HISTORY OF THE

U. S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

INTERVIEW BETWEEN:

Menno D. Voth
Retired Laboratory Director
Minneapolis District

and

Fred L. Lofsvold
Food and Drug Administration

May 25, 1983

INTRODUCTION

This is a transcription of a taped interview, one of a series conducted by Robert G. Porter and Fred L. Lofsvold, retired employees of the U. S. Food and Drug Administration. 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 & HUMAN SERVICES

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TAPE INDEX SHEET

CASSETTE NUMBER(S): 1 and 2

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

DATE: May 25, 1983 PLACE: Denver, Colorado LENGTH: 80 minutes

INTERVIEWEE	INTERVIEWER
NAME: Menno D. Voth	NAME: Fred L. Lofsvold
ADDRESS: [redacted]	ADDRESS: U.S. Food & Drug Admin.
Denver, CO 80233	Denver, Colorado

FDA SERVICE DATES: FROM 1937 TO: 1967 RETIRED? Yes

TITLE: Laboratory Director, Minneapolis District
(If retired, title of last FDA position)

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This is a recording in the FDA series of oral history recordings. The interview today is with Mr. Menno D. Voth at his residence in Denver, Colorado. Date is May 25, 1983. Interviewer is Fred Lofsvold.

Lofsvold: Mr. Voth to start this interview would you please put on the record when and where you were born, your education and a brief summary of your career with FDA.

Voth: Yes indeed. I was born in a small town in Gotebo, Oklahoma, which is near an Indian reservation there. I grew up and attended the grade school, up to grade 7 in Gotebo. My parents then moved to Buhler, Kansas where I lived and attended grade school and finished high school and also attended college, while my parents lived in Buhler, Kansas. The college I attended was Bethel College, Newton, Kansas, which is a small denominational college. During the time I attended this college I also took work during the summer in the subject of chemistry at the University of Kansas. I graduated in 1929 and was hired as a teacher in Wilson, Kansas where I was a teacher for one year and then principal of the high school for six years and superintendent of schools for about a year and a half.

During this time while I was teaching and in administrative work at Wilson, Kansas, I attended the University of Colorado, where in 1937 I received a Masters Degree in chemistry. During the time that I was attending the

University of Colorado I received an inquiry from the U.S. Government that I was eligible and asked whether I was interested in a position as Seafood Inspector in New Orleans, Louisiana. The inquiry indicated that the position was not permanent and that actually it guaranteed only six months employment and that the rest of the year was sort of optional depending on how the seafood inspection progressed. During the time that there was not enough employment, I would be on extended furlough. Generally most people took their furlough during the time that their annual leave was available. I talked to some people at Boulder, at the University, who had actually been seafood inspectors and they advised me not to take the job because it was a dead end and would not lead to any sort of career. I notified Washington that I was not interested.

In 1937 when I was superintendent of schools at Wilson, Kansas I realized that I was not particularly interested in that type of position. I had taken the position as superintendent of schools because the position was vacant and I was told that new superintendents who came in often brought their principal with them and I might be without a job. The superintendent of schools at Wilson was promoted to a state position and that is why the position was open.

I then took a job at Hays, Kansas as the assistant principal and head of the mathematics department. I took

this position because I tried to get out of the administrative position at Wilson, Kansas because I did not particularly care for that responsibility. When I got to Hays, Kansas I realized that I had made a terrible mistake. I should have realized from my previous contacts with the Hays, Kansas schools that the discipline was horrible. This was the fault of the superintendent who did not take a strong position and did not support his teachers. After working there for approximately six weeks I realized that the poor discipline problem would actually undermine my health. In other words, I was unable to cope with this.

In desperation I wrote to the government in Washington and told them that if they were still interested in Seafood Inspectors I would be willing to take the job. I was notified after a week or two that a position was open in New Orleans as a Seafood Inspector and that if I wanted the job I should take a physical examination etc. This I did and received a telegram on a Monday that I could have the job if I would report to New Orleans the following Monday (one week!) This created a great hardship because I had to teach till the end of the week and I was supposed to be in New Orleans on Monday morning. We did get there by driving day and night. When I got there I found that I was the last inspector that was hired that year and they told me to take off a few days and find a place to stay and when I mentioned

the hardship and everything that had taken place in order to get there they said, "Well, why didn't you call us and tell us you couldn't be there by that time and let us know I would report in two weeks". Well, as one who had never had any contact with government operations I assumed that when they said to be there Monday morning, I had better be there or forfeit the job. I had a week's time to sell a house, pack all goods and take care of everything that had to be done.

I was introduced to the Seafood Inspection Service by Walter McRae who took me into a shrimp plant and showed me how it operated and spent a little time explaining what the job involved and that was about it. He was a supervisor at the New Orleans station and I think came once to see how I was getting along. That, it would seem, looking back at it, was a weakness of the Seafood Service in that the training at least at some of the places was very inadequate. It turned out that I was not prepared for some of the problems that came up at this plant in New Orleans which was the only one in that area. So the supervisor, Walter McRae, decided that I should be transferred to Biloxi, Mississippi where there were a considerable number of seafood inspectors, operating plants. This gave me an opportunity to become acquainted with and sort of train myself in the seafood inspection and from then on it was not difficult.

I was transferred from Biloxi, Mississippi to a factory in Louisiana, farther west where I spent some months. I was then furloughed for the summer and spent the summer in Kansas. While there I received a telegram from New Orleans asking if I would be interested in a transfer to Boston, Massachusetts as a chemist in the FDA laboratory and of course I gladly accepted this offer.

I was then transferred to Boston District as a Junior Chemist. I spent 13 years in Boston and was then offered an opportunity for a position as Chief Chemist in Seattle, Washington. In Seattle, Washington I spent five and one-half years as Chief Chemist supervising the laboratory in Seattle and also a substation in Portland, Oregon.

