CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

JAMES A. FISHER

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Marjorie Gapp & Lloyd DeWitt

in

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

on

19 December 2001

(With Subsequent Corrections & Additions)

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

JAMES A. FISHER

1920 Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 15 March

Education

1942 B.A., chemistry minor, Yale University

Professional Experience

1942-1944	Alcoa Niagara Works Engineer
	Fisher Scientific International, Inc.
1945-1950	Sales Staff
1950-1960	Sales Manager, Director
1963-1981	Senior Vice President and Director
1981-1985	Assistant to the President
1985-present	Chairman and President, Kipling Corporation

ABSTRACT

James A. Fisher begins the interview with a description of his family and early years in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After graduating early from Yale University because of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Fisher secured a position in a smelter plant making aluminum for warplanes at Alcoa Inc. In 1945, Fisher left Alcoa to work for his father, Chester G. Fisher, at the family business, Fisher Scientific International Inc. While at Fisher Scientific, Fisher became fascinated with his father's collection of alchemical art. Fisher's interest grew to the extent that he began to purchase paintings, engravings, and photographs relating to alchemy to add to the growing Fisher Collection. After the death of his father, Fisher was instrumental in the creation of the Fisher Museum, which was used to display the Fisher Collection, and the Pasteur Room, which was dedicated to the achievements of Louis Pasteur. Fisher concludes the interview with reflections on his role in the donation of the Fisher Collection to the Chemical Heritage Foundation.

INTERVIEWERS

Marjorie Gapp is the Curator of Fine Art at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia. She comes from a fine-arts background and was awarded both a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant. As part of her work with the collections, she has mounted many exhibits including, *Spinning the Elements: Wallace Carothers and the Nylon Legacy*, *Dow Chemical Portrayed*, and *Transmutations: Alchemy in Art: Selections from the Eddleman and Fisher Collections.* She recently coordinated a yearlong research project of the Eddleman and Fisher Collections of alchemical art.

Lloyd DeWitt is a Ph.D. Candidate in Art History at the University of Maryland, College Park, and is currently a Museum Fellow working at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He was the 2001-2002 Price Fellow, and collaborated with Lawrence Principe on *Transmutations*, the CHF guidebook to the Fisher and Eddleman Collections. His area of specialization is Dutch and Flemish painting of the seventeenth century. In 1993, he received his MA in Art History from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

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INTERVIEWERS: Marjorie Gapp and Lloyd DeWitt

LOCATION: Pittsburgh, PA

DATE: 19 December 2001

GAPP: We're here to talk to Jim Fisher about his memories concerning the Fisher Collection of alchemical art, his father, and the artworks. Jim, I wanted to start out talking to you about your childhood: who your family members were, your parents' names, the names of your siblings, the extended family members that you think should be mentioned, and those who were involved and loved the artworks that we now have in our [Chemical Heritage] Foundation.

FISHER: Well, the Fisher Collection, some of which is art and some of which are copies, some photographs and drawings, could or couldn't be described as art, but Dad [Chester G. Fisher] always referred to it as the Fisher Collection. The company always referred to it as the Fisher Collection of Alchemical and Historical Pictures. Dad was not nearly so much interested as to whether it was art, so long as it had a scientific connection. That's why he started it. Now, to go back to your question, my mother was Margaret R. Aiken. Aiken is my middle name, and also the first name of my oldest brother. Both of my brothers are deceased now. Her family was Scottish, Scot-Irish, from what is now called Northside Pittsburgh, an area originally called Allegheny City, and originally the second or third largest city in Pennsylvania, now a part of the City of Pittsburgh. Father came from a German family and his grandfather spelled his name with a "c," which is the only way you could spell "Fischer" in German. There is no "sh" in German. It's "sch." So when Grandfather came to this country, in about 1840, he took the "c" out because he thought making it "Fisher" was more "American." He changed Johann to John, so he became John Fisher, but he had a "c" left over because he took it out. So he put it in as his middle initial, and it made him John C. Fisher. He was a man who saved everything, and he didn't want to have a "c" lying around left over. So he made a middle initial out of it. That was a very common heritage. Scottish and German, believe it or not, that was, in this area a very common marriage get-together.

The Scottish troops came into Pittsburgh with John Forbes to Fort Duquesne in 1758. In 1758, the Scottish troops under John Forbes, who was Scottish, came in and captured Fort Duquesne from the French and Indians. [Marquis] Duquesne was the French governor of Canada, then called New France. They saw a large group of troops coming in and knew that they were going to be defeated, so they abandoned the Fort, set fire to it, and left. So it was kind of a hollow victory, but it didn't make any difference. The British got it anyway.

When those Scottish troops "captured" the Fort, if you want to give them credit—in baseball, they say you get credit for the win—a lot of the Scottish troops stayed in this area. So

you had an original small Scottish settlement here. They sent for wives and sisters. Then the Germans came in some time later—forty or fifty years later—a huge German invasion. So you had that part of the city thickly populated by Scottish and German people. We had eleven breweries over in that part of Allegheny City, now called Northside. There were German singing groups, bands, German clubs, and Rathskellers. It was very, very German. Dad came from that heritage, and they met as young, young people. Dad saw Mother sitting in a box at a theater—just a startlingly handsome woman with thick black wavy hair—a very handsome, young woman. I think she was perhaps twenty at the time. He decided he would meet her at intermission, so he went up to her and introduced himself. They courted and were married in 1905. The first son, my brother Aiken, was born in 1908. That's how the family got started. I am tracing down both sides of the family through a genealogist at the urgings of my children, and so I'm doing a tree and all that sort of stuff.

GAPP: That's wonderful.

FISHER: My father was a very methodical man. He was born in 1880, which is nice and neat. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh, then called Western University of Pennsylvania, in 1900, keeping it nice and neat. [laughter] His four sons—there were no daughters—were born exactly four years apart in 1908, 1912, 1916, and 1920. They were all boys, exactly four years apart, within a month! [laughter] Now, the family members were involved with the collection only through business because the Fisher Collection really stayed in the business [Fisher Scientific International, Inc.]. It didn't come home. We never had anything from the Fisher Collection hanging in the house where I was born, where all of us were born. Naturally, we knew about it. One son died in infancy, but the three who were remaining all worked in the business right after graduation from college. The oldest brother, Aiken, graduated in 1929 and went to work for the company. We'd all worked there in summers before. Another brother graduated from college in 1938 and went right to work there. Pearl Harbor came along, and I graduated early. I was to be in the class of 1942 [at Yale University], but got out in late 1941 or very early 1942 because, of course, Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I worked for Alcoa [Inc.], the Aluminum Company of America, working in what you might call today a smelter plant, a plant that turns ore into aluminum, which was badly needed, of course, for warplanes. Following the war, the end of 1944 or early 1945, I left Alcoa and went to work for the company. So eventually, we all worked for the company.

Now when you worked for the company, you had to be aware of the Fisher Collection because it was hung all over the offices. It was rather indiscriminate because wherever you had a wall, Dad had something hung there. The people who worked in the company—the company was pretty small in those early days—took quite an interest in it, because you know, hanging right over their desk or right next to their desk was a couple of old alchemists blowing up some ancient laboratory that you couldn't help but notice. The collection and the company were inseparable. And of course, Dad was the inspiration for it.

Dad began collecting, I believe, right after World War I, which of course ended in 1918. Of course that war started in 1914 and the source was Europe. There was no other source really. So I don't think there was any collection before 1914. The company was only twelve years old, and Dad had his hands full with three, four, five, six employees. It started with two, as you know. I don't think he'd been to Europe. I don't believe he'd made a European trip, which wasn't essential, but it was useful in tracking down the dealer who had such a narrow interest. Most of these pictures were bought through a dealer who had a very specific and focused interest in a few things.

GAPP: You have no memory or knowledge of who that dealer was?

FISHER: It's in the records somewhere. Some of the records I've tried to chase down. You can call Harry Schwab later, if he's in town. I have his unlisted number here.

GAPP: That would be great.

FISHER: I don't think he has a recollection of who the dealers were, but the towns were London, Paris, Brussels, the heart of Flemish painting, of course. A lot of these rather fine works that really are art works as well as historical, were Flemish. That is, the Netherlands and Belgium. Let me see, maybe a dealer in Germany somewhere. I don't recollect what city. But those were the prime sources of these three or four dealers. Dealers, as you know, are amazing. They can kind of smell something, and they trade information from dealer to dealer because one has a customer who has a certain interest, and he trades it with another dealer who has a different interest. That way they move stuff.

GAPP: That's right. They support each other that way.

FISHER: That's right. They do. So my best guess is that Dad took an interest in about 1920. What triggered it, I don't know. It might be that he made a trip to Europe in the 1920s. I know he did. It might have been the early 1920s. He and Mother went fairly often to Europe on steamship, of course, and always Cunard Line. That was reliable because you could trust the English! [laughter] Also there was no language problem. There isn't a language problem on a ship anyway because they always have a multilingual crew. But Mother was a zero linguist. Dad spoke a little German because his grandfather and mother were German, and they would sing some German songs when I was a kid at Christmas time. *O Tannenbaum, O Christmas Tree*. And they had a few little tiny jokes in German. My grandmother lived to be almost ninety, obviously pretty good in German. So they went to Europe, and I think that's how Dad first may have got the idea. I don't know what sparked the original thought, but he began to take an interest and ask about dealers. Of course dealers were happy to oblige—all Americans

were considered rich, and they were American, and that was big stuff. They would make a record of what he was interested in and send him photographs.

