

A Guide to the Drugs in the Valley: Fifty Years of Merck and Co. Oral History Collection, 1990 SdArch 0003

Drugs in the valley: fifty years of Merck and Co. oral history collection

1990



Title Statement

A Guide to the Drugs in the Valley: Fifty Years of Merck and Co. Oral History Collection, 1990 SdArch 0003

Author: JMU Libraries Cataloging staff

Edition Statement

The contents of this collection were initially described by JMU Libraries Cataloging staff in the early 1990s through item-level bibliographic records that cataloged each individual interview by interviewee name and interview date.

In 2019, Special Collections staff developed new descriptive practices for oral history collections in order to implement more consistent, content standard compliant description across archival holdings. This shift in descriptive methods ended the practice of using bibliographic records to describe individual oral history interviews and instead moved to archival description structured in a finding aid to describe oral history collections and their component interviews.

To implement this shift in practice across existing oral history holdings, archivists compiled descriptive metadata from catalog records for each interview in this collection into the appropriate fields in this finding aid, and added required and value-added contextual information sourced from documentation in collection control files. Interview summaries from the MARC 520 field were moved into Scope and Content notes for each interview. Copies of previous catalog records used to compile the finding aid descriptive metadata are filed in the collection control file.

Publication Statement

Publisher: James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

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Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807

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library-special@jmu.edu

URL: <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/special/>



1990

Notes

2026: Item-level catalog records for individual interviews removed from the JMU Libraries catalog and OCLC; New collection-level catalog records to include interview names and information relevant for equivalent search and discovery via the collection-level record.

Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2025-10-18 07:01:50 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

SdArch 0003

Unit ID

/repositories/4/resources/591

Unit Date

1990

Language

English

Abstract

Collection is an oral history project comprised of a background paper and three audio recordings with corresponding transcripts of interviews conducted in July 1990 by Laura Oakes with former and current employees of the Merck and Co., Inc. pharmaceutical manufacturing plant located in Elkton, Virginia, known as the Stonewall Plant.

source

Oakes, Laura

Creator

Oakes, Laura

Extent

0.25 cubic feet 4 folders and 4 original sound cassettes (Reformatted access copies 3 digitized audio recordings)

Repository

James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

Access to oral history interviews is governed by agreements with the narrators. All interviews in this collection are open for research without restriction. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Special Collections staff at library-special@jmu.edu before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright interests for the interviews in this collection have been transferred to James Madison University Special Collections. Copyright status for other collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for determining copyright status and obtaining permissions for use rests solely with the user.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Interviews and collection materials were donated to Special Collections in 1990 by Laura Oakes.

Processing Information

In 2008, Libraries' staff in the media resources department reformatted the contents of the original audio cassettes in this collection, using a Tascam CC-222MKII CD recorder / cassette combination deck to transfer digitized m4a and mp3 files onto MAM-A Gold Archival 700MB CD-Rs to serve as both access copies and preservation storage.

In 2018, the digital archivist in Special Collections completed a large-scale project to transfer reformatted born-digital files stored on gold CDs off of the physical media and into access and preservation storage environments on Libraries servers. As part of this project, the digital archivist also combined audio files when appropriate for interviews that were originally recorded across multiple pieces of physical media or on different sides of a single piece of media, and applied a new file naming convention constructed from the oral history collection identifier and a component unique identifier used to differentiate among interviews at the file level in the archival description. The archivist saved these newly combined interview files in .wav file format for preservation storage, and also created derivative access file copies in .mp3 file format.

In 2025, as part of an oral history redescription project, archivists corrected errors in file names for audio files in this collection to align with existing file naming conventions for digitized Special Collections materials, and to ensure that all component unique identifiers used within file names for digital surrogates matched the identifiers employed in the corresponding archival description.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item/interview], [date of item/interview], Drugs in the valley: fifty years of Merck and Co. oral history collection, SdArch 0003, Special Collections, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

Biographical / Historical

Oral history interviews that make up this collection were conducted in July 1990 by JMU undergraduate student Laura Oakes, as part of an oral history summer internship in Special Collections. The background paper and the three interviews in this collection formed the basis for the bachelor honors thesis titled *Drugs in the Valley: the history of the Stonewall Plant of Merck and Company, Inc., 1941-1991*, as well as the monograph titled *Stonewall: the realization of a vision, 1941-1991*, both published in 1991 and authored by Oakes. Copies of both of these related titles form part of Special Collections' rare book holdings.

Scope and Contents

This collection is comprised of a background paper and three audio recordings with corresponding transcripts of oral history interviews conducted in July 1990 with individuals who had worked at the Merck and Co., Inc. pharmaceutical manufacturing plant located in Elkton, Virginia known as the Stonewall Plant.