Because of health problems in the family I asked to be transferred to another District. I was then transferred to the New York District where I spent three and one-half years and again asked for a transfer because of the pressure of the work in this large district.

When a position opened at Minneapolis, Minnesota as Chief Chemist I was transferred there and spent the last seven and one-half years at Minneapolis, from which I retired in 1967.

Lofsvold: When you were working as a Seafood Inspector, just what were your duties at those canning plants?

Voth: The duty of the Seafood Inspector assigned to a plant was to be responsible for the sanitation and the proper preparation and canning of shrimp at these plants.

Since the harvesting of the shrimp was rather uncertain, the inspector assigned to the plant was never sure just when he would work. The telephone was the key. You had to be available at all times to be prepared to come to the plant and see that the shrimp was processed properly. In New Orleans where we lived in an apartment, there was a phone in the hall to which you were constantly listening. In other words you didn't work all the time but you had to be available at all times, and at all hours. Whenever a shrimp boat had caught a load of shrimp, they came into port and to the plant. The plant had a whistle or a horn which they sounded to alert the workers in that plant that the shrimp boat had arrived and that the work was to start in a certain length of time, probably an hour. The next step was the telephone call to the Seafood Inspector, who hurriedly got up, generally about 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock in the morning and promptly went to the plant. In my particular case, in New Orleans, the procedure was unique in that the plant was located in the city and not along the coast like the other plants. It was the only plant located in that manner. Therefore the shrimp had to be unloaded from the boat and transported by truck to the plant and the inspector was unable to observe the unloading of the shrimp from the boat.

The first thing that the inspector had to do was to see that the plant was in good condition, that it was sanitary and that everything was clean and then they were permitted to start unloading the shrimp. The shrimp was unloaded into carts and then put onto what they called an "inspection belt". This was a movable belt which had trained people standing on each side looking for unsuitable shrimp. The unsuitable shrimp could generally be distinguished by the color of the body. If it had a "reddish" color, that would indicate that the shrimp was not in good condition. One of the important jobs of the inspector was to train the people on the inspection belt to pick out and discard shrimp which were unsuitable. The ones that were suitable then went on to the end of the belt where they dropped into a large tub and were taken to tables where they were dehulled. That is, they removed the hulls, which are the body covers and the back part over the tail of the shrimp. The workers, after dehulling them put them into containers approximately 1/2 gallon in size. When the containers were full they were taken to a central collection point. At that time the workers were paid five cents for each full container. The employees learned to work fast. They could dehull a shrimp in less than two seconds. It was also the responsibility of the inspector to see that the people who dehulled the shrimp were doing it right, that they themselves were clean and

that the work area was also clean. The plant superintendent was also interested in the fact that they were dehulled properly, otherwise the cans of shrimp were not suitable for marketing. A great deal of the time of the inspector was spent at or near the inspection belt because that was the crucial area where the bad shrimp were removed. When the inspector found that some of the employees at the inspection belt were getting careless and were not removing all the decomposed shrimp he ordered the inspection belt to be stopped and then the tub which was at the end of the belt was rerun over the inspection belt. This, of course, caused some delay and was an encouragement to the employees who picked out the bad shrimp to do a better job, otherwise their boss would be unhappy at the delay.

The inspector, also had to follow the whole processing procedure and he was particularly careful to note that the processing of the shrimp in large pressure cookers was done properly, and that the canned shrimp were stored properly.

I recall one occasion when a batch of cans had been misplaced, but fortunately they discovered it in time or they would have had one whole batch of shrimp that had not been processed at all and was not sterile. This incident could have caused a lot of problems if that batch of unprocessed cans would have been shipped into the market place and spoiled.

When I was working at Biloxi, Mississippi, where the boats docked right at the plant the procedure was a little bit different than at the New Orleans plant. The sounding of the horn and the telephone call, was identical and very, seldom did the boat ever dock after 6:00 o'clock or 7:00 o'clock in the morning. They always seemed to come in at night, sometimes as early as 1:30 a.m.

Another problem the inspector had to face was that the boats, especially at the larger plants, might come in two or three at the same time. So it was easily possible that an inspector was on duty from 3:00 o'clock in the morning till eleven o'clock that evening or even later which meant a lot of hours of inspection time. In a place like Biloxi, Mississippi, where there were many plants, if that continued too long the supervisor might assign some other inspector to assist. Some inspectors enjoyed this type of work where you worked for let's say 18 hours at a time and then you didn't have to work for maybe a week. Although you had to be available all the time, you could do anything that you wanted to. To me this was not enjoyable because I liked to have a steady job and didn't want to spend all that time between not doing anything or just waiting.

There were always problems at the plants. You had to consider the wishes of the operator who wanted to process the shrimp in the most expeditious fashion and your job as

an inspector who wanted to see that the shrimp were in good condition when they were processed. One of the first duties that the inspector had when he came to the plant in the morning was to see that the toilets were in proper shape. So the first thing to do was to always check the toilets to see that they were clean and ready to accommodate the personnel.

I remember a time when this wasn't true and I informed the plant superintendent that we wouldn't start processing until they were cleaned up. The superintendent of the plant objected very strenuously that this was holding up all the operations and that FDA had told him that we wouldn't create a hardship for them. For my part I insisted and suggested that the next time they get this cleaned up ahead of time and then we could start immediately.

When the boats came in and the plant was ready to go, the inspectors job was to go down into the boat and make a preliminary inspection to see that the shrimp were in good enough condition to get started. Sometimes boats stayed out too long and this wasn't true. It never happened to me but it did to some inspectors.

When the inspector had determined that the shrimp were in fairly good condition, he gave the signal to go ahead and immediately the operations started and proceeded as I have previously discribed.