GAPP: So they sent him photographs?

FISHER: Very often.

GAPP: I see.

FISHER: Then as he became better established and known to them—he always paid his bills very promptly. Incidentally, he made this collection himself. And he paid for it himself. Much later the company bought it to get it out of his estate. He must have been in his late seventies or early eighties. He died when he was eighty-four. My oldest brother, Aiken, a very wise man, an extraordinarily wise man—he was a "think ahead" guy—and he knew that some federal appraiser could put a value that was complete nonsense because he didn't understand it. So he'd just put a, you know, X-million bucks, or whatever. So he had the company buy the collection at a reasonable price, a very modest price. Then that all just became buried. It was history and the company owned it. So it wasn't in Dad's estate. When the company was sold and I was out of the company—had I been there, I think I would have thought of it—when the company was sold, they made the mistake of selling the collection with it. That was a mistake because then it bounced all around the place.

GAPP: Right. Thank goodness you tracked that down.

FISHER: It was in terrible shape. So that's my guess as to how he got started.

GAPP: Your dad must have had incredible files and records if he received photographs from these dealers. Did he save some, do you think?

FISHER: Well, you see, when the company was sold, I wasn't in the company. Ben and Aiken had relatively little interest in the collection. I was the one who took over the interest. I bought a number of works. After Dad died in 1965, I became the one who became interested in it. When the company was sold I wasn't in the company. I had been let go in a separation agreement with—we had an altercation with the then president. I have no idea what happened to those records, you see. Another company came in and just took over, and they had <u>absolutely no</u> appreciation for what they had. They didn't even know what they had.

GAPP: So where does Harry Schwab fit into that? And John Pavlik?

FISHER: Well, Harry Schwab was the original self-appointed curator. He got to be that because we used our collection of alchemical and historical pictures as part of our advertising and public relations program. He was a writer that I had hired for the advertising department. I was vice president of marketing, and that meant sales promotion, direct mail, catalogs, publications, and sales training. We did our own printing. We owned our own ad agency. I don't know—a lot of things. Harry was a writer who came to the advertising department, which acted like an advertising agency that was really a department of the company. Harry was a walk-in and I hired him. He showed me what he could do in ten minutes, and I hired him. He wrote a lot of publications for us, and the publication he first worked on was one that Dad had started. We used an alchemical picture of some sort, one from the collection, on the front cover, the way *Life* magazine always had a full bleed front cover picture. *Look* did the same thing for a while. So, it was kind of the trademark or style of the publication, which was called *The Laboratory*, and he wrote it.

GAPP: What date would that have been that the first picture was used? Do you have a recollection?

FISHER: Well, it would be very early in the issue of the first *The Laboratory*. Schwab would know the dates of that. John Pavlik would know the dates because they have a complete collection of every issue of *The Laboratory*.

GAPP: Is there any chance that there's an extra collection that we could add to our archives, an extra set of these?

FISHER: We're lucky to get one set of *The Laboratory*. You know, Marge, it's really funny, when history is happening, so very few people realize it's happening.

GAPP: That's normal.

FISHER: I expected to work at the company until I was seventy-five or something. I thought I might survive my brothers, which I have, and I didn't know whether it would be family-owned, and they'd let me have a little cubicle in the corner or something so I could collect my mail and come in a couple days a week like Dad did. It tapered off. I would have kept an interest in history. But you see, all of a sudden, I wasn't there. I left the company in 1979, and so all of

this mess happened later. So, there was no duplicate. In the 1950s, one could have set up a duplicate copy of *The Laboratory*, because you could dig around and find every one. It had been published for, oh, thirty-five years I think. John can answer that. You can call him if he's in town. And of course Harry could answer that.

GAPP: Of course photocopies would be perfectly acceptable for us, and we can look into that later—as a research record.

FISHER: Well, there is a complete set of *The Laboratory*. Thirty-five or forty years, and then it stopped. Just stopped. As you know, it stopped and people thought they were paying for it as a periodical and kept writing us. "My subscription has run out."

GAPP: You see how good a job this advertising did. I can't believe how many people remember these things.

FISHER: There's a company history here on the table. I'll find it. Fisher Scientific Public Relations wrote it in a hope to get it into the *Wall St. Journal* because we're a hundred years old in May, as you know. Sometimes the *Journal* will go for one of those "family company survives a hundred years and still doing what it was doing when it set out," which is very unusual because when you started out to make buggy whips and now you're making computers and it's the same company. [laughter] But here's a company that set out to do laboratory equipment supplies and today is the largest in the world doing laboratory equipment supplies. So that may have a little of what's called a "news hook" that would appeal to the *Journal*. So Norm Ritter at Fisher is doing that, and I'll find it for you. He wrote and I re-wrote, he wrote and I re-wrote a mini-history of the company for publication. Also I have here for you the *Fisher News*, which is an internal newspaper for employees when it was seventy years of age. So that is useful to you.

GAPP: Great. Thank you.

FISHER: So we're just guessing as to when the first alchemical pictures were starting to come, but probably in the 1920s, and probably as a result of traveling to Europe. But something crossed Dad's mind that he could dignify and therefore cultivate the scientist by this collection. The collection was a kind of homage to science that was largely unrecognized. The man behind the gun—way down in the dumps there was a lab somewhere. The steel manufacturers, they got all the pizzazz up front. It was glamorous and these huge rolls of steel came out. But of course, every roll had to be tested, and <u>way</u> back somewhere, down the hospital corridor in the cellar was a lab, et cetera. So, his customers, therefore, were the unglamorous, the unrecognized, and unappreciated people. Until the atom bomb and the attack on Japan—you remember President

[Harry S.] Truman came out with a speech, "We have won the battle of the laboratories, as we have won the other battles"—announcing the victory over Japan. It was the headline in every newspaper, and I don't know whether television was in effect at that time. Maybe not. But that was the headline. So all of a sudden people said, "Listen, battle of the laboratories," and the word "laboratory" suddenly began to take on significance. The whole Manhattan Project and atomic energy all came out of the lab. So suddenly it wasn't confused with "lavatory," which it was for years. This was in my speech, which when you get to Philadelphia you can read. Mother's house was kind of a curiosity because if you would be invited, you could ask to use the bathroom, and there was nothing odd in the bathroom. Even though we were in "lavatory supplies." So that's how it started, and it started very small. After a certain number of issues, which was reported in *The Laboratory*, he began to put parts of the collection on the front cover. Up to that point, the front cover was all print. It had maybe four lines of, like little headlines. He wrote that for years before I took over. And they were interesting headlines. You know, he put a little spark in them. They weren't just dull. But it wasn't nearly as interesting as having some old coot, you know, in the middle of the seventeenth century, blowing up a big cauldron of something on the front cover. I mean, that was intriguing. So he began to put those on the front cover.

GAPP: I see. What about the reproductions? When did they start?

FISHER: Well, they came in a good bit later. The reproductions. He waited quite a while. I believe we started the reproductions in both color and black and white probably around 1950. I believe so. Because when I went with the company after the war—let's call it 1945—I don't recollect that we offered the reproductions then. Now, a search of the catalogs, of which I have many, could document that because we began to list those reproductions in our regular catalog, which is, as you know, hundreds and even thousands of pages. We did some smart things. I don't know who did this. Maybe I did. We assigned numbers to the seven or eight black and white reproductions as B1, B2, and to the colored ones as A1, A2, and A3. Now that was done to avoid complications. It was also done so that the laboratory or stockroom man could, on a requisition list, put down 2-540 beakers, 1 case of 10-040 flasks, and 2-A1. And you got two color prints. You see, it went right through the purchasing department. They took the requisition, it was all approved, and just sent the order through. So when this box arrived at the lab, they had all their thermometers, chemicals, and a couple of pictures were in there, too. They were offered framed and unframed. I've forgotten what the designation was for framed and unframed, but they all had a number, and that helped us. Of course, the stock boys, they'd much prefer to work by numbers. If you wanted a 2-540-400, that's a Griffin beaker. An A1 with the frame, was an A1 framed. They were all pre-cartoned and put in the box with all the rest of the stuff. So that's when it began to become very popular.

We also put salesmen on a quota. Everybody—they'd go wild, if you'd let them. You know, they'd say, "Send me two hundred." [laughter] And they cost quite a bit. Especially framed. So a salesman was given a quota. I don't know what it was. A few, a dozen or so a year. He would pick, select the customers. Then one fine day, he would go in to the chief

chemist and they would do their business and so forth, and he'd say, "Dr. Jones, I have something here for you I think you would enjoy." He'd hand him B1 or A1. "Oh," Dr. Jones would say, "I'm delighted to have it." The other smart thing was, when it started out, it was a little bit advertising-like. I think it had a bit more print about the company on it than I thought was smart. I wanted to play this down, because I wanted it to get on walls, and if you put too much advertising on there, people kind of react. So I had a very light type on there, and it's still there today, I believe.

