

Anthenaem Society
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U. S. TOBACCO CO. AND RELATED TOPICS

The title of this -- my first Anthenaem paper -- is U.S. Tobacco Company and a few related topics.

In this, the "age of political correctness", some of you might wonder why I would want to do a paper on any subject related to tobacco.

You have probably heard the story of the man who bought a small farm and was visited by his neighbor. The new owner asked the neighbor, "Can you tell me where the property line runs between our farms?" The neighbor then said, "Are you talking owning or mowing?" The issue of tobacco evokes many of the same ambivalent feelings. If you use tobacco products or have a monetary interest in raising and/or selling tobacco you probably think it's a pretty good product. I won't go into why people are opposed to tobacco because, although well-intentioned, they obviously have never enjoyed the true stimulus of nicotine or owned any tobacco company shares of stock that have quadrupled in value over the years.

Tobacco has had a significant effect on my family and me. My father worked for U.S. Tobacco Company for forty (40) years until his retirement. I remember as

a young boy asking my father why he got into the tobacco business. He said it was very simple. When he was a young boy growing up in Springfield, Tennessee almost all of the larger houses in town were owned by people who were in the tobacco business. That made sense to me then and it stills makes pretty good sense to me today. My dad also said that all the people in Springfield who were in the tobacco business made it through the Great Depression unscathed. My family name of Ben Sory came from a man of some notoriety during the tobacco Night Riders episode in Kentucky and Tennessee history. Ben Sory had been the Sheriff of Robertson County, Tennessee and a close family friend of my great grandfather. As a result, my grandfather was named Benjamin Sory and the name was eventually passed down to me.

U.S. Tobacco Company is a world-wide corporation with approximately 1.5 billion dollars in sales in 1995. Its connection to Hopkinsville is in the form of an industrial complex on North Main Street. U.S. Tobacco is the nation's largest producer of snuff or smokeless tobacco.

The first U.S. Tobacco plant in Hopkinsville was erected in 1916 on the corner of 4th and Clay Streets. An old school had been located there before it was torn down to make way for the tobacco plant. Mr. Oscar Hanks of Paducah was vice-president and director of the Company in charge of the buying and processing of tobacco. U.S.

Tobacco also had plants in Clarksville and Springfield, Tennessee and Murray, Kentucky, with dark-fired tobacco being the main type handled at these plants.

At the death of Mr. Hanks in 1945, Mr. P.T. (Phil) Roberts was appointed vice-president and director of all the leaf sales and purchases for the Company. Some say affectionately that Mr. Roberts' initials of P.T. stood for "pretty tight", but I have no way of knowing for sure. He remained in this capacity until his sudden death in 1960. Some of you may remember Mr. Roberts as a community leader who lived in the house on Cox Mill Road that has since been occupied by Dr. Jim Parrott and his family and currently by George and Sally Coffeen. Others of you may remember him as Linda Roberts' father. My main memory of Mr. Roberts was his love of baseball and the fact that he and other tobacco men would watch the World Series at our house on Alumni Avenue during the decade of the 1950s. That was when the World Series was played during the day and television didn't dictate every move in the world of sports.

Mr. Roberts was succeeded by R. N. Winn, who was the father of Mrs. Bob Clint (Ruth) Cayce. Mr. Winn moved the leaf operations headquarters from Hopkinsville to Clarksville, Tennessee. Upon Mr. Winn's retirement, he was eventually succeeded by Duane Snider. I am sure some of you remember Mr. Snider and others know his two children, Becky and Bill Snider. Mr. Snider died suddenly

in 1968 and was succeeded by my father, Sory Fletcher. Upon his recommendation, the headquarters was moved back to Hopkinsville from Clarksville and a new and modern leaf handling and storage operation commenced in 1977 on North Main Street with construction being completed in 1978.

This became the main plant for purchasing, processing and storage of tobacco for the entire Company. The old plant at 4th and Clay continued to be used for storage until it was donated to the City of Hopkinsville a few years ago. This was then turned into a incubator building by the City of Hopkinsville to house new businesses and/or industries that were just beginning. O.E.M. Exhaust was one of the first businesses to make use of the old U.S. Tobacco building. Of course, as you know, O.E.M. Exhaust is now located in a new facility in the Hopkinsville Industrial Park.