I should mention that shrimp is a very, very delicate creature and that the shrimp are actually dead, probably, before they come out of the net. During the time that I was in the seafood service I never saw a live shrimp delivered to the plant. This was one of the reasons why the past conditions in the industry were so bad that the seafood service had to be instituted. I want to stress again that because of the nature of the shrimp it was extremely important that they be processed promptly. Therefore, the superintendent of the plant is very anxious to go ahead with the operation so that the shrimp doesn't spoil after it comes in.

I'd like to say a further word about the job of the Seafood Inspector. When I was stationed in New Orleans and took the street car to the plant, I realized that after working in the plant for 3 or 4 or more hours, all your clothes were saturated with the odor of shrimp which even if it isn't decomposed, is not very pleasant. I had the first experience in my life of sitting down in a seat in the street car, and having people move over because of the odor of my clothes. When you arrived home the first thing you did was take off your clothes and hang them on the wash line to air them out or perhaps in some cases wash them everytime.

I would like to mention along the line of the trials of the Seafood Inspector was that the training and evaluation

was somewhat rudimentary. When I came in, as I noted before, I received only cursory training and this bothered me a lot. Also the evaluation of the inspectors did not seem to be uniform.

I know particularly of one individual whose name is Lauren Hammack, who was a very fine individual, very conscientious and had asked the supervisor a number of times how he was doing, and if there was anything he could do to improve his performance. He suddenly found that the supervisor had rated him low, or unsatisfactory and word came from Washington to dismiss this inspector. This was a very serious blow to this inspector, who had been, I thought, very conscientious and had been doing a good job. In fact I had visited his plant several times and thought that he was doing an excellent job, yet he was dismissed as being unsatisfactory. Of course, most of the supervisors were very good, Walter McRae who trained me first was very kind to me and helped me a lot in doing my duty in the seafood service.

Lofsvold: After your season with the seafood service, you were transferred to Boston as a chemist?

Voth: Yes, I was notified when I was on furlough that I had a chance for the position as chemist in Boston which, of course, I eagerly accepted.

When I came back from furlough to New Orleans, I assisted in training some of the new inspectors that came in and then was transferred to Boston in August, 1938.

At Boston I was assigned as a chemist in the laboratory. During the time that I was at Boston, which was 13 years, I was frequently asked to go on field trips with inspectors, assisting them by correlating the inspections with the resulting laboratory work. In fact this happened so often that my chemical experience became somewhat limited. Quite often after I had started a chemical examination, the chief inspector came in and wanted me to go on a trip. When I protested that I was examining a sample, he suggested that another chemist could complete the work on the sample. This was very interesting for me because I became acquainted with the inspection procedures and I believe I assisted the inspectors occasionally by explaining to them the laboratory procedure that would be involved.

I also spent considerable time putting up experimental packs of fish. At that time the Washington laboratories were developing chemical methods for the determination of decomposition in fish. I was designated as the person in the Boston laboratory who would prepare and also examine quite a number of the "experimental packs" that were prepared. So called "experimental packs" are necessary in order to correlate the observation by odor and appearance of

the fish with the resulting laboratory findings. In order to determine what decomposed fish, let's say, would be like after they had been canned, it was necessary to take absolutely fresh fish and immediately examine them chemically. At the same time some of the fish were canned for later examination. The remaining fish were slowly allowed to decompose. They were examined every day, or if it was warm more often, perhaps even twice daily. When the decomposition became noticeable by the odor and other characteristics, you could tell that a change had taken place. Then some of the fish were again taken and examined chemically, and also canned immediately. The above process continued until the odor of the fish became so bad that any person, no matter how insensitive they were to decomposition would readily admit that they were "putrid" and that they smelled very very bad. This was the last stage. Then we took this fish and examined it chemically and also canned it. Later we opened these cans and examined them by smelling, which we called organoleptic examination, and also tested them chemically. But where most of the useable information was obtained was to compare the odor of the raw fish and the odor of the corresponding fish which was in the can. It was not at all the same. The odor of the fish in the can was an entirely different odor than you would smell, when the fish were in the raw state. Individuals who examined the fish in

the can for the first time often times completely exchanged the good and the bad. They thought the fish that was good actually had been decomposed. Therefore, it was very important that individuals who examined fish in the can would be able to distinguish these odors. It is a different type of an odor, and you could with experience, determine which fish had been produced from the decomposed fish.

Lofsvold: Then, by preparing these authentic packs, you and the other people who participated became trained in recognizing the odor of the canned fish which was characteristic of decomposed raw fish. How did you use this skill?

Voth: This skill was used mostly in the laboratory because canned fish would be brought in and could be examined there. However, on trips which I made with inspectors, I did examine the cans which were questionable in the field.

Some of my field work was involved in reconditioning fish. Some packers whose product was seized, where there was a fairly low percentage of fish which showed some decomposition, thought they could recondition the fish. I'm talking about raw fish now, which had been frozen. The packers were reluctant to discard this whole batch of fish which had been seized and applied for the privilege of reconditioning this fish. I was involved in this process which was incidentally not very pleasant because you always worked in cold warehouses and under disagreeable conditions.

The process was to take fish from each code which indicated that it had been packed at that certain time, thaw out this fish, and then examined a substantial portion of each code to see if this fish was suitable for consumption. This could generally be done. However, there were very few packers who did this more than once, because the fish after examination had to be refrozen and therefore was of a lower quality and difficult to market. Or the examination took so long that enough time was lost so that in the end most packers concluded that it was better to discard the entire lot in the first place, rather than trying to recondition it by sorting out the decomposed fish.

There was one time when a packer tried to recondition canned fish. The way they did that was to separate the codes and take each code and puncture a hole in all the cans and then squeeze the can so some of the juice would exude through the hole, which they then examined were able to separate to a very good degree which cans were decomposed. The cans which were punctured and examined the way I have described were then soldered, that is the holes were soldered and then they were again marketed.