GAPP: Yes, it's quite discreet.

FISHER: "Reprinted from the Fisher Collection." That's all it says. And it's very light. It says "Fisher Collection." It doesn't even say "Fisher Scientific Company." And that's enough.

GAPP: Yes, I know. I think it's quite discreet.

FISHER: Now, the nice thing about that is that when the chief chemist was promoted, retired, died, moved, or whatever the new chief chemist, who was probably his assistant, moved into the same lab office, and there was the picture on the wall. Why was he going to move it? It was glorifying the space. So it drove our competitors nuts to see this darn thing hanging on the wall, no matter who was the chief chemist. It was a brilliant idea of Dad's, and it turned into kind of an icon associated with the company. It became very closely associated with the company. It wasn't unique. There was a chemical company [Aldrich Chemical Company, now Sigma-Aldrich Company] in Milwaukee, run by a guy named [Alfred R.] Bader and he had some alchemical pictures, some really quite good original oil paintings, half a dozen I think.

GAPP: Yes. Many of his were religious, though. There were not many that were chemical.

FISHER: Yes, I'd forgotten that. He was in the chemical business, but you see, when he went around to try and buy them, there weren't a whole lot left because Dad had been at this for years. He used them on his little advertising publication. They became associated with his company.

GAPP: Right.

DeWITT: He would often write a story about it because he was big on art history. He's become an art dealer now.

FISHER: Really? He became an art dealer?

DeWITT: Yes, in seventeenth century Dutch art. He also was forced out of his company, and this has been a second career. He's become one of the world's greatest dealers of Rembrandt paintings.

FISHER: No kidding? You've got to be good at that game. Boy!

DeWITT: He's famous for his eye. Well, we're very interested in seeing if Alfred—I'm sure Alfred must have been inspired by Chester.

FISHER: Well, sure he was. Now let's see. That's how we got into it, and that's how we started to use it for public relations, advertising, whichever you prefer. This brings me to a closely related subject. I don't think I did this in the talk because the time was too limited. The alchemists also used the signs of the zodiac because there could be more propitious days than others. If you did a certain experiment at a certain time of the year related to the zodiac, you know, under Pisces or whatever—you might have better luck of doing what you were trying to do, which of course was to transmute metals. So the signs of the zodiac appear on the floor, set in stone, or in other forms in old laboratories. In Germany, I believe it's in the Deutche Museum in Munich, which is an absolutely marvelous museum—I could spend two weeks there—there is a reproduced alchemical laboratory, quite authentic. I say "authentic" as if I knew. Nobody was there, but it has a circle with twelve circles around it, like a clock, in the floor, if I remember. It's been a long time since I've been there. Well, that appeared in some pictures, and Dad decided—when Dad made up his mind about some of these things, that was it, there was no changing him. When he decided, you know, pink was gray—it was gray. There was no question about it. All the world was wrong. It was gray! He decided that that was the alchemist's symbol for the laboratory. Because, of course, the alchemists used symbols. There's a symbol for silver, gold, sulfuric acid, and the like. So nobody could persuade him that that was not true. So the company adopted the sign of the zodiac, a circle with twelve circles around it, and the letter F in the middle, as the logo of the company. Today, they have dropped the outer circles and kept the center circle, and that's where it came from.

GAPP: I didn't know that.

FISHER: The guys with a sense of humor in the company said, "They've knocked the meatballs off around the outside." [laughter] That's what they did. They knocked the twelve meatballs off around the circle and ended up with the inner circle with the F. I changed the F twice to keep it in style, because lettering has style.

GAPP: Yes, it does, absolutely.

FISHER: It goes in vogue and out. I changed it a couple times. I think what they're now using is pretty close to some of mine from way back. But that's where the circle came from, and that's where Dad got the idea, from the alchemy lab.

GAPP: If the paintings and engravings weren't actually in your home, how young were you when you started visiting your dad?

FISHER: Well, you'd go down to see Dad for some reason or other—you'd meet Dad in his office because maybe Mother was coming in town to have dinner with Dad or the whole family was going to have dinner at the Duquesne Club, which was a downtown club here. So you'd stop in his office while Mother waited. I never—to my recollection—saw her go in the office. I don't think in her entire life she ever was in Dad's office. You've got to remember, she was born in 1881, and she comes into the 1900s from a completely different century. Women stayed home, took care of the house, raised the children. Of course, there weren't any women in the office in 1900, either. The typing pools were all men. Oh, no. It was World War I that put women in the office. That was 1917 or 1918. After that, women were in the office. They became telephone operators, typists, clerks, and everything. I don't think Mother ever came into the office. But I would come into the office and visit Dad who would say, "I'll be right with you, Jamie," as I was called, and cleaning up his desk, "Sit down." I can remember looking around at the alchemical pictures there, but they were scattered all over the building. There were all kinds of alchemical pictures, and a lot of stuff in files because Dad, as I said, collected that theme. Did it have any interest, have any historical connection? Didn't matter.

GAPP: There are so many engravings, portraits, and apparatus.

FISHER: And copies or photographs.

GAPP: Many of them are fine old engravings.

FISHER: And copies of engravings and photographs of engravings.

GAPP: Yes, and the engravings are copies of the paintings before, which is very important historically.

FISHER: So you can see filing cabinets, really, filing cabinets full of stuff, which you couldn't see, but Dad had a whole bunch of filing cabinets.

GAPP: Did he sometimes show them to you? Were you allowed to go through them?

FISHER: Well, a visitor would come, maybe by appointment. We didn't get a lot of visitors in those days until we built the museum. That was my baby. I said, "We can make a whole lot more out of this collection in terms of"—I then became vice president of marketing, and I was thinking in all kinds of ways. We were doing some reconstruction and addition to the building in 1946. We built an addition to the building, and I went to Aiken and said, "Let's do this. We're going to have to build a new cafeteria. We've way outgrown the other one. While we're talking about plans for this new building," which was bigger than all the other buildings that were probably built in downtown Pittsburgh, "Why don't we think about a little private dining room and a place for the collection?" And he said, "What do you mean, the collection?" I said, "Well, let's make it kind of a museum. Let's pick twenty or thirty items, of which we have dozens and dozens and dozens, and hang them in a style that is really very high-class." Everybody thinks more of artwork if you go into a beautiful art museum that has marble, than they would if the same things were hanging in a barn. Same art.

GAPP: Absolutely, context is everything.

FISHER: Exactly. "And then we could invite people to come and visit our museum and it would be a real good will thing. We could also take them through our building and show them our computer system." We were just getting computers at that time. "If we have time we'll run them up to our big factory just built in Indiana County, which is near Pittsburgh." Aiken liked to think big. You know, give him a big idea, he liked that. He would grab onto a big idea. So he said, "Go ahead."

So we built this museum, and we built a little room attached to it. Attached to that was the kitchen, which served the cafeteria, but it was a complete modern kitchen. So you could get the bigwigs to come in. The chief purchasing guy, the chief chemist, or something, and the salesman would come in with him. Because first they had waiting time, airport time, they became real buddy-buddy. You'd get people you were pretty chummy with. A car would meet them, we'd arrange for them to come in, and we would have a look at the museum and the pictures. We'd explain what they were, and that was very impressive. We broke all the rules by serving sherry. We didn't want to get into booze. We didn't want to get into cocktails in the middle of the day, red or white wine, and all that sort of stuff. So I hit upon the idea of why don't we have a couple of good bottles of sherry. They lasted a long time. I bought some little glasses.

GAPP: Very parlor-like.

FISHER: We had a silver-plated tray. It was real classy. Have that sitting on a table in the middle of the museum—these people would come in from Indianapolis, Dubuque, Detroit, Minneapolis, and God-knows-where—they were ushered in, and we had this other idea that whoever was in town of Aiken, Ben, or me—sometimes it was all three, and sometimes it was just two—it would depend. If you were in town, you got a notice way in advance as to who was coming in, the company, a little bit of the financial background, how sales were, and who the competitor was. A little digest that you could read in about three minutes. So in comes the guy, he would have the sherry, see the pictures, step through the door—all walnut—and have a very nice one-plate lunch served in the private dining room. The dining room was a memorial to Louis Pasteur, the French chemist who Dad was a great supporter of. I mean, he was an extraordinary man. Everybody knows about him. So we would talk about him while we were sitting there at lunch. Then we would get the subject around to the customer's company, and his mind was blown, because here was the president and two senior vice presidents, who knew the facts and dates, how much business they've got, who the competitors were—all about his company! Then he went to our Indiana plant, which is a huge factory, and then driven to the airport. It became a standard one-day package. People became just—they never stopped talking about it. There was just nobody else in the business after that. They were just swamped. It was very clever—now that was just using the pictures in a very discreet, measured, high-class way. It wasn't thrown at them. It was just a collection that just happened to be in our building. The Pasteur Room was a totally non-commercial room. It was a memorial to this great French chemist, and that's not commercial.