U.S. Tobacco also still has two large storage warehouses at East 24th and Virginia Street (at the Belt Line by Key Oil Company). The front lawn of one of these warehouses fronting on Virginia Street was the site of many a sandlot baseball game in the 1950s and early 1960s. There was also a neighborhood grocery store across from the warehouse which was run at different times by Seldon Dixon and Ronnie and Tony Jones' father.

That was a time in Hopkinsville when neighborhood schools, neighborhood

grocery stores, Mickey Mantle baseball cards and sandlot baseball for the kids of Latham, Alumni, Mooreland, Virginia and East 23rd Streets were all a young boy could ever wish or hope for. Unfortunately, today no business in its right mind can allow kids to play sports on its property for fear of a lawsuit being filed in case of an accident.

In 1980 work was completed on a 140,000 square foot primary processing plant flour mill next to the leaf handling plant on North Main Street. Through various processes tobacco is prepared to be shipped by large tanker trucks to finishing plants in Nashville and Chicago where it is further aged, flavored and packed in cans for delivery to consumers. It is also noteworthy to mention there is sufficient land on North Main Street for U.S. Tobacco to expand its Hopkinsville operations if necessary. U.S. Tobacco presently employs more than one hundred (100) people in its Hopkinsville operation. It has some of the most sophisticated equipment found anywhere in the tobacco business.

In the past few years, U.S. Tobacco constructed a security fence around its entire operation on North Main Street and put in a guard station. The reason for this is most of the tobacco which has been purchased by U.S. Tobacco Company is located in the warehouses on North Main Street. Since this tobacco located there is in essence the "nerve center" of the entire Company, it obviously made sense to take

every precaution to make sure the tobacco is secure.

U.S. Tobacco is primarily interested in flue-cured, fire-cured and air-cured tobacco. Flue-cured tobacco-leaves, which are leaves subjected to heat without smoke, is used mostly for cigarette manufacture with some of it going into the production of chewing tobacco. Fire-curing involves a process similar to the smoking of hams and produces a tobacco impregnated with the smoke of hardwood and rich in gum and aromatic oils. This is used in the manufacture of U.S. Tobacco's snuffs and fine-cut chewing tobaccos. Of the types treated by the more natural air-curing process, Green River, One Sucker and some Burley are used for snuffs and chewing tobaccos.

U.S. Tobacco's main consumer product is Copenhagen snuff. A can of Copenhagen snuff begins in the soil, about three (3) years before it is offered for sale. The rich, dark leaves of fire-cured tobacco, grown in Kentucky and Tennessee, are carefully selected at the seasonal tobacco auctions or directly from the farm and packed in hogsheads which are then stacked in warehouses to age for thirty (30) months. Nothing has been found in the laboratory to substitute for nature's slow method of allowing the inherent harshness present in all tobacco leaves to "sweat" out by fermentation.

When the aged tobacco in hogsheads arrives at the factory, it is broken out and

blended. The various leaves, grown in different areas under different conditions of rain, sun and soil, are mixed by the fine hand of the snuff master to ensure the distinctive Copenhagen taste. Then it is cut, "cased" -- flavored with oils, herbs and aromatics -- dried and bagged for a further period of aging.

It is moistened and loaded into large, stainless steel bins. It remains there for forty-five (45) to fifty-two (52) days, being periodically turned over and aerated. A second "sweating", or fermentation process, completes the mellowing period. When the tobacco is in prime condition, the snuff master orders it fed to the packaging lines for immediate shipment.

Of all tobacco products, smokeless tobacco has the deepest roots in American history. U.S. Tobacco and its predecessor firms have played a major role in nourishing these roots. Even though U.S. Tobacco has diversified successfully into other areas in recent years, smokeless tobacco or snuff remains its principal product line. Most of you are probably familiar with Copenhagen snuff, Skoal, Skoal Long Cut and Skoal Bandits. Other consumer products produced by U.S. Tobacco include premium wines from Washington State and California's Napa Valley, sold nationally under the names of Chateau Ste. Michelle, Columbia Crest, Conn Creek and Villa Mt. Eden wineries, as well as sparkling wine produced under the Domaine Ste. Michelle label.