Lofsvold: After recooking?

Voth: Yes, after reprocessing. This, of course, was not very desirable because the flavor of the product after the second processing, which was really over-processing, was

generally not very good and this is the only time, I think, that that was ever tried in our area that I know of.

Lofsvold: That was the common practice, you remember, out in the northwest when we were at Seattle. The salmon canners reconditioned bad lots in that fashion, and had done it for years. It did produce a mushy, very soft product that they had to sell at a reduced price.

Voth: Yes, I remember that now. I was talking about New England where they were trying this, I forget just what the product was actually. But that's the only time there that I remembered it was done.

Lofsvold: With a softer fish like most of the fish they catch there I imagine the reprocessed product would not be very attractive.

Voth: That's right.

One of the examinations that we did in the laboratory at Boston was the examination of maple syrup. As you know maple syrup comes exclusively from northeastern U.S. states and adjacent Canadian provinces. The problem that we ran into was that we found lead in the maple syrup, that is, lead dissolved in the maple syrup. In tracing back to where this came from, it was found that the people who produced the maple syrup generally used large kettles made out of galvanized metal which were generally rectangular in shape, and the corners were soldered. The use of solder was the

problem because solder is composed of at the very least 50% of lead. Some cheaper solders contain considerable more lead. The maple syrup that is produced is collected from the sugar maple trees in these areas. I'm sure everyone has seen pictures of drilling holes into the trees and having the sap collected as it drips out. This sap really contains mostly water. The amount of sugar in the sap is between 1 1/2 to 3%. So it takes a lot of cooking or boiling to boil away the water and get the maple syrup to where it can be marketed. It takes 30 to 50 gallons of sap to produce one gallon of syrup. This probably takes days, since most of these evaporators are fired by wood burning underneath these tanks. This maple sap being a little bit on the acid side, dissolves some of the lead which is in these soldered joints and that is where the lead comes from. Lead is quite a poisonous substance when ingested into the body and therefore Food and Drug objected to it presence. We examined a considerable number of shipments of maple syrup and seized quite a few.

One of the cases was contested in court and went to trial. The trial was somewhat interesting. This trial was in an area where the jury was largely composed of farmers who were in the maple sugar or maple syrup business. So we anticipated quite a challenge. The challenge, was that the amount of lead that was in the maple syrup really was not

that harmful. In order to bolster our case we hired expert witnesses, one of whom was Dr. Carlson from the University of Chicago who was a pharmacologist in the medical school.

Lofsvold: Was that Anton J. Carlson?

Voth: Yes, Dr. Carlson had quite an imposing personality, and I think he won the trial for us. After the witnesses for the government had presented the fundamentals of their case, such as proof that the chemical tests were proper and accurate, and that they had determined that the lead which was present was harmful to the human body, Dr. Anton J. Carlson was put on the stand as the expert witness. The lawyer who was questioning him used the tactic of trying to discredit his testimony on the grounds that Dr. Carlson never practiced medicine himself, that he was only in the University teaching. It was interesting how Dr. Carlson met this challenge. He said, "No, I've never practiced medicine myself, I have taught over 5,000 doctors but I never did practice medicine myself." And that ended that line of questioning.

Lofsvold: And then in 1951, I believe, you were transferred from Boston to Seattle as Chief Chemist, is that correct?

Voth: Yes. At Seattle I don't know if there was any special item that should be discussed except Seattle was unique in having a satellite laboratory at Portland, Oregon. This meant that the laboratory had to have good chemists at

Portland because most of the time they were on their own. They had one person in charge, Dick Edge, who incidentally is still working for FDA at this time (1983) even after he retired from the Dallas District quite a few years ago. This meant that at least once a month the Chief Chemist at Seattle District had to travel to Portland and evaluate their operations. Later on this laboratory was discontinued and I don't believe there is any district that presently has this feature.

From Seattle I was transferred to New York District, as I mentioned previously, due to health problems in the family. The New York District in addition to being the largest field district in the Food and Drug Administration at that time had some unusual characteristics. One of the chief differences between the New York District and other districts was the imports. The imports were so numerous at New York District that they consumed a considerable portion of the time of the staff of the laboratory because we had to examine hundreds of samples each day. It was rather interesting that there was a big difference in the number of samples that could be examined by different individuals.

There was a chemist named Dan Ungar in the laboratory who actually acted more as an inspector than as a chemist. He had several degrees; he was a pharmacologist as well as a chemist. He enjoyed working out in the field, collecting

samples and advising the laboratory as to what was going on. He was an extremely intelligent and versatile individual.

As an example, he examined spices that came into the laboratory and was able to do them about 10 times faster than any other chemist. At first when I came to New York District I questioned this, since it seemed very unusual and a number of times had his samples reexamined by other chemists but determined that he was always right. That he was able to do this showed his ingenuity. I observed him as he worked and noted that he had a way of estimating and determining whether the sample was suitable or not, that was so unique that he was designated to examine most of the spice samples.

Lofsvold: Those were visual examinations?

Voth: These examinations consisted mostly of examination for extraneous material which could be visually determined such as excreta of mice, rodents and insects and materials of that type. These lent themselves to this very rapid examination. In addition to doing this work in the laboratory, Dan Ungar had other qualities; he was not averse to getting up at 3:00 o'clock in the morning, going to the airport and to the docks to see what materials were arriving and still doing his work in the laboratory.

From New York District I was transferred to the Minneapolis District where they were in the process of ex-

pansion and in constructing a new building. This was my first and only experience in this and it was rather interesting. People have said that expansion is the most difficult problem in any area and that retrenchment or reducing the work force is much easier than expansion. You'd think it was the other way but it's not, as I found. When I was transferred to Minneapolis we were in an old building, very crowded, with inadequate facilities which were not remodeled because the new building was anticipated and later under construction.