GAPP: Wonderful. It made them feel so good about their profession.

FISHER: Yes, especially if they were scientists. It was a coup. We carried that on for years and years. When the Allied [Chemical] Corporation [now AlliedSignal Inc.] came and bought it—of course I was out by then—but there was a very tough talking, tough man named [Edward L.] Hennessy [Jr.] who was the boss, a ruthless boss of Allied Corporation. He bought this company thinking it was something it wasn't because he told somebody else, using some very foul language I won't repeat—

GAPP: You mean in buying Fisher?

FISHER: Yes. He thought he had bought A, and he ended up buying B. I don't think that my brothers defrauded him. He just said, "I believed all the propaganda and stuff that that damned Jim Fisher wrote in his catalogs." He had the impression that we manufactured everything

because we had five thousand Fisher-brand items that we didn't make. Just Fisher-brand. So he was in a big hurry for everything. Everybody was buying high-tech companies. He thought he was buying some "dot com" company or something. So after he'd bought it, he made a visit to the company and was met by John Pavlik, who wore a white shirt and was all shined up, they cleaned the building, a tour through the building was arranged, and he swept through the building like royalty. They took him down, headed to the private dining room, and on the way there, where he was to have a bite of lunch, followed by his accolades, ring bearers—he was treated as royalty—got to the door of Fisher Collection, which he had bought—that was the mistake I mentioned—and opened the door.

[END OF TAPE, SIDE 1]

FISHER: Hennessy gets to the door and said, "What's this?" Somebody replied, "Well, Mr. Hennessy, these are some samples from the Fisher Collection. This is the Fisher Museum." And he never stepped in the door. He said, brutally, to someone, "How much is this stuff insured for?" The accolade said, making a note quickly in his notebook, "I don't know, Mr. Hennessy, but I'll find out." Hennessy turned around and walked away. That's how much interest they had in it, and they didn't know what they'd bought, nor did they care, nor did he care; he's a strange man. So John Pavlik, who was then the curator, was standing in the doorway as they walked away down the hall. He'd never seen anything like it. Nor had anybody.

GAPP: That's awful.

FISHER: Go at least three steps, you know, and put your head around. But not any interest. So that was it. That was the end of it. It got sold, as you know. The history of the company went through ups and downs, and ended up in completely different hands, which it now is. But they have a very fine respect for it. So they use it.

GAPP: Yes, they do. They've given it a lot of support.

FISHER: Now, I think as a kid, somewhere along the line, maybe it was not when I was summer jobbing, my first summer job there—and this is all in the document I have here and in the talk—I wrapped packages in the receiving department. Stuff came in in bulk. Might be two hundred packages of filter paper, a hundred pieces to a pack. They'd be in a big crate. Well, you don't sell them that way. You sell them in dozens. So you'd take twelve, and wrap them and put a label on it, which was Dad's idea because then you didn't get them so mixed up in the stock department. You picked orders by catalog number, as Sears & Roebuck [Company] does or has. So the time to get the right catalog number on is when you first receive it, because then

it isn't going to get mixed up later on. So when it first comes in, get your catalog number on it, because you live by catalog number. I spent several summers wrapping glassware and thermometers that came in in bulk.

GAPP: So was there art in the stockroom as well?

FISHER: No. That area was too crowded—you might accidentally bat a box into it and crush it.

GAPP: So it was in the offices?

FISHER: Offices and some labs. We had a research lab, and it had some works in it. Offices of the research people had reproductions or some originals. When we formed the museum, that was a bit of a heartbreak, because you'd go in to some guy who's had a picture on his wall for ten or fifteen years, and he'd grown very accustomed to it, and you'd say, "George, I'm sorry to tell you, but we're creating a museum and we're going to put some of these pictures in the museum that are kind of the highlights of the collection, and I'm sorry to tell you, we're going to take that away. We can replace it if you like. We'll give you a choice. We'll work it out with you because we've got some other nice things that we're not going to put in the museum, and we can put that back in your office." So, what was he going to say? He'd said, begrudgingly, "Well, okay."

GAPP: People can get very attached. So, he wasn't happy.

FISHER: No, but he got another picture on his wall that gave him a little class.

GAPP: Right, but you do form attachments to certain paintings that you live with. You absolutely do.

FISHER: So it was the publication that had it on the cover, in the beginning, to offer the reproductions in the general catalog. That began to create the big interest in the recognition of the collection. If you keep that up for twenty or thirty years, you get it closely associated with the company.

GAPP: Absolutely. The Fisher Collection is very closely associated in many people's minds. I tour so many people through the collection and they have reproductions at home. They love them.

FISHER: They've heard about it?

GAPP: Absolutely. Many, many, over and over again.

FISHER: Well, that's what I really know. Of course, they couldn't all be in Father's office. It was a modest office. I don't know—he had four pictures, I think, or something, in his office. Something like that. None at home.

GAPP: Really? Did he have particular friends or colleagues that he shared his interest with, that you can recollect?

FISHER: Well, he had one close personal friend, who was also a business client, customer, and that was a man named Dr. [Edward] Weidlein. He was a man from Kansas who took his Ph.D. very seriously, and he spent his entire life known as Dr. Weidlein. He wanted you to know that. He had three boys, and we grew up with the boys. They were close friends. Two of them are still living today and are good friends of mine. One of them is exactly my age. He and his wife, and my mother and father were close bridge-playing friends. They played bridge in those days. Dr. Weidlein was about seven or eight years younger than Dad, but a very nice pleasant man, always polite—although self-important. Dr. Weidlein was well aware of the collection because he and Dad were personal friends and they would talk about the alchemists and the history of science. Dr. Weidlein was a Ph.D. in chemistry and director of the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research. So obviously, steeped in laboratory science and the history of science. They shared that for years. Dad's other friends were industrial people, but they were not laboratory people. They were industry people, executives, and in manufacturing for the most part.

He took up golf when he was about thirty-eight or forty. I guess tennis became a little too tough on his knees, as it does for everybody, so he went to a golf pro to take some early lessons. He was a natural athlete, and he played pretty good golf. I imagine he played pretty good tennis too before that. He said to the pro, "Gee, I wish I'd started this golf earlier." The pro said, "Mr. Fisher, it's already too late!" [laughter] But Dad perfected his own style, and he enjoyed it. He loved to play golf. Hot weather or not, he loved to play golf.

GAPP: Did you ever hear him discussing the apparatus that were depicted in the art works?

FISHER: Yes. When he acquired a new part of the collection, whatever it was—a drawing, photograph, historical document—as I became more and more interested in it, I became the kind of designated driver. I became the one—we were all very busy—but Aiken and Ben never took a great interest in it. Enough so they weren't diffident, and when we had these gatherings in the museum, they would pick up in the conversation. They didn't just stand there like stone, you know, so that the visitor got the impression that we were all knowledgeable about it. But whenever there was a question, they would defer to me. They'd say, "What would that be, Jim?" I'd say, "Well that would be about 1800," or something like that.

GAPP: Because you and your Dad were the ones that had discussed it?

FISHER: That's right. So he would call me down to the office and he'd say, "I'm thinking of buying this," from a photograph, or, "I have just bought this." He'd have someone come in and help him unwrap it or unpack it. Then he would point out to me in that picture—let's say it was a big print of an alchemist. He would point out to me what was going on in that picture, and how that—he would say, "Remember, that looks just like the one we have by van Heemskirk," and I'd reply, "Yes, and that one has the so-and-so." And he'd say, "That's right." So we'd have this discussion about that work. Then if it was going to be hung, say, in the museum later on, or if it was going to be hung on the wall somewhere, it ought to be framed because that was the only way that we could keep them. He'd say, "Do you think it ought to be framed?" I'd say, "Yes, I think it should." He'd say, "Well, take care of that." So I would take care of it, remove it, bring it up to my office, then I would, of course, take it to a framer, and we'd talk about the right mat or no mat. It would come back and Dad would approve it, then it would be dispatched, and it would go into somebody's office or maybe it would later go into the museum. Depends. You'd have to take something down because the museum was full.

There are pictures, by the way, Marge, of the museum in action. There are people standing around. We have a picture of it in this recap. It wasn't a big room, but it had indirect lighting, and a carpet. And it was classy.

GAPP: There's a photograph in one of the brochures of the museum, as I recall. I remember what it looked like. It was very elegant.

FISHER: That's right. It had louvers and there were sort of beams with lights between them, so when you looked up you didn't see light. You just saw the effect of light. It was pretty hot stuff for its time, for its period.

DeWITT: So you built the museum. Where did you get the ideas about designing the gallery because it's really quite impressive.

