

HISTORY OF THE U.S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

**Interview between:
Robert G. Stanfill, Sr., Retired
Director, Philadelphia District
and
Fred L. Lofsvold
Haddon Heights, N.J.
September 12, 1981**

INTRODUCTION

This is a transcription of a taped interview, one of a series conducted by Robert G. Porter and Fred L. Lofsvold, retired employees of the U. S. Food and Drug Administration. The interviews were held with retired F.D.A. employees whose recollections may serve to enrich the written record. It is hoped that these narratives of things past will serve as source material for present and future researchers; that the stories of important accomplishments, interesting events, and distinguished leaders will find a place in training and orientation of new employees, and may be useful to enhance the morale of the organization; and finally, that they will be of value to Dr. James Harvey Young in the writing of the history of the Food and Drug Administration.

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



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TAPE INDEX SHEET

CASSETTE NUMBER(S) 1 and 2

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

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

INTERVIEWEE

INTERVIEWER

NAME: Robert G. Stanfill, Sr.

NAME: Fred L. Lofsvold

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

ADDRESS: U. S. Food & Drug Admin.

[REDACTED]

Denver, Colorado

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

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

CASS. NO.	SIDE NO.	EST. MIN. ON TAPE	PAGE NO.	SUBJECT
1	A	0	1	How Stanfill came to FDA
		10	3	Canned green bean processing investigation at St. Louis.
		20	5	Transfer to Philadelphia
		27	6	Staff at Philadelphia
	B	0	7	Inspection work at Philadelphia
		5	7	Dr. Chevalier Jackson and the Caustic Poison Act
		9	8	Clement S. Brinton
		16	10	Stanfill's publications
		19	10	Revision of Toulman's book on Food and Drug Law
		24	11	Nitrite in fish poisoning case.
2	A	28	12	Commissioner Paul Dunbar
		0	13	Commissioner Charles Crawford
		2	13	Commissioner George Larrick
		4	13	Revision of Inspectors Manual
		8	14	Chief Inspector at Philadelphia
		12	15	Director at Philadelphia
		16	16	Consultant to industry
		18	17	End of recording

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

Interviewer is Fred Lofsvold.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lofsvold: Did you report to Philadelphia?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lofsvold: Did they ever have any cases of botulism?

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

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

Lofsvold: How long were you in St. Louis?

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

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

Lofsvold: Separated from the Bureau of Chemistry?

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

Lofsvold: About how large was that staff in Philadelphia?

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

Lofsvold: And how many chemists?

Stanfill: About five or six chemists.

Lofsvold: You worked then as an inspector?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stanfill: Yes, uh-huh.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stanfill: I don't remember.

Lofsvold: You succeeded him as director?

Stanfill: Yes.

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

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

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

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

Stanfill: Uh-huh.

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

Stanfill: Yes.

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

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

Lofsvold: Were they on Philadelphia stations at that time?

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

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

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

Stanfill: I delivered a paper at the annual meeting of the Association of Food and Drug Officials in Kansas City and discussed some of the investigations of the Food and Drug Administration by Congressional Committees and others.

One of the persons in the audience at Kansas City, who was incidentally given recognition as having been very supportive of the Food and Drug Administration and the Commissioners was Bradshaw Mintener. I believe he was Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and a well-known attorney from Minneapolis and a law partner of John Mitchell of the Nixon fame.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stanfill: Uh-huh.

Lofsvold: When did you take that job?

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

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

Stanfill: Kirk.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