The construction was started during the time that I was in Minneapolis so I was exposed to the entire process of the construction of the new building. It was during this time that Congress authorized the Food and Drug Administration to expand and also appropriated money to construct new buildings because they realized that there were a lot of problems with old buildings in our type of work. What made it difficult was the fact that during this time, since we anticipated a larger staff and were moving to the new building, we hired chemists who began their training in the old building. Therefore, we were extremely crowded with double the number of people working at the work benches than would normally be the case. There was also the problem of training these new chemists in the laboratory. We always needed about a year to properly train our chemists and we also estimated that it

took half a chemist's time to train a new chemist. Therefore, the staff which we had was not only crowded and handicapped in that way but they were, in reality, depleted because so much of their time was devoted to training the new chemists.

During this time the construction of the new building was in progress and there were a lot of problems that came up in determining whether the way the building had been designed and was being constructed seemed suitable to us or if any small changes should be made.

Finally, the new building was completed and we moved in. This in itself was a very difficult task. Moving the equipment to the new location and acclimating everyone to the new surroundings was a headache. It was particularly difficult in the laboratory because so many of the items which should have worked, didn't. A good example was the "steambaths" which we had, where live steam was piped in to heat the items that had to be kept at a certain temperature. The contraction and expansion of the materials created problems because there were constant leaks from the steam baths until the contractor finally found one product, which could expand and contract sufficiently to prevent the leaks. Then the innumerable other small items that didn't function properly which I suppose is always true, whether you build a house or whether you build anything which is new - it doesn't always work.

In addition, as far as the laboratory was concerned, since it was so much larger than the old one, they transferred in ten chemists from another district. This made a big impact upon the supervision since they didn't transfer any supervisors, probably because other districts also had their problems within the supervisory field. The supervisors who had to be appointed as acting supervisors were inexperienced and needed a lot of supervision themselves. Actually, the first year in the new laboratory was, to me at least, a nightmare. It was much easier for the administrative staff to expand, taking people who were experienced than to train the chemists in their job. After a few years, this of course, was alleviated but in the beginning it was very difficult. What I'm trying to say is that any expansion of this type and at this rate involves a lot of work on the part of the individuals who are responsible for doing it.

Lofsvold: Do you think that expansion could have been better planned in order to have made it easier...or was it just the fact that we had so many coming at once that we really couldn't plan for it?

Voth: Well, I think it could have been planned better but other districts had the same problem, so that I think this is something that is normal to that rapid an expansion. It's much more difficult to expand than it is to contract.

Lofsvold: At that particular time in response to the recommendations of the Citizens Committee reports, the Congress was anxious for us to expand as quickly as possible. I suppose the Commissioner and the other top managers were in the position that they had to take that money while it was available and probably couldn't do much better...

Voth: I would agree it was a difficult time for every one concerned. I don't think it was necessarily a matter of money it was just that our chemists weren't ready for this. They weren't properly trained. Training is a gradual process which can only be speeded-up within limits.

Lofsvold: If we could have hired these people over a period of years, a smaller number each year, it would of been a much easier process.

Voth: Absolutely.

Lofsvold: One of the questions that we have asked most of the people we've interviewed is whether they have any anecdotes or any stories about Commissioners or other leaders of the agency that illustrates the way that they operated.

Voth: Well, there's one instance, I think it was at Seattle District, the FDA seized a shipment of mislabeled salmon intended for the armed services. This came to the attention of the superiors in Washington. The colonel from the armed services was very irate about this since it reflected somewhat upon their buying procedures. He telephoned John

L. Harvey the Deputy Commissioner of FDA and told him he didn't approve of this and he said to Mr. Harvey "I want you to come down here right now and get this settled." John L. Harvey's answer to him was, "I will be here in the office until 4:30 and if you want to come and discuss this with me, I will be glad to do so."

Lofsvold: That was typical Harvey. That must have been when he was Deputy Commissioner.

Voth: Yes.

Lofsvold: Yes I remember that case, that was the one where the Army Quarter master was buying silver salmon steaks, but the contractor was delivering chum salmon, which is the much cheaper species of salmon. Doug Hansen, was the investigator and he has discussed it in the interview we had with him.

Was there any other subject that you wanted to talk about on this recording?

Voth: No, I don't think so. I think there are a lot of other people that you have interviewed or are going to interview that can add more to it than I could.

Lofsvold: Well, some of the things that you put on the record today, we did not have from anyone else. We are very grateful for you taking the time to make this recording. Thank you very much.

Voth: You're welcome.

STANFILL

HISTORY OF THE

U. S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Interview between:

Robert G. Stanfill, Sr., Retired
Director, Philadelphia District

and

Fred L. Lofsvold

Haddon Heights, N.J.

September 12, 1981

INTRODUCTION

This is a transcription of a taped interview, one of a series conducted by Robert G. Porter and Fred L. Lofsvold, retired employees of the U. S. Food and Drug Administration. 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 & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Food and Drug Administration
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TAPE INDEX SHEET

CASSETTE NUMBER(S) 1 and 2

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

DATE: Sept. 12, 1981 PLACE: Hoddon Heights, N.J. LENGTH: 78 minutes

INTERVIEWEE	INTERVIEWER
NAME: Robert G. Stanfill, Sr.	NAME: Fred L. Lofsvold
ADDRESS: 115 White Horse Pike	ADDRESS: U. S. Food & Drug Admin.
Haddon Heights, N.J. 08035	Denver, Colorado

FDA SERVICE DATES: FROM 1927 TO: 1961 RETIRED? yes

TITLE: Director, Philadelphia District
(If retired, title of last FDA position)

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This is an interview in the oral history series. We are recording today Mr. Robert C. Stanfill, Sr. at his residence in Haddon Heights, New Jersey. Mr. Stanfill is a retired director of the Philadelphia District of FDA. Interviewer is Fred Lofsvold.