FISHER: Well, the architect, who redesigned the offices, the kitchen, the Pasteur Room, and is a close friend of mine, [Grant] Curry, had that as his assignment in doing over the 1946 building. I'm not sure, I don't think the museum was absolutely original in the 1946 addition. I'm pretty sure it wasn't. But shortly after that it was necessary to make some substantial changes inside the building, and that's when we did this. I remember that we needed more space. So we built a balcony over part of an open area. That gave us some more rooms off the balcony. At the end of the balcony, suspended in a kind of a super-balcony, were the new kitchen, cafeteria, Pasteur Memorial [Collection], and museum. So out of air, he created new floor space, and that's when Mr. Curry, who was a personal friend of mine and my age—he was much younger then and so was I—had that kind of thinking. He did contemporary style. That was his style. He didn't do classic architecture at all in any job he ever did. He just wasn't that style. So he gave us something that was quite with-it for the time.

DeWITT: That does not surprise me; it still looks very sharp.

FISHER: Yes, it would pass today for a very crisp looking place. He also did some very clever things. We called him in to help relay out the main office, which was on the same floor when it was in the older building, and he painted all the columns bright orange. You know, you normally paint offices cream, white, or eye-rest green, as described by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, PPG. They sold trainloads of eye-rest green—very, very light green, but it was not like these walls of cream, which gets dull. So they had this nice soft green in a busy office. It's supposed to be restful. Nice and restful. So we had miles of eye-rest green, and Grant said, "This was no way to run an office." That was Curry. So he came in and designed it. He had a column with a strong, strong blue on one-fourth of a square column, on the opposite side of the square column, he had bright orange, and in between it was cream. But you'd be surprised the effect it had on people working in the office. There was a new pep; there was a new zip to the office! Those were the days. So that's how we got into that. Most of his friends were only aware dimly of the collection.

GAPP: They were there for his pleasure. It was his pleasure and he didn't share it.

FISHER: But at the very same time, he saw the public relations dimension. It was truly a tandem concept for Dad. It was his heart's love. It was the only business he ever owned and ran in his whole life. It was his whole life, outside his family of course. So he combined this collection to honor scientists of all ilk, and at the same time, it was a magnificent public relations device for the company, without being crude, too forward, or too commercial. It was the world's most subtle sort of thing. You know, the big pharmaceutical companies picked that idea up. Now, I don't know that they picked it up from Fisher, but somehow in the 1950s, the big pharmaceutical companies began to either reproduce works of art of the physicians and

surgeons, which they offered in high-class reproductions to physicians, or they had them made by very skillful—what amounts to poster artists, who can be very good.

GAPP: I see. Commissioned.

FISHER: Commissioned. A poster artist is just short of a fine artist, and many of them made the transition. There was the physician, sitting by the bedside of a sick child, the anxious parents over at the side, and a candle, perhaps, because we're looking at 1870.

GAPP: Yes, a comforting image.

FISHER: Yes, and then below, "Produced through the generosity of Upjohn Corporation [now Pharmacia Corporation]," Eli Lilly [and Company], or Parke-Davis [and Company]. Or all of these old-time pharmaceutical companies. What they were doing was honoring the physicians who were their customers, because these were all prescription drugs, for the most part. And doing public relations, you see, at the same time. So it's not unique in the world. Dad was early, very early. I don't think it's unique to the Fisher industry, our kind of industry either. I just gave an example, but that's why he did it. It was very, very successful. Now, we'll have to talk to others about some of these questions.

GAPP: Yes, like about the other museums that borrowed the collection. We know that the Carnegie [Museum of Art] did, and the Franklin Institute did.

FISHER: I'm not sure, but those were, I think, maybe the only two venues. Now there were some Fisher Scientific venues, but that was in-company. When we opened a couple of branches in order to try and make an event to get people to come, because it really was a warehouse in an office, with about one exception, they were not in the factory class. You know, you built a big box, literally. You built a big box, filled it with cases of stuff, and you had an office of ten or fifteen people, that's all you needed, and bingo! You're in business in St. Louis, Houston, Atlanta, Silver Spring in Maryland, Medford near Boston, and I could go on and on and on. We ultimately had thirty of them or something. Not always, but when you wanted an event, you might take selections and have them temporarily wrapped by furniture movers with those big blankets. Then the whole van, the whole truck would go to the site, you'd have people there, and they'd unload it. Then you'd have temporary walls set up from rental agencies, and, you know, as you can for weddings, receptions, or whatever. Then you'd hang these things. So you had either half of the office or maybe none of the office and a piece of the warehouse—you know, a nice clean, brightly lit, brand new, comfy floor, all that sort of stuff with the collection. And then you'd have punch, usually. Trying to get around the alcohol problem. You didn't

have cocktails, but you had alcohol punch and non-alcohol punch for those who wanted it, sort of small sandwiches, and a nice invitation.

GAPP: A reception for the opening of a building.

FISHER: You'd get two to three hundred people and you'd get publicity. It was a way of saying to the people in that area, "We're here now." It was much more important in those days, because you didn't have on-line stuff, you see. Today it doesn't make any difference. You pick up the phone, dial a number, and you don't care if the stuff is in Kansas City. It's a totally different business. The physical presence of being in these towns was catastrophe for competition. They were already there. But in comes this big guy with this huge national inventory, a way to connect his inventory, and monster advertising: PR [public relations], publicity, and direct mail catalog program. It was tough.

GAPP: So you're saying the impact of your arrival was not well received, but it was well received by others?

FISHER: By the competitor? I'm talking only about competitors.

GAPP: But the city, the town itself probably was delighted to have you.

FISHER: Oh, yes—a lot more jobs. More jobs. Every town loves jobs. Every city would say, "Oh, so-and-so is going to open here." I don't care who it is. I mean, except a brothel maybe. [laughter] But I mean, everybody, "Gee, we're glad to have ABC Company come here." It's another ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty jobs. No, the competitor was the guy that grinded his teeth. That, plus the two-year catalog just finished them. I mean, it was brutal. It really was brutal. I don't think in any way it was illegal.

GAPP: So did you usually end up buying the company?

FISHER: Many. Twenty or thirty. We carried the name for a little bit. For six months on the phone, when they'd ask for so-and-so—they were all trained how to answer. We lost very few. You don't know how much you lost because you can't measure, but you lose very little. All the branches took them on. But that was one way to use a different venue for the collection. Then as you say, the Franklin Institute and Carnegie Museum of Art, here in town. They had some free time and the director prevailed on us to lend, I don't know, maybe thirty works of art or something like that.

GAPP: We're looking to find—there was a book or catalog of that. You don't happen to have it, do you?

FISHER: You can see the state of my office.

GAPP: Because if you do, we're going to try to get one from them in case they should happen to have an extra one, but it seems unlikely. So we would like to find one.

FISHER: Well, the director of the Museum of Art is a close personal friend. I've helped him in many ways—he's Richard Armstrong. I don't know where he is today, but his office—I can call ahead, tell him you're coming, and they'll do anything they can for you. They're the nicest sort of people, and Richard Armstrong will just give instructions, "Mrs. Gapp is coming. Give her anything she wants." That's all it takes.

DeWITT: I think they physically don't have a copy.

GAPP: Did they tell you that?

DeWITT: Yes, it was a long time ago. It was 1974.

GAPP: Chances are they don't. She did look?

DeWITT: She looked, then they called me back, and said no.

FISHER: Well, there aren't any. It wouldn't surprise me. A major museum has three or four changing exhibits a year, and so since then it would be a hundred.

GAPP: They don't usually have space to keep more than one copy of those things.

DeWITT: I work with a fellow at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and we have similar issues.

FISHER: You have the same problem?

DeWITT: We have tons of old catalogs in the back of the office, but that doesn't mean every exhibit has been saved.

FISHER: Well, when you print a catalog for a big show, you always guess how many—the budget committee and all those sorts of things, and the board. Are you going to print two thousand or six thousand? These are expensive catalogs and you have no idea how it's going to sell. You either run out, or you have them left over. You just can't ever be right. Then when you get all through and it's all done, and it's a year later an all, what you do, you run out of storage space. You say, "Let's keep a dozen." Because you just can't. You push all the rest out into the market—there's a after-market out there—and they go for a buck or two someplace in little shops all over the country. Then they vanish. They evaporate. So, I don't know.

GAPP: Did your dad have an art book collection? Did he collect art books?

FISHER: No. He never was interested in art. Never. Neither was Mother. They were totally untutored. Totally untutored in the field of art. They did the right things that Americans did. You went abroad. You went to the art museums far more than you went through art museums in the United States. I don't think Mother was ever in an art museum in the United States in her life. She went to X, Y, and Z in Europe because it was the thing to do. It's what Americans did. You couldn't go to Paris without going through the Louvre [Museum]. You can't help but be impressed with what you're looking at, but you don't really know what you're looking at. There was no real appreciation of art, the history of art, fine art, or knowledge of art at home.