The background paper provides contextual information around the genesis of the oral history project and outlines the project purpose as intending to record the experiences of plant employees to understand the impact of Elkton, Virginia plant operations on individuals and communities in the Shenandoah Valley and beyond. The background paper includes a brief chronological history of the growth and development of the pharmaceutical corporation, Merck and Co., Inc. with focus on the history of the Stonewall Plant.

Interviews in this collection record the recollections of three individuals who worked at the Stonewall plant in different capacities, and who were selected for participation in the project to reflect a variety of viewpoints. A summary of each interview is included in a scope and contents note for each individual interview.

Keywords

Pharmaceutical industry -- Shenandoah River Valley (Va. and W. Va.) -- History

Pharmaceutical industry employees

Industrial relations -- Virginia -- Elkton

World War, 1939-1945 -- Virginia -- Rockingham County

Rockingham County (Va.) -- History

Industries -- Virginia -- Rockingham County

Rockingham County (Va.) -- Economic conditions

Industries -- Shenandoah River Valley (Va. and W. Va.) -- Sources

Shenandoah River Valley (Va. and W. Va.) -- Economic conditions -- Sources

oral histories (literary works)

Oakes, Laura

Existence and Location of Copies

EXISTENCE AND LOCATION OF COPIES

A bound volume that comprises copies of the transcripts of each interview in this collection as well as a copy of the project background paper and any related materials is cataloged as a monograph and is available as part of the Libraries' circulating collection under the title, *Drugs in the Valley : fifty years of Merck and Co., Inc., 1941-1991. Part of an oral history project.*

Description of Subordinate Components

Background paper: Drugs in the valley: fifty years of Merck and Co., 1941-1991

Unit ID SA0003-01

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18234

Unit Date 1990

Mixed Materials [1000898332] 1 (box)

Container SA0003-01 (folder)

Extent 1 folders

Scope and Contents

This background paper records a brief chronological history of the growth and development of the pharmaceutical corporation, Merck and Co., Inc. and in particular, one of its manufacturing plants, the Stonewall Plant at Elkton, Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley. The paper traces the history of the Merck family and its association with pharmaceutical businesses beginning in 17th century Germany to expansion in the U.S. in 1891 where it became an independent entity in 1908. Mentions various family names, including George W. Merck; refers to plant sites including Rahway, New Jersey and specifically the Stonewall Plant at Elkton. Gives background information on the selection of the Virginia site, its 1941 founding and growth, along with mention of the 1977 plant built by Merck, Sharp and Dohme. Explains the purpose of the oral history series in recording the reminiscences of Stonewall plant employees to determine the impact of the plant on the area and the company as a whole, and also the events, etc. in the local community, company and world upon the plant, its employees, and local area. Three employees were chosen to reflect varying viewpoints. They were: G. Elliot Reeke, 39-yr. retired employee (maintenance engineer manager), present from the plant's founding; Olin N. Leake, 38-yr. retired hourly employee (chemical operator), present during the plant's middle and growth years; and Barry Ream, 20-year current employee (administrative manufacturing area head).

George Elliot Reeke interviewed by Laura A. Oakes

Unit ID SA0003-02

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/32419

Unit Date 1990 July 03

Creator Reeke, George Elliott, 1917-2001

Creator Oakes, Laura

Scope and Contents

This interview records the recollections of Mr. George Elliot Reeke who was a maintenance engineer from 1941-1980 at the Stonewall Plant at Elkton, VA., a manufacturing plant of the pharmaceutical corporation, Merck & Co. Reeke describes various aspects of work; the impact of the plant on the community and company, and events and changes which impacted on the plant, its employees and local area. Expresses viewpoints from the perspective of an employee who was present at the founding of the plant through its building years. Mentions the building of the plant and its physical layout; descriptions of jobs and key personnel; employment practices (wages, benefits, status of minorities and women); administrative research and production activities (ex. riboflavin process, thiamin, streptomycin, penicillin, atabrin, various vitamins); employer-employee relations; outside activities (clubs, etc.); communication within the plant, safety/quality control measures and health care; transportation of raw materials; company housing; community relations and economic impact; environmental impact (fish kill in the Shenandoah River); and the impact of WWII on the plant, employees and community. Recorded at the home of Mr. George Elliot Reeke of Harrisonburg, VA. on July 3, 1990.

Digital access copies

Unit ID SA0003-02

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/32421

Digital Files SA0003-SET-001 (network storage)

Container SA0003-02 (Digital-Materials)

Extent 2 digital files1 MP3; 1 PDFinterview sound recording; transcript document

Conditions Governing Access

Researchers may request these materials via a digitization request to receive electronic delivery of access copies. Contact library-special@jmu.edu with questions about requesting digital access copies.

Conditions Governing Use

Provision of copies of materials in this collection in does not imply permission to utilize materials in excess of fair use. The researcher is solely responsible for determining the copyright status of materials and, if necessary, obtaining permission to use material from the copyright holder.

Scope and Contents

Includes digitized access copies of interview recording and interview transcript.