Lofsvold: Mr. Stanfill, would you please give us a brief sketch of your career with the Food and Drug Administration?

Stanfill: My career with the Food and Drug Administration actually started with the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Chemistry about October 1926. Prior to that I was employed in the Department of Agriculture Weather Bureau in Trenton, New Jersey. It was interesting how I got to Trenton. I was a student at George Washington University through 1925. One of my pastimes was taking Civil Service examinations every Wednesday afternoon and every Saturday morning and shortly after I graduated I got a whole bunch of inquiries about my availability for employment. That was almost as unusual in those days as it is now to have a choice. And one of the examinations that I had taken led to a job offer with Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington and an inquiry from the Weather Bureau about a position open in Trenton, New Jersey. I spent about a day and a half touring and being interviewed at Saint Elizabeth's

Hospital and decided against taking the position there because I couldn't tell the patients from the keepers. Saint Elizabeth's was a psychiatric hospital.

I had traveled quite extensively during my school days because as a son of a railroad employee--I'm a former part time railroad employee myself, I was eligible for and had annual passes good on any railroad anywhere and I was interested in Trenton because I had never been there. I applied for and was accepted for a job in the Weather Bureau at Trenton, sight unseen and went to work there for a distinguished meteorologist who was a Harvard graduate. And if I recall correctly, he personally knew and remembered another Harvard graduate connected with the Food and Drug Administration, Harvey W. Wiley. After I had worked for the Weather Bureau for about nine months, I got an inquiry about whether I would be interested in a position as a Food and Drug inspector. The way I got on the eligible list was from having used my schooling in bacteriology, or as we say now days microbiology, and I had taken Civil Service examination in sanitary bacteriology, which theoretically qualified me for some analytical work in water pollution control in the Public Health Service, where there was a vacancy at Pittsburgh.

The description that was given me of the work of a Food and Drug inspector rather intrigued me because it was

somewhat different from any experience or schooling that I had ever had and I found out later from Commissioner Dunbar that he decided to appoint me because he had never had a bacteriology major as a Food and Drug inspector and thought it had possibilities.

Lofsvold: Did you report to Philadelphia?

Stanfill: I reported to Philadelphia to find out more about the job. I was accepted for a position in St. Louis without having actually been interviewed specifically for the job and reported. Meantime, remembering a sign on the railroad bridge entering Trenton from the south, which says "Trenton makes, the world takes." I had met a very charming young lady in Trenton, Isabella Chamberlain and when the offer for a job in St. Louis came along, I proposed to her and she accepted effective when I came back from my six months probationary period on the job in St. Louis.

My station chief in St. Louis was Ernest B. Smith, a very pleasant individual who was a graduate pharmacist and former operator of a drug store. He decided that it would be interesting to use my background in bacteriology in my duties as a Food and Drug inspector. One of the big projects in St. Louis was the canning of string beans or green snap beans and they had been bothered a great deal with flat sour decomposition. So I was put to work investigating the processing times and temperatures and the

effect of different times and temperatures and details of handling string beans before the heat processing period and their relationship to flat sours and other types of decomposition.

Another food product that was manufactured quite extensively in the area was cider vinegar and there was a great deal of cheating by the manufacturers by using concentrated apple cider which was concentrated 50 to 1. And the concentrated apple juice or concentrated cider was used with diluted corn sugar to simulate the cider. That's how cider vinegar was made.

Lofsvold: That work on the canned beans, was that the first work that was done on causes of flat sour?

Stanfill: Well, it was the most extensive work that had been done. Work had been done on it previously, but this was the most extensive research that was done on it.

Lofsvold: Did you arrive at a decision on what the cause was?

Stanfill: It was decided that the principal cause was too short a time period and insufficient heat and pressure, along with some spoilage. It was not entirely eliminated by the heat and pressure. Some of the growers in the Ozark Region had their own canneries and some of them had rather unusual ways of getting the heat and temperature that was required. One grower-canner used a wood fire and second-

hand frozen egg cans to cook the cans of beans and in order to get steam pressure, he weighted the tops of the egg cans down with fire wood and some way or another it didn't work as well as a retort would have. Some of the cans would swell and blow up, but it was quite interesting to see how the different canners experimented with substitutes for good retorts.

Lofsvold: Did they ever have any cases of botulism?

Stanfill: No violent deaths or actual outbreaks of botulism, I don't know why; all of the opportunities seemed to be there. I guess it's because the good Lord sometimes takes care of fools and idiots.

However, it was an interesting three or four seasons that I worked on this and it came in handy in the later years when I did a somewhat similar but less extensive study on canned peas in New Jersey and Delaware and Pennsylvania canneries.

Lofsvold: How long were you in St. Louis?

Stanfill: About three years. During a vacation I came back East--my family lived in Knoxville, Tennessee--and my wife's family lived in Trenton, New Jersey. I stopped in at Philadelphia and talked to the station chief Clement S. Brinton and his chief chemist Arthur M. Henry. I told them what experience I had in the St. Louis station and that in order to have my wife closer to her family and available to

visit them more often, I'd be interested in getting a transfer back to Philadelphia. Shortly after our return to St. Louis, I had an inquiry as to whether I was available to transfer to New York. I came back and had a further discussion with Mr. Brinton and Mr. Henry and they were interested in having me added to their staff at Philadelphia. So without further discussion with me about it, they talked to W.R.M. Wharton, the chief of the Eastern District in which both Philadephia and New York were located and persuaded him to change the proposal from a transfer to New York to a transfer to Philadelphia. This was done effective about April 1927. At that time it was the Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration.