We had a fine painting in the dining room of an eighteenth century army cavalry officer on a fine white horse, a beautiful painting. Big beautiful painting over the fireplace in the dining room, but I don't think anybody had a clue as to who painted it, or who the subject was. It was a beautiful thing. There was a scene of Venice in the living room, which was a certain style with a mirror below. It probably was bigger in its day when you had a giant mirror and a panel above, which was when ceilings were tall in the old days. That was a very common form of decorative art, and you'd get a good artist to paint a scene. Venice, of course, was the perennial and sentimental favorite—it was a classical favorite. We had the upper half of a very lovely panel, a mirror below, with an antique mirror in it. We kids would look at the antique mirror and see it was kind of speckled and imperfect, and you know, because glass making was imperfect, and mirror making was imperfect. Above it was this beautiful scene of Venice. We know it was Venice because Mother and Dad said, "That's Venice." That's what it was. But that was about all. So there really wasn't much.

There was an itinerant artist who painted my great-great grandmother—I have it at home—a Scots-Irish woman, with the false teeth, a stern face, and a bonnet. It was painted

about 1810 by an itinerant artist. It's a good painting really, but we don't know the artist. It was handed down. That's the sort of stuff that was in the house. It wasn't fine art. Dad never collected fine art. He could have bought—God, you know the history. He was a man of some means in the 1940s and 1950s. The 1930s, of course, were tough going. The Great Depression lasted all through the 1930s. But even in the 1920s, he was—relative to his time—a well-to-do man, and we lived quite well. You could have bought a [Pablo R.] Picasso for two or three hundred dollars. And painters of that period—you know, a mural and—you're talking in the 1920s—for nothing. They just hadn't been discovered. Stuff that goes for one, two, three, five million today. Hindsight is great.

GAPP: What he bought was great for us!

FISHER: Yes, he bought this stuff, and all out of his own money, as I said.

DeWITT: There seems to be a very tight span when he really purchased most of his paintings. Do you remember it as being more spread out?

FISHER: Well, I would say he continued to collect until—he died in 1965—up to about 1960. He began to have some health problems. I bought a few things from about 1955 through—or maybe sort of 1960—about 1975, because when an offering came, it more likely came to me, or it came to Dad and he would send it to me. You'd look at the offering and you'd think, well, sometimes it was almost a dupe of something we already had. Or, it was something new. Or, it was a print that was a little bit different from the one we had. We'd go and look at the one. If it was a hundred bucks, "Let's get it." So we have hundreds of those. If you couldn't get any of that, sometimes you'd say, "We'll tell you what we'll do. We'll pay you for a photograph." Then some of these people, having already been turned down on the sale, would foolishly say, "All right. Twenty-five, or fifty dollars, and we'll send you a photograph." So we have a lot of photographs. But it was a relatively short period. Don't forget, a big chunk of the collection was the Pope Collection. You know about that? You see, that came in one chunk.

GAPP: Is there a list of what was included in the Pope Collection? That was probably material that went to the company and you're saying is lost, but do you yourself think that there would be anything? Because that would be invaluable.

FISHER: I think John at the local company—when you came into the airport, you went by a business complex there, Suburban Business Complex, roughly halfway between the airport and the city, big office buildings. You know, the standard procedure. Get out of the city. They're there. And that's where John is. He could answer whether he has a list of what was in the Pope Collection in his files.

GAPP: That would be very helpful.

FISHER: I thought he might have turned it over to you guys, to Philadelphia.

GAPP: The only thing we got was a xerox copy of Chester Fisher's notes, his notebook, and that does have a lot of information, but it's not original, some of it's hard to read, and it's not really documented—just his notes.

FISHER: Well, we could ask John. It's easy to ring John and see if he's there. If not, I'll call him another time. It's just about five miles from here. Harry would know. Harry wouldn't have any records. He might have a memory. I'm almost certain there was a list.

GAPP: I'm sure there was.

FISHER: Yes, I'm sure there was. You know the story on the Pope Collection. He had a man bid on it at an auction and sent it over. The ship was torpedoed, came back, they tried again, and this time it made it. Now that was—not in number, but in quality—a very huge impetus to the collection. It equaled the fine stuff that Dad already had, so then the fine stuff essentially kind of doubled. But it did not have all his collateral information, only stuff—copies of prints and photographs.

GAPP: It wasn't prints as well? It was only paintings?

FISHER: No. It was engravings and fine paintings. They were really fine works in the Pope. He collected on a dual scale. He collected the history of science, but he also had a threshold of—he was not interested in a five-dollar copy of something for the heck of it because it was of interest and he could use it for advertising. That wasn't him; he was an eminent scientist, a chemist. See, I collect for interest. Some of that stuff is photographs of maps because I couldn't get them. But it has a theme. The theme is the history of Western Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh. So I have lots of that. But they're not worth five dollars. I'm collecting for a different reason, you see. So you're right. There was quite a spurt at that one point.

DeWITT: Right. You collect for the content. This was during the war, then?

FISHER: Well, he didn't get much offering during the war because most dealers would have surmised that there was no way to ship it. You know, shipping during the war—from 1939 to 1945, the North Atlantic was just a minefield. It was called an ocean, but it really was a minefield. How Dad's shipment ever got through, I have no idea. The only thing I can think of is that the U-boats had a limited number of torpedoes. Why torpedo a ship going west? It wasn't carrying any supplies to anyone. The United States, of course, kept England alive; they would have been dead without it. It would have been all over because we would have had no staging ground for the invasion. Maybe in the long run, the USA and its allies would have won that war, but it was a completely different scenario. So my guess is that you'd get a ship going west, and the U-boat captain would say, "Why waste a torpedo on that? We want to get them going the other way." But it didn't have munitions and the other stuff that kept England alive. So it was going west with freight and they let it go. I don't know why it was torpedoed the first time. It's bizarre. And we don't even know for sure that it was torpedoed. We know the ship was damaged. It could have been a shot or a mine. It could have been a submarine that surfaced and figured, "Well, we'll give it one shell. If it turns and runs, we're not going to chase it." Fuel was limited. They had about a 75mm cannon on deck. They could give it one wham and injure it.

DeWITT: If it had a lot of fuel, of course, it would have blown up.

FISHER: It could have blown up, but it got back to port somehow. [laughter]

DeWITT: Good for us!

FISHER: It's a funny story. Harry Schwab told that story for years before audiences all over the United States, and he ended that part of it with, "And you can imagine the joy in Pittsburgh when the shipment arrived, which was even more surprising since we're 300 miles from the coast." [laughter] And the audience would laugh! Because that's the kind of way he told stories, you know. Harry is a great storyteller.

GAPP: Yes, I haven't met him, but I've heard about his storytelling.

FISHER: What you don't know is that he makes them up!

GAPP: What do you know about the Harmony Society and Old Economy Village? Do you know anything about your father's relationship with them?

FISHER: I wasn't aware of any. I know what it is. It's an late eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century village set up around a religious concept, centering, like the Mormons, around a certain religious leader, who moved west for inexpensive land, the right to build and live as he and his followers wanted in every style. The theme was self-sufficiency. You grew everything you ate; you made everything by hand as you needed, you made your tools—with what I don't know—but you made your tools with tools you had made. I don't know where it starts.

GAPP: And evidently they were preparing for a second coming, which they thought would be imminent.

FISHER: As to a certain degree, so are the Mormons. It's wrapped up with a religious concept. It's in Economy, Pennsylvania, which is down the Ohio River. It's about a forty-five-minute drive from Pittsburgh on the Ohio, and it's now an open-to-the-public Williamsburg-style village/museum.

GAPP: Reconstructed, right?

FISHER: Well, not so much reconstructed as Williamsburg is, but to a great degree. It's almost totally original. Of course, it's much younger than Williamsburg. To historians of various types, it's extremely interesting. It doesn't happen to be of particular great interest to me. I'm interested in the history of the area, but it is not a history of this city. It's only a dim part of the connection of the history of this city, which was a fort in the triangulation of the river. Of course, [Meriwether] Lewis and [William] Clark started their trek here and went all the way to the Pacific. You know, this city has a whole lot of importance in itself, not just as a steel center, but as a transportation—[President] George Washington came here three times and was shot at and almost killed. Once he left with three holes in his jacket from bullets. I mean, you know, there wouldn't have been a George Washington. It's <u>loaded</u> with American history. This triangle.

GAPP: Right. Well, evidently the director, Raymond [V.] Shepard, has records that your father gave some old alchemical laboratory equipment to this museum.

FISHER: I didn't know about that. It would be very doubtful if it's alchemical equipment. I never had any idea or concept that we ever had <u>any</u> alchemical material. We do have a little bit in the collection of Pasteur material. But, you understand, that's a whole lot later.

GAPP: Maybe it was just chemical. That's totally different.

FISHER: Yes, the alchemical period at its height was about 1640 to 1660—in that period, or even earlier. It really wouldn't have any connection with the Economy Village because that was much later. So you're telling me something about which I know nothing. I never heard of it. I've been there, but that wouldn't necessarily mean that it wasn't there and I didn't see it. But I've never even heard about it; I never thought to ask. I doubt if it was alchemical material. Now it's conceivable that he might have come across some apparatus of about the period when that was founded, from some collector, and had no real need for it—there being no Fisher Museum at that time. So he might have said, "What am I going to do with this?" I'm just conjecturing.

GAPP: Some earlier chemical equipment?

