what we called the Philadelphia Fish Story. A fish firm there had a lot of flounder on hand that had become decomposed so he proceeded to treat it with very large amounts of sodium nitrite. He sold it to the consumers. As a result, there was one death and quite a number of illnesses. That was back in 1959.

P. - Do you remember the name of that case?

W. - No, I don't remember. It was some small fish dealer in Philadelphia, but it had quite a significance at that time because he had a pretty wide distribution locally.

Another time we got into a number of problems was when Swift dried egg yolks for babies which is a very sensitive situation became contaminated with salmonella. We were making factory inspections, running around collecting samples, putting embargoes on various lots for a long time. There were some illnesses that were contributed to this particular product.

I participated in some of the early cancer remedy investigations like hoxey and koch and some of the others. I remember one time that we had a case against cranberries which were contaminated with the weed killer,

aminotriazole, and it happened right at Thanksgiving when they tied up just about all the cranberries in the East coast. People were a little bit disturbed about that but I guess they got over it because they had cranberries the next year.

P. - You know, Larry, one man that we both know well--you knew him better and longer than I did--was John L. Harvey. If you have some recollections of him that you think would be of interest, I'd appreciate your just talking about Harvey.

W. - Well, yes, I did. I felt I knew Mr. Harvey very well. As a matter of fact, he was the one that originally interviewed me for my appointment to Food and Drug back in 1935. He was Chief of the Seattle Station at that time. Then a little bit later he became the Western District Chief, and after tours of duty at the various Western Districts, I went up to San Francisco to work under Mr. Harvey as his assistant. Then when the districts were abolished and he was transferred to Washington and I was transferred to Washington, and eventually he became the Associate Commissioner and I was with the Bureau Field Administration. For some time there I was in charge of the recalls. Now, recalls when they first started out were relatively simple. Later they became very complex. They all had to be thoroughly investigated, conclusions made and then taken to one

of the Commissioners for his approval before anything could be actually done. In that respect I had quite a bit of contact with Mr. Harvey because he was handling as Associate Commissioner the final decisions on recall in those days dealing with both food and drugs.

P. - What kind of guy was he?

W. - Well, I thought he was a very personable man, very fair and I thought he was extremely well advised and intelligent in the enforcement of the Food and Drug Act.

P. - I remember him as being a very excellent speaker.

W. - Oh yes, he was a magnificent talker and I think everybody liked him. I don't know of anybody that didn't like him.

P. - Well, I think so, too. He was a little pompous at times.

W. - Yes, yes he was, but I don't know, I think that was part of his inner nature. It helped him develop his character, too, and made him agreeable to more people.

P. - How about Larrick. Did you know Larrick very well?

W. - Well, of course I knew Larrick. He was Commissioner while I was in Washington, but I didn't have a great deal of contact with him. Larrick was more concerned with legislation and trade relations, which I didn't have a great deal to do with during my tenure in Washington. So, I didn't have much occasion; I would see him once in a while but not too often--not nearly as much as I would see Mr. Harvey.

P. - You know, my recollections of Larrick involved two things that I think are interesting about him. After I had been transferred to Chicago and Larrick hadn't seen me for a number of years, I can't believe he knew I was in Chicago because at that time he was Commissioner and it just doesn't seem like he would have. In any event, I met him not in the office where he might have associated me in some way, but I met him in the hallway in the post office in Chicago. Right away, out comes his hand, "Hello, Bob. How are you?" He knew me. Another time when I was transferred to Washington in 1963. I had some business with him because I worked on some of the background work on developing the quackery congress that they had in about '63 or '64. I went in to see him--it was my first time to see him since I came to Washington--he took me in his office and showed me the new Food and Drug building outside his office windows, which at that time it was under construction. He was such a, to me, such an easy person to talk to and I always felt kind of a warm feeling about him.

W. - Yes, he was very easy to talk to and he did have the remarkable facility of knowing just about everyone in the Food and Drug Administration at that time. He knew their name, he knew where they were stationed and what they did; and he was always extremely

friendly. I know that after he retired he was about to form a group of Food and Drug retirees. In fact, I got a letter from him asking for some help and information about retired Food and Drug employees in our area. Then shortly after that he died.

P. - I didn't know he had that in mind at all.

W. - Yes, he was going to form--that is one thing I do miss. I don't hear very much about Food and Drug down here. In the old days when they had the Food and Drug Review they would always have something about ex-Food and Druggers, what they were doing, what was going on with transfers, promotions in Food and Drug itself. You'd know what was going on. You have no way of knowing that now unless you happen to talk to somebody who was one of your former co-workers or a close friend.

P. - I wonder if we could--I don't know whether it would be proper to spend government money for it--but it seems to me it would be nice if somebody in publications in some way in Washington just did a little news sheet and send it out to retired Food and Drug employees. You know that there is no list of retired Food and Drug employees. When I started this project...

W. - They used to have one. They kept track of them through this old Food and Drug Review. Now, they couldn't support something like that exclusively on government money, but if they combined current activities of the

Food and Drug with a little publication and then added something about knowledge of current retirees and former employees, I think that would be compatible.

P. - Well, when I wanted to get a list of all the retired people to start this project, there was none in existence. I went to Personnel in Washington; they don't have it. I said well, they all get a pension, maybe Civil Service will give a list where all these retired people are on their computer and it looks to me like they could run their computer against people, the agency they were in at the time that they retired.

W. - But, they don't keep it that way.

P. - Well, Civil Service didn't even tell us that. They said it would be against the law for them to do it because of the Privacy of Information Law. So, I couldn't get that. The way I did it--it wasn't the perfect way--was to ask each district to talk among themselves and send me a list of all retired people they knew--in or outside their district. This way I got some duplication, of course, but...

W. - There would be a tremendous amount though.

P. - But, I got all everybody told me about and then sorted them out into the district they lived in because if I was going to visit them, naturally, their geographic location was important and so I have that list. When I say I have it, Food and Drug has it now; but no--

there's still no mechanism to up date it. I did that a year ago almost.

W. - That's very strange.

P. - I retired last April. I'm not on that list. It's too bad. It really is too bad, but I don't know what could be done about that.

I know this record isn't getting all history in it, but it doesn't hurt to have somebody hear some of this.

W. - Maybe they'll do something about it sometime.

P. - Well, let's see--Harvey and Larrick and...

W. - Bob Roe was a good friend of mine. When I reported for duty in 1935 at San Francisco, he was the assistant chief there. Part of the time we'd go out on field excursions--like when we were doing tomato plants. We were putting up experimental packs of tomatoes for food standards, and Bob would go off with us. He was a hard worker, but he was very thorough and efficient on all that. Later on I worked under Bob Roe in Seattle when he was the district chief there, again when he was district chief in Los Angeles and then we were both transferred to Washington. Of course, he went into a different division than I was; but we've been good friends. Bob is very personable, he's very sincere and a very hard worker. I wish I was able to see him once in a while now, but there's quite a distance involved between California and Washington.

P. - Well, Larry, thank you very much. I appreciate your recording these recollections for us, and I know that your hobby for many years has been to play the piano and in more recent years, the organ. Since we've got time left on this tape, why don't we finish up this track with a little organ music. Can you tell me what you're going to play?

W. - Well, I'm going to start out with a little session on Hawaiian wedding songs. That's one of my favorite pieces. See how you like it.

P. - Good.