Transcript and supporting documents

Unit ID SA0003-02

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/32420

Mixed Materials [1000898332] 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Extent 1 folders

Original audiocassette #1

Unit ID SA003-OP-001

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18237

Unit Date 1990-07-03

Audio 1 (Media Cabinet)

Container SA003-CS-001 (Audiocassette)

Conditions Governing Access

Access to original or duplicating copies of physical media is restricted. Researchers must consult digital access copies; if none exist researchers may request that digital access copies be made. Contact library-special@jmu.edu to request digitization.

Original audiocassette #2

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18238

Unit Date 1990-07-03

Audio 1 (Media Cabinet)

Container SA003-CS-002 (Audiocassette)

Conditions Governing Access

Access to original or duplicating copies of physical media is restricted. Researchers must consult digital access copies; if none exist researchers may request that digital access copies be made. Contact library-special@jmu.edu to request digitization.

Preservation master cd #1

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18239

Audio 1 (Media Cabinet)

Container SA003-OP-001 (CD)

Conditions Governing Access

Access to original or duplicating copies of physical media is restricted. Researchers must consult digital access copies; if none exist researchers may request that digital access copies be made. Contact library-special@jmu.edu to request digitization.

Preservation master cd #2**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18240**Audio** 1 (Media Cabinet)**Container** SA003-OP-002 (CD)**Conditions Governing Access**

Access to original or duplicating copies of physical media is restricted. Researchers must consult digital access copies; if none exist researchers may request that digital access copies be made. Contact library-special@jmu.edu to request digitization.

Olin Norman Leake interviewed by Laura A. Oakes**Unit ID** SA0003-03**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18241**Unit Date** 1990 July 12**Mixed Materials** SA0003-SET-001 (network storage)**Container** SA0003-03 (Digital-Materials)**Access Restrictions**

Interview is open to research. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Special Collections staff at library-special@jmu.edu before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

Use Restrictions

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Scope and Contents

This interview records the recollections of Mr. Olin Norman Leake who was a chemical operator from 1948-1986 at the Stonewall Plant at Elkton, Va., a manufacturing plant of the pharmaceutical corporation, Merck & Co. He describes various aspects of work; the impact of the plant on the community and company, and events and changes which impacted on the plant, its employees, and local area. Expresses viewpoints from the perspective of an employee who was present during the middle years of the plant's history (to date). Describes training procedures and the production process for drugs such as streptomycin; (also mentions vitamin B-1, B-12, and chicken feed drugs such as nicarbazine and sulfaquinoxaline). Refers to packaging and sterilization of drugs and process of batch operations. Mentions communication within the plant; safety/accident quality control measures and health care; company housing; community relations and outside activities. Recalls employer-employee relations and employment practices (wages, benefits status of minorities and women); shift work; and the strike of 1984. Talks about impact of WWII on plant, employees and area (blackouts, draft). Mentions competition from international production (ex. Egypt plant), and impact of machinery taking place of workers. Recorded at the home of Mr. Olin Norman Leake of Harrisonburg, Va. on July 12, 1990.

Transcript and supporting documents**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18242**Unit Date** 1990 July 12**Mixed Materials [1000898332]** 1 (box)**Container** 3 (folder)**Barry Jay Ream interviewed by Laura A. Oakes****Unit ID** SA0003-04**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18245**Unit Date** 1990 July 18**Mixed Materials** SA0003-SET-001 (network storage)**Container** SA0003-04 (Digital-Materials)

Conditions Governing Access

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Scope and Contents

This interview records the viewpoints of Mr. Barry Jay Ream, employed since 1970 and now a manufacturing area head at the Stonewall Plant at Elkton, Va., a manufacturing plant of the pharmaceutical corporation, Merck & Co. He describes various aspects of work; the impact of the plant on the community and company, and events and changes which impacted on the plant, its employees, and local area. Expresses viewpoints from the perspective of an employee who is currently employed and who has knowledge of the plant's present status and insight into its possible future. Discusses various personnel related issues including changes in employer-employee relations, employment practices (wages, benefits, women), labor relations and the strike of 1984, and descriptions of job responsibilities and key positions. Refers to two fairly new divisions of the company (MPMD and MCMD). Mentions the fermentation (microbiological) process and production of vitamin B-12, Mevacor, Primaxin and Carbidoba. Also mentions several accidents and the use of benzene, now known as a carcinogen. Discusses various technological changes; those made by Roy Vagelos; importance of environmental issues; and the growth of generic drugs. Talks about changing management practices resulting in competition between plants with possible plant closing (Cherokee Plant), decentralization versus centralization, and importance of research and international divisions (ex. England and Puerto Rico plants). Mentions relations with the area, in particular, Elkton; also flood of 1985. Recorded at the home of Barry Jay Ream of Elkton, Va. on July 18, 1990.

Transcript and supporting documents

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18246

Unit Date 1990 July 18

Mixed Materials [1000898332] 1 (box)

Container 4 (folder)