FISHER: Just about the time of the Old Economy, which was in the 1800s or something like that, wasn't it? So he might have said, "This is 1800s stuff, and I don't know what to do with it."

GAPP: That could be.

FISHER: He might have given it to them. But I'm just conjecturing. But that's news to me that we have any connection with that place, other than an interest in museums. I'm on two museum boards and they're members of a sixty-member museum group, the Greater Pittsburgh Museum Council, which is four counties. Museums of every kind: historical, art, science, planetariums, zoos, and aquaria. There's an old trolley museum, et cetera. Everything. We belong to a loose federation, and through that, Old Economy is a part.

GAPP: They evidently had some paintings that they no longer own. So I guess he was also speculating as to whether or not the paintings—and evidently there was a [David] Teniers [the Younger]—there were two small pictures by David Teniers—so he wondered whether or not they had been sold to Fisher. This is all speculation also.

FISHER: Well, I can't help you. Has someone talked to the director there?

GAPP: I have spoken to the director there, and he knows no more about it than what I've just told you.

FISHER: Oh, we've run into a blank wall then, because I can't shed any light on that subject. The David Teniers that we have in the collection, which are now at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, is every one that I ever had any contact with. Now your friend at Aldrich, he might have had that—that was kind of a favorite topic of Teniers the Younger, because he was a genre painter, as [Pieter] Brueghel [the Elder] and others: the village scenes, the rustic scenes, the country wedding, the farmer's picnic. That's why he painted the alchemist because he was a very interesting old geezer in the village. He was part of the scene of the old village. As [Vincent] Van Gogh painted the *Postman*. It was standard—not royalty, but the postman. You see what I mean?

DeWITT: He was a close follower of Brueghel who was a very close indicator—a member of genre scenes to Teniers. His scenes are much more, I think, somber or dignified.

FISHER: Oh yes, because Brueghel was raucous, and liked nothing better than the company picnic or what. Girls were being chased, trousers were being pulled off, and everything in the world's going on in those pictures. [laughter] You know, they're really very raunchy. As was the period.

DeWITT: Yes, that's important to remember.

FISHER: Yes. He was a genre painter, and he was photographing, in a way, what was going on.

GAPP: A visual recording, yes.

FISHER: That was what was going on. It was a lusty period. It lacked the reserve of what came in much later.

[END OF TAPE, SIDE 2]

FISHER: The question is how did C. G. [Chester G. Fisher] hear about the Pope Collection? His dealer in London told C. G., probably by cable, which is what you did in those days, that there was an auction. The way I heard the story from Dad was that he authorized—and maybe there was an estimate in the dealer's cable. There almost always was. You know, "Estimate: this collection might go for so-many pounds." Dad authorized the dealer to bid up to "X"—whatever that was. And by George, he got it. Apparently, it was quite close. He felt very lucky about it because the War being on, and so much other more important news, the

scientific community of Great Britain was probably hardly aware of even [Sir William] Pope's death, far less the collection, far less the auction. So as Dad sort of said with pride, "The Yankees did it again! They stole in at night and took this collection out from under them." Because I'm absolutely certain that the scientific society of Great Britain would have made some kind of a move to stop that and set up some kind of a collection in a museum, or whatever. But they didn't, he was smart to grab it when he did, and he got it on the bid. He could have been the under-bidder, and in those days, who knows—you'd send a cable over, and in a couple days you'd get it back. It isn't like these telephone bids at Sotheby's [Auction House] when you get somebody on the phone, you get the collection, and you get somebody in Australia who says "I'll go another ten thousand dollars," and it goes on like this; they didn't do that in those days.

I have a copy here of a priceless cablegram from Andrew Carnegie when he paid the money to build an extension on his famous building, which you'll be in this afternoon. It contains the Museum of Natural History, a music hall, a lecture hall, and the Carnegie Museum of Art, all in one building. There's a beautiful hall of architecture, which has plaster casts, which were out of favor and have come back now—we have some magnificent plaster casts—and right next to it is a hall of sculpture. The sculpture is surrounded—it's a copy of the Parthenon interior on a smaller scale. It's a really fascinating room. The balcony around the way the Parthenon originally did. Of course many statues, and the question by the architect was whether the statues should be clothed or not. Knowing Carnegie, he was wise enough to ask, because Carnegie could be very generous, but he could also be very opinionated. So Carnegie sent back a telegram that said, "Regarding cablegram, recommend statues be clothed as indeed they are in all respectable museums, except London. Signed, Carnegie." [laughter] Now, the joke of course was that he was Scottish and the rivalry between the Scots and English—London was the center of all evil. It was the center of sin, you see, to a Scotsman born in Dunfermline, with a twelve hundred population, or whatever it was—two thousand—I've been there. So the unclothed figure, oh, that was just lewd automatically. So I have a copy of that cablegram, and I wrote a presentation for the one hundredth anniversary of the founding—we had an actor playing Carnegie and all. He read that line, and we had a packed audience in the music hall. We must have had fifteen hundred people, and they just roared. When we'd rehearsed it, I said to this actor, who was simply marvelous, you say to a comedian, "You've got to pause here because you're going to get a laugh here." He said, "Really?" I said, "Yes, you will!" And he paused, and there was a spectacular laugh, because you can't hear the next line if you go on. So anyway that's how we heard about it. You heard the story of how it got here. You know how we used the collection.

GAPP: Yes. Here's something I've been wondering about. You had spoken to me about all of the film footage, the home movies that your father took when you were traveling.

FISHER: Well, that is all now at the Pittsburgh Film Makers, which is, I guess, close to being the number one film making training center in the country. It's run by a great-nephew of mine

named Charlie Humphrey, who's a ball of fire, a basket of energy. He looked in the closet at my house one day, on request, and there were hundreds.

GAPP: I remember you telling me that.

FISHER: He rolled his eyes, and I said, "I will have these all delivered to you." Among his programs he has slave labor, because you can get your degree there now in connection with a couple of the local universities, and you know, it's like the intern in the medical world. It's kind of semi-slave labor. You work your eighty hours a week and you get a hundred dollars a month. But the brave man said, "Send it, and I'll start through it." He has it, and he's starting through it. I had a call just a couple days ago saying that he had started, and I guess at some point this winter, I will stop in and see how far he's gotten. But it's got a little bit of everything, and I'm sure it's got me in short pants sliding down the slide or on a swing. You know, that kind of stuff.

GAPP: Well, there are two things here. One is that the images of you and your family that are casual that could be turned into images that we could have in our archives. We would be interested in that. Your father, you, your family, your mother, your brothers. But then secondly, the visits to the Pasteur Institute and any footage inside your father's workplaces, images like that. Do you remember if he took a photograph of the laboratory in the Pasteur Institute, for instance? That would be incredible to have for our archives. Those are the types of things that I would really like.

FISHER: I don't recollect my taking pictures inside the laboratory. We went through with our little guide, a little old man, who as a boy was bitten by a rabid dog. After his life was saved by the Pasteur vaccination, he stayed on as a janitor and helper. Or my brother who was four years older, Ben, because he had a tiny, little 8mm movie camera made by [Eastman] Kodak [Company], which would fit into a pocket if it had a pretty good-sized pocket. The speed of the film would be such that I would be <u>very</u> doubtful if you could take anything inside. You'd need an awful lot of light. It was color film and he wouldn't have the speed to film. Now, he did take—and you have a copy of it—a movie of Joseph Meister outside when we went to leave, standing at the gate. We took one frame, and out of that frame made that print, and that print was taken outside at the gate, at which he later shot himself in probably 1939 (rather than admit German army officers). I believe that was all. I don't think anything was taken inside. Now, the Pasteur Institute in Paris, where I was a couple years ago, has a lot of prints of the lab as it was when he worked there. You know, he died in 1895. This is quite newer. This is, I mean, a whole lot newer than the alchemist. Up until fairly recently they left the labs as they were.

GAPP: I remember you telling me that.

FISHER: They have now changed that. They have all his glassware in a mini-museum in cases, big glass cases, many of them with glass shelves. You can spend a couple hours in there looking at those things. They have photographs of a lot of that stuff and they have photographs of the labs as they originally were when he died, or shortly thereafter, because they kept them that way for a long time. There is a lot of space in an adjunct building that is not currently used for research medical laboratories, records, documents, books, correspondence, everything. That place is just crawling with opportunities to get stuff on Pasteur. In fact, that's all they do.

GAPP: I think we would be interested in that, but in the context of what I'm speaking of, I'm interested in what is related to you and your father, and in the kind of imagery, film footage that, you know, you would want to give to us.

FISHER: I don't know what's in there. It's going to be fascinating if this stuff that's at the film maker reveals the film from which the one frame—the reason I say astounding is because it seems to me that that one film, on 8mm film, it didn't get put back with all the other stuff. My guess is that once it got out and we took it to somebody in town, "Can you make a print of this?"

GAPP: That print, I think, is from something that was produced in a newspaper or magazine because it has a dot matrix.

FISHER: Well, then the film may be gone and the original was—

GAPP: May have left.