Lofsvold: Separated from the Bureau of Chemistry?

Stanfill: They separated the Bureau of Chemistry into the Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration and the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils which stayed in the Department of Agriculture. The staff was enlarged somewhat because the insecticide and fungicide group of inspectors were absorbed as Food and Drug inspectors.

Lofsvold: About how large was that staff in Philadephia?

Stanfill: I think we had about eight inspectors, station chief, chief chemist, chief inspector, and a staff of about four in the insecticide and fungicide group.

Lofsvold: And how many chemists?

Stanfill: About five or six chemists.

Lofsvold: You worked then as an inspector?

Stanfill: When I came back to Philadelphia, I worked in southeastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, southern New Jersey.

Lofsvold: What were the principal things that you were working on in those days? Mostly foods or some drugs?

Stanfill: Mostly foods, some drugs and I did quite a bit on caustic poisons.

Lofsvold: That was a fairly new law at that time.

Stanfill: It wasn't too long after I came back to Philadelphia that the sulfanilamide case busted out and took everybody's time for a while. Another case was dinitrophenol which, if I recall correctly, was used largely for weight control and a number of people died and a number of people were made seriously ill from misuse. Another thing that caused a lot of injuries and some blindness and possibly even death was eyelash and eyebrow coloring. Lash Lure was one of the famous ones that did a lot of damage, caused a number of cases of blindness and injury to the eyes.

Lofsvold: Were you involved in investigating some of those injuries?

Stanfill: Yes, uh-huh.

Lofsvold: You mentioned the Caustic Poison Act. Didn't that law come about because of a physician here in Philadelphia?

Stanfill: Yes, there were a number of instances of severe injury to children from drinking lye solutions in the kitchen or family laundry. Swallowing the caustic lye solution literally destroyed the esophagus of a number of children and Dr. Chevalier Jackson got very much interested in curing these children and preventing it from happening again. He took a lot of pictures of these children that he examined and treated and operated on to repair the corrosive damage done by the lye solutions. After he got a lot of his data together, he wrote a proposed Caustic Poison Act and took his data, including the photographs and statistical information on injuries and deaths, made an appointment with the Congressional Committee In Washington and showed them his data, gave a lecture and presented the proposed Caustic Poison Law. He did such an excellent job, convincing job, that the Committee presented a proposed Caustic Poison Law. They voted on it and passed it the same day. It looks like if you have a good piece of legislation you want passed, you find a Dr. Chevalier Jackson.

Lofsvold: The law covered various caustic substances, not only lye, but caustic acids and similar substances that caused this kind of damage?

Stanfill: Yeah. Clement S. Brinton--S, that's for Starr, S-t-a-r-r. Clement was a good name for him because he was

a very gentle man, he was six feet five inches tall and weighed proportionately, but he was a very gentle man who was married to a woman who was very small in stature, but was able to persuade him to do as she wanted to, whether he agreed with it or not. On one occasion we had a picnic with the staff of the New York station and we organized a tug-o-war match. Mr. Brinton was about to serve as the anchorman for the Philadelphia District, McKay McKinnon was anchorman for New York, two heavyweights. Mrs. Brinton was afraid that the exercise would be too drastic for Clement, so she grabbed him by the coat tail and says, "Clement, thee said thee wouldn't and thee mustn't." So peace loving Quaker as he was, he didn't.

Clement Brinton was appointed as junior chemist to work in Washington under Dr. Wiley and a number of other chemists well known in the early days of the Food and Drug Administration. He was selected by Dr. Wiley to open a Philadelphia laboratory as an import station. A great deal of work was done analyzing imported foods and drugs. That was even before the Food and Drug ACT of 1906 was enacted and after the Food and Drug Act was passed on June 30, 1906, the laboratory under Dr. Brinton was continued in Philadelphia.

Lofsvold: He retired in what year, do you remember?

Stanfill: I don't remember.

Lofsvold: You succeeded him as director?

Stanfill: Yes.

Lofsvold: As I recall, Bob, during your active career with FDA you did quite a bit of writing on various FDA subjects.

Stanfill: Yes, I made a lot of contributions to the Association of Food and Drug Officials Bulletin and some that I'll never be able to find now because they were published in the Food and Drug Review, which was an in-house organ that doesn't get quoted outside. One that was published with extensive illustrations was a paper on the Caustic Poison Act and a lot of the photographs were presented to me personally by Dr. Chevalier Jackson.

One of the most famous or infamous cases that I worked on, that I wrote about several times, was the Dinshah P. Ghadiali and the Dinshah Spectrochrome Institute. That's referred to in the treatise on Food, Drug and Cosmetic Law supposedly written by Toulman, but I spent about two and a half years updating it and rewriting it.

Lofsvold: That's the three volume work entitled "Food, Drugs and Cosmetics, the Law of Food, Drugs and Cosmetics" by Toulman, the second edition published in Cincinnati by W. H. Anderson and Company in 1942?

Stanfill: Uh-huh.

Lofsvold: I guess the second edition was actually 1963 because you did that work after you had retired.

Stanfill: Yes.

Lofsvold: You also prepared something, I believe, on that problem with sodium nitrite in fish?

Stanfill: Yes, I caught the attention of newspapers all over the country and radio and TV stations. If I remember correctly, two of the still active TV commentators were Roy Neal, who does a lot of broadcasting of NASA events and the space flights and Tom Pettit who is now a Washington correspondent.

Lofsvold: Were they on Philadelphia stations at that time?