Certainly, anyone would be hard pressed to name a consumer product that has been an unqualified success for almost one hundred and seventy-five (175) years. Yet Copenhagen Snuff, which was first produced in 1822 - just forty-six (46) years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence -- is today, far and away, the best selling moist, smokeless tobacco or snuff in the world.

Until the last few years, U.S. Tobacco produced and distributed ZIG ZAG rolling papers. Rumor has it that these rolling papers were not always used for rolling tobacco cigarettes, but I was unable to get anybody from U.S. Tobacco to comment one way or the other on the record.

Snuff was discovered by a priest named Romano Pane who sailed with Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the so-called New World. He discovered Indians both smoking and sniffing tobacco. With some astonishment, he noticed the Indians took their tobacco in powdered form through a "Y" shaped cane, the ends of the "Y" being inserted in the nostrils, and the other in the tobacco dust otherwise known as snuff. This is the first recorded instance of the taking of snuff.

On his return to Spain, Romano Pane told many stories of the Indians and their tobacco. Such stories were eagerly absorbed by the Spaniards, especially since Romano had stressed the medicinal value of the strange herb.

At that time the French Ambassador to Portugal was Jean Nicot. He was able

to purchase some tobacco leaves brought into Portugal from neighboring Spain. These he sent to Paris, some as a personal gift to Catherine de Medici, who was the Queen of Charles II of France, probably with instructions on powdering the leaves into snuff.

Catherine tried the snuff and thus perpetuated her name as the first woman to take snuff. As for Jean Nicot, spelled N-I-C-O-T, his name will live forever in the word "nicotine".

Until the last thirty (30) or forty (40) years, doctors throughout the world prompted their patients to use snuff on a regular basis. Medicated snuffs containing Menthol and other recognized inhalants were highly favored by the medical profession because they were said to be a decongestant and cured sinusitis. It was also recognized that snuff cleared the head, alerted the brain, thus giving a stimulus to the whole system. It was even suggested by some doctors that if more people took good snuff, there would be less resort to "pep pills." Some might suggest that we should distribute snuff before Athenaeum Society papers are presented to make sure that all members of the Society are properly stimulated throughout the presentation of all papers.

It was also said during the reign of cholera in Europe that snuff users were almost exempt from the disease. In past years, the supporters of snuff steadfastly

maintained that snuff cured headaches, improved eye sight and acted as a cure for deafness by ridding the eustachian tube of the mucosities which obstructed it.

From George Washington, the Father of our Country, to Troy Aikman, star Super Bowl quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys, prominent people throughout history have sniffed or dipped snuff. Babe Ruth set most of his records with a pinch of snuff between his gum and lip. Such notables as Frederick the Great and Napoleon strolled across the European stage sniffing snuff from ornate and richly-jewelled snuff boxes. Today the custom of sniffing snuff has been almost universally replaced by "dipping", placing a pinch of snuff under the lip and keeping it there for hours.

For those who enjoy tobacco products, snuff gives them the advantage of having the use of their hands while enjoying the good, old-fashioned stimulus of nicotine. As already mentioned, Napoleon was a user of snuff, which gave him free use of his hands but it still does not explain what he was doing with his hand inside his jacket for all those years.

Like most of the corporations that have located manufacturing plants in Hopkinsville, U.S. Tobacco has been a good corporate citizen. As previously mentioned, U.S. Tobacco Company gave the City of Hopkinsville the building at 4th and Clay which was valued at Two Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$250,000.00), and it had a new roof on it. Most recently, the Company donated the flag pole and

flag for Gander Memorial Park, and it has given Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars (\$25,000.00) to Hopkinsville Community College for the proposed Technology Center. Even though tobacco has become a controversial subject in the 1990s, I believe the people in Hopkinsville and Christian County are fortunate indeed to have had U.S. Tobacco Company, or U.S.T. as it is officially known, locate the real heart of the entire Company in our hometown.