

July 20, 1967

Editorial Department
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Gentlemen:

I return herewith the galley proof of the biographical material on Earle W. Webb, prepared for publication in The National Cyclopedica of American Biography.

I have not undertaken to correct the proof so as to put it in what I might regard as suitable form for publication. Rather, since certain factual statements are incorrect and certain sequences are disordered, I have undertaken to straighten out the facts in a separate (attached) statement. By eliminating certain statements and modifying others, I have allowed the general language and the sequential account to remain substantially intact.

Let me point out the reasons for the alterations which you will find in my statement.

(1) Beginning with line 41 (from top), I would put a period after "duPont de Nemours and Co(mpany)", and begin a new sentence with the word "Later" or equivalent, since the Baton Rouge Plant was not built for some years later. Its operations began, I believe, in 1937, Ethyl took it over for operation in 1945 or thereabouts. I have not checked the precise dates.

(2) The research department of Ethyl Corporation had been initiated by Midgley in 1924, but was greatly expanded into an extremely effective arm of the Corporation over a period of years after it moved to Detroit, Michigan from Yonkers, New York somewhere around 1927 (I'm not sure of the date and there is no special need to look it up.) It never at any time concerned itself with toxicological problems in its research, while being conscious of the hygienic relationships and impacts of its efforts, through continuous contact with Ethyl's Medical Department and the Kettering Laboratory. It was fully recognized by Webb that these matters always impinged upon the public interest, and were better dealt with by a responsible public institution. The research people did, however, carry out a number of difficult technical researches (such as the nature of the lead discharged from the exhausts of automobiles), at the request of the Medical Department, implemented by the executive arm of the corporation.

(3) The reference to the development of a "safe ethyl fluid" is entirely off base. The initial product went through a series of technical developments to meet requirements that, increasingly, became evident through automotive engine research. But nothing of this sort ever influenced its toxicity materially. Safety was achieved by methods and equipment for handling developed by industrial hygiene engineers in collaboration with the Medical Department of the Corporation which took into account all of the knowledge gained by technical and medical research.

(Incidentally, it is quite clear that almost no one outside of Ethyl Corporation, and only a few people in related industries /automotive and petroleum/ has ever

appreciated the fact that the applications of medical and technical knowledge /Occupational Medicine and Hygiene/ in such hazardous enterprises, is the necessary accompaniment of modern technological developments. Unless such developments are scrutinized for their dangers (medical and hygienic research), supervised carefully in terms of methods for the detection of actual or potential injury /medical surveillance of workmen in all categories/, studied by technical experts for means for affecting satisfactory avoidance of danger (industrial hygiene technology), our society is heading for disasters, and we have had them. This is exactly why we are in such a dither, at present, over air and water pollution and the contamination of food. We have not learned, even yet, to accompany technical research and practice with adequate hygienic research and practice. Webb learned these things very rapidly and that is the principal reason that this admittedly hazardous industry has been able to continue in business without frequent crises, and without taking a toll of the health of the people who manufacture, distribute and use its products. Little inkling of the significance of this intellectual quality of Earle Webb's efforts has entered into this biography, whereas it is indeed, one of his most important contributions to the life of our times.)

(4) Reference has been made in the attached statement to the sentence which begins - line 69 from top - "Although Webb's concern with research" - - - , and has the wrong slant. Webb did not presume to direct or even to suggest medical research (and neither, for that matter did Kettering, beyond certain broad statements of goals to be achieved). What Webb did was to make sure that such research was equipped and financed adequately, and of course, that it was productive of industrial guidance. I have suggested cutting out all of that sentence as being entirely misleading, without interrupting, otherwise, the biographical account.

I trust that my remarks above and in the attached statement will not lead you to believe that I do not give this biography a good rating. It is good, generally, in my view. As a good friend and firm admirer of Earle Webb, I consider it a good account of his life. It would hardly be possible for anyone not close to him and the situation in which he was involved, as President of Ethyl Corporation, to appreciate the type of effort and thought which went into this highly complex matter. If therefore, I have undertaken to straighten out the record at several points, it is because the unvarnished truth in these matters is a part of the American record which should be preserved.

I am grateful to you for the opportunity of commenting on this record, before it has been finalized.

Very truly yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.
Professor Emeritus of
Occupational Medicine

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Suggested Alterations in the Actual Wording of the Biography
(for such adaptation as the editor(s) may make)

Line 41

Later to ensure that his company would not be handicapped by competition with the powerful duPont interests, Webb directed the erection of a new Ethyl plant in Baton Rouge, La., to be operated by duPont until such (stipulated) time as Ethyl should choose to take over the operations. At the time the use of tetraethyl-lead in gasoline to prevent detonation during the combustion process in automotive engines was still in the developmental stage, Webb expanded the research department, initiated by Thomas Midgley, Jr. in 1924, to engage in broad research into the performance of automotive and aeronautical engines, and into many other related mechanical and chemical problems. He had also recognized the significance of the hygienic problems of the industry and their potential impact upon the public health, and had been highly instrumental in establishing a research laboratory in the Medical College of the University of Cincinnati for the investigation of these problems. This Laboratory was named in honor of Charles Franklin Kettering, the Kettering Laboratory of Applied Physiology. (Subsequently shortened to the Kettering Laboratory, after numerous investigations of major problems of industrial health, sponsored by many other industrial organizations, it became a noteworthy center for research and graduate professional training in Occupational Medicine and Hygiene).

In 1933, the use of ethyl fluid was extended beyond premium gasolines into common grades of motor fuels, and in the following year it was adapted for use in oil burning farm tractors.

Eliminate entire reference to research, beginning with "Although Webb's concern," etc. - - - to the end of this sentence, since all of it is incorrect. It had nothing to do with Kettering's (personal) support of medical investigations at Antioch University at Yellow Springs, or at the Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton. It was, rather, strictly a university function financed by industry under agreements made with the Board of Directors of the University of Cincinnati. From there on, so far as I know, the facts as stated are correct - - - Webb made major contributions, etc. - - -

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