Stanfill: Yes. Tom Pettit came into my district chief office with a hand-held TV camera and we talked quite a bit very informally. The poison fish case involved my home town of Haddon Heights. There was a family, all of whom liked seafood very much, and they'd have filet of flounder every week if they could get some that was fresh. They bought some at a local food chain store and shortly afterward several members of the family got quite ill. Besides the gastrointestinal symptoms, the kids turned blue around the mouth and one later died. They were hospitalized as emergency cases and a young intern recognized the symptoms as characteristic of nitrates and nitrites and used that as the basis for suggesting to our staff that something of that kind might be involved. We took it up from there and found that the filets that were left on hand did actually contain large amounts of sodium nitrite.

An inspection of the fish processor revealed that they had bought large quantities from a local chemical house and that some of the brine still on hand contained up to 1,700 times as much as was safe. We were able to prosecute the fish processor. Interestingly enough, he died just about on the first anniversary of the death of this child.

Lofsvold: Were there any other materials that you prepared for publication?

Stanfill: I delivered a paper at the annual meeting of the Association of Food and Drug Officials in Kansas City and discussed some of the investigations of the Food and Drug Administration by Congressional Committees and others. One of the persons in the audience at Kansas City, who was incidentally given recognition as having been very supportive of the Food and Drug Administration and the Commissioners was Bradshaw Mintener. I believe he was Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and a well-known attorney from Minneapolis and a law partner of John Mitchell of the Nixon fame.

Lofsvold: You knew severl Commissioners during your FDA career. What kind of a man was Dunbar?

Stanfill: Dunbar had started out under Wiley and I think he was a junior chemist at a hundred dollars a month. And while he was a Ph.D and a very active chemist, he didn't think that that was particularly unusual or out of place.

Crawford was a close understudy of Dunbar, had an entirely different type of personality, but one thing that was characteristic of both of them, they personally were acquainted with everybody in the Food and Drug Administration, and felt a surprisingly close personal attachment to every employee in the organization.

Lofsvold: Did Mr. Larrick also have that kind of a relationship with people?

Stanfill: Yes, my first recollection of George P. Larrick was at a conference of Food and Drug officials in Chicago, when I overheard conversations relating to stories about the personality and some of the outstanding work done by people who were described as possible future Commissioners. One that was mentioned most frequently in that respect was George P. Larrick. Apparently he was very active and a very outstanding Food and Drug inspector. Of course, there was always a bit of professional rivalry between inspectors and chemists, they were the two professions that people started out in in the Food and Drug Administration and I got acquainted with the reputation of George P. Larrick before I ever saw him. I got personally acquainted with him when he selected me to take a crack at revising or rewriting or updating the Food and Drug Inspectors Manual and I was assigned to go down and stay in Washington and work on that and report directly to Larrick and to call on

any employee of the Food and Drug Administration anywhere to assist me on any phase of it that I thought they could help me with. I remember Larrick asked me how long I thought the assignment would take and I said it depends on the size of the committee you have working on it. If I have seven of us, it will take me about three years. If I have five, I can probably have it completed in two years. If I'm given full responsibility for it, about six months. Got it essentially completed in about six months.

Lofsvold: Were you chief inspector here at Philadelphia at that time?

Stanfill: Uh-huh.

Lofsvold: When did you take that job?

Stanfill: I've forgotten now, but I do recall that we had a meeting, where the important people in the district who were in the confectionary business attended and Mr. Wharton addressed the group. It was an evening meeting. He addressed the group and at the end of the speech he announced my appointment as the Chief Food and Drug inspector.

Lofsvold: You succeeded--who was here before you as chief inspector?

Stanfill: Kirk.

Lofsvold: Ken Kirk. And that was about the time then that he went to Washington. And then you were chief inspector

until Mr. Brinton retired and you became a director. That was about 1944?

Stanfill: About. By a coincidence at the time that we were without a district director I had another meeting in Philadelphia that Mr. Wharton addressed and--I've forgotten what organization it was now, but I think it was the Philadelphia Conference of Food and Drug Officials--or it may have been the Central Atlantic States group. Wharton used that occasion to tell them I'd been promoted to director.

I recall that I probably got better acquainted with Commissioner Larrick than with any of the other Commissioners. When I retired and became available for work as a consultant to the food, drug and cosmetic industry, I found he had no objection to that, in fact, he said that I was still doing the same work to benefit the enforcement of the law with a different angle. Later on we saw each other at a number of meetings with the Association of Food and Drug Association in the United States, including Detroit, and Kansas City.

Shortly after I retired on January 31st, 1961, there was some publicity in the local papers, radio and TV about my retirement and I got telephone inquiries from some people in the food and drug industry asking if I was available to do consulting work for them. I told a couple of

them that I didn't want to get into that for a while yet because I thought that my association with the industry as a law enforcement agent was still a little too fresh and it wouldn't be, in my opinion, appropriate for me to get into consulting with or working for the industry that I had been regulating quite so soon. If they were still interested in my services after another year, if they thought about it, to give me a call and I would let them know whether I would be interested or not.

I waited for the year and I got some calls and besides individual companies, I was selected to be the consultant to the Pennsylvania Manufacturing Confectioners Association and one or two other trade organizations and had a long and pleasant relationship with them and I think served them well in helping them to be sure that they were complying with the law and thus increasing their consumer protection.

Lofsvold: It was during that period that you were involved with Toulman's publication?

Stanfill: Yeah, I was contacted by Aubrey Toulman, a patent attorney in--I can't remember now whether he was in Dayton or Akron--it was a rubber town in Ohio. I went out to Toulman's office and interviewed him and we discussed the prospect of updating his large one volume edition of "The Law of Foods, Drugs and Cosmetics," and agreed to update it and did work on it for several months. It was

published in three volumes by The Anderson Company and it is owned and circulated by a number of libraries. Among those who spoke favorably of it and were responsible for some sales being made were two Federal judges, and about four former United States Attorneys.

I guess that's about all I have to say.

Lofsvold: Thank you, Mr. Stanfill, for taking the time to make this recording for our oral history series.