FISHER: Yes. Now, the farthest back that I can go is that same picture, maybe with a dot matrix or maybe not, hung in the Pasteur Memorial, which is this mini little dining room, which was dimly lit for atmosphere, with walnut walls, and stuff for atmosphere. If I had had a strong light, I would have known—and also younger eyes—whether that was indeed clipped from something that had been printed. And it's very possible that it was printed because it might have been reproduced in one of our magazines.

GAPP: That's what it looks like, yes.

FISHER: Harry would know more about that than I. I would despair of thinking that we had the film.

GAPP: I see what you're saying, because it was used.

FISHER: The 8mm film. I'm sure we have some that's at the filmmaker's, because it was a cutesy idea, a little camera that was so light, you could almost put it in an overcoat pocket. My brother, Ben, was a great photographer. He took a lot of pictures. He loved taking pictures. A lot of family stuff is in there. Whether that particular film, because it had that historical little old man, is unlikely, because my guess would be that that film would be found—

GAPP: It would have been used.

FISHER: You know, it may be that that film is in this pile, which is a station wagon load full of stuff.

GAPP: That would be nice. We'll keep our fingers crossed.

FISHER: What we have in the museum was cut from a publication.

GAPP: Yes, but equally—I mean, I'm interested in that, but I'm also interested in some more candid shots of your father.

FISHER: Yes. I don't know. I can't answer that. I'm going to go this winter out to see Charlie.

GAPP: Well, just keep it in mind.

FISHER: I'll go through what we've got out there, and I'll keep this in mind when I see that. Now, a lot of that stuff would be my family, when I was first married in 1953. Not Dad's family. But it's a mixture. A lot of still stuff. A lot of 35mm—35mm cameras became very popular, and very inexpensive. The Argus was a 35mm camera, twenty bucks or something. They just sold like hot cakes. It was a successor to the original Kodak Brownie, but it had 35mm film. If you cranked it up, you could get thirty-six exposures on it, and the grain got closer, so you could get a lot of detail and so on. My brother, Ben, had a dark room in the house and developed a lot of his own pictures. It was off the laundry—had a laundry in the cellar of this big old house—it was a tiny little grubby room. I don't know what in the world it was ever

built for. It had a little tiny sink in it. He put tape on the walls, climbed in there with the film, closed the door—the place smelled of hypo—and took the pictures in. He took a lot of pictures.

DeWITT: I was there.

FISHER: You were there? You're not old enough.

DeWITT: No, we did this in our parents' basements, too!

FISHER: Did you?

GAPP: My husband's a photographer, and he does a lot of black and white photography.

DeWITT: Do you still have it in your house?

GAPP: Yes, we have a dark room on the third floor.

DeWITT: That's fantastic.

FISHER: I can remember being in there with him and we'd squeeze together, with a little tiny red bulb, close the door, open the film, dunk it, then at some point, you know, he'd put it in the tray and with a stick move it around, and then put it up. That's about as far from the digital camera as you can get.

GAPP: Yes, no kidding.

DeWITT: You bet. My wife still teaches the kids how to do black and white photography.

GAPP: Does she? Is that what she teaches?

DeWITT: She teaches art, yes.

FISIHER: You will see at the Carnegie Museum of Art that we have right now a simply fabulous black and white collection being shown by—called *Dream Street*, which is the name of the street—[W. Eugene] Smith, the great American photographer.

GAPP: Yes, we saw it on the website, and we're looking forward to seeing it. I love it.

FISHER: It's a fabulous picture. It's surprisingly small pictures, but you just stand a little closer. His eye for the moment and the angle are just superb. It's on display at the museum and before I forget it, I have a couple passes for you. There's no point in paying admission.

GAPP: Thank you. That's really kind of you.

FISHER: Take those because—by the way, it's a joint admission—you won't have time, but one admission lets you in both the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Art and you can use one for the other. But there's one admission because people wander between them and in that building there's no possible way—well, for other reasons, we do it by "clicker" count. But that same person may walk back out again, go into the other, and so forth.

What else can I tell you? I hope your record takes proper cognizance of the part that Paul [M.] Montrone played in bringing about what the Chemical Heritage Foundation has. He was absolutely key, because he didn't really—and this is perfectly understandable—know what he had. He was still trying to find out what he had in the company, never mind about this oddball collection. It wasn't his cup of tea. He wasn't part of it from way, way back. The fact that he was born and raised in Philadelphia helped.

GAPP: I didn't know that.

FISHER: Well, you do now.

GAPP: Well, thank you.

FISHER: But it helped because he sort of brought it home to his hometown. Through a long period of education, if you will, he began to understand what he had, and so many things could have happened to it that didn't. We had one close call after the other.

GAPP: Really? Well, you were working on this for over two years.

FISHER: Arnold [Thackray] and I worked hand-in-glove. I mean, Arnold and I talked every week for months about how to teach Paul what we had, what it was, where it ought to go, why it should be kept together, why it should go to Philadelphia, and why the company should give it. Just on and on and on and on. I would write to Paul and he would write to Paul. We did all kinds of things, including when you did those extensive renovations at your place of business in Philly, we built the gallery before we had the collection. I say "we" as if I was part of it.

GAPP: I know that. We did. [laughter]

FISHER: Then I went over there on several occasions and took pictures of the work in progress. On, I think, three occasions, then I would send those pictures to Paul, and tell him I just got back from Philadelphia, and "our" project was coming along nicely. Here was Paul, "What the hell is this guy talking about? We haven't decided to really do this with the pictures." But the more we did that, the more he began to think, "They're building this extensive renovation"—some of which wasn't for the museum, the collection.

Finally, we got right down to the point of decision. It was very, very close, and I called him. I had been in his office and made the pitch, which he was astounded by. He was taken aback. He had a couple of his assistants there, and they of course went—and he made a nod, which meant, "Check this out from a tax point of view," you know, as any executive would. And they did. So finally it got right down to the final, final, final. I called him, and said, "Now, Paul, we've got to make a decision on this." I had written him and I said, "We want that collection, and we want a hundred thousand dollars to clean it, reframe it, and hang it." I have been in fund-raising for, I don't know, half a century. I've learned that if you're going to give A you don't mind giving B. If you're going to give a dormitory, and I've sold a lot of them for a school, then you wouldn't mind endowing it. "You wouldn't want that dorm to get ratty, would you, Dr. Jones?" [laughter] So I said, "Give them the collection, and a hundred thousand dollars." There was a long pause. He's obviously thought about it. He said, "Well, Jim, I'll tell you what. If we come up with the collection and the a hundred thousand dollars, it seems to me appropriate that the Fisher family should come up with a hundred thousand dollars too. Doesn't that seem to make sense?" Well, of course, what are you going to say: "No, it doesn't make sense?" But you could tell he was chief executive, obviously, but I was ready for him. I said, "Paul, I believe that that can be done. So sit tight." He said, "All right. I'll sit tight."

Well, the family has what amounts to a foundation—it's actually a fund within the Pittsburgh Foundation, which is a catchall. It has eight hundred funds in it, but one of those is the Fisher Fund. So I went to the Fisher Fund, of which I was then chairman. Now it's a new generation. I told the whole story. Dad established the foundation, so I was on firm grounds. He did that on the advice of older brother Aiken, who was always the long-sighted one, <u>except</u>

for the fact that he didn't get the collection out of the company sale. If he had done that, it wouldn't have made any difference to Allied at all. They didn't even know what they had.

So I went to that, and gee, it was easy. It was an easy sell. We got the hundred. I called Paul and rather than let him forget what he had done, I interpreted his conversation with me as an absolute promise. "I'll give you A, if you give me B." He didn't quite say that. I said, "Paul, we've met your match. The deal is done." [laughter] There was a pause. He realized it. I said, "I got the hundred to match your hundred, and we'll arrange something; you'll be hearing from Arnold and his gang" and so forth. Then we had a couple more words, and that was the end of it.

GAPP: That's wonderful.

FISHER: He probably wondered, "What have I done?" [laughter] Because I think that was the way to do it. You know, I didn't want him to deliberate and talk to his accountants some more, talk to his lawyers some more, or let John Pavlik, who is the curator here talk—because John's heart was broken when he lost this. They had him in the office in this place halfway to the airport, and they had about three visitors a year to see it compared to where you guys are. It was just way out of the way. I mean, the company headquarters is in New Hampshire, you know. It's not there. Well, it's divided. One division is here.

GAPP: We still have a good relationship with Fisher Scientific International. We're working with them on a one hundred-year anniversary exhibit, I understand. I think that they are still very interested. We're very close to them and hope to go back to them for more support.

FISHER: Well, that's good. I'm delighted you are, and of course you have the one hundredth anniversary of the company coming up, which is in 2002. What else can I give you on the tape?

GAPP: I have some show and tell for you.

FISHER: And I have something I'm digging for, but we needn't use tape time for that.

GAPP: All right.

FISHER: I've got too many pots going at once.

GAPP: Yes. Well, you want to turn the tape off?

FISHER: Yes, we'll turn the tape off.

[END OF TAPE, SIDE 3]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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