

GDCI FOUNDER'S DAY

GDCI Recognizes Leaders at Founder's Day Ceremonies

A highlight of GDCI's 1975 Semi-Annual Meeting in Omaha was the October 2 SPIRIT OF '56 Founders Day Luncheon. The program, co-chaired by GDCI Past Presidents C.E. Kallens and G.B. Reed, Jr., was dedicated to the SPIRIT OF '56 which witnessed the founding of Gypsum Drywall Contractors International and to the recognition of those industry leaders in whom this spirit evoked the wisdom and support which nurtured the organization and growth of Gypsum Drywall Contractors International.

Keynote speaker at the luncheon was Andrew J. Watt, whose timely remarks are published on this page. Following Watt's address, GDCI Chairman of the Board Herbert S. Reisenfeld and President T.J. Vogt presented plaques to those founders and industry leaders whose names, by Resolution, were inscribed in the GDCI Hall of Fame.

Concluding the program was a round table discussion during which the founders and leaders present were invited to share their ideas about the SPIRIT OF '56 and its continuing vital role in the growth and progress of GDCI and the Drywall Industry.



Andrew J. Watt

Andrew J. Watt, Executive Vice President of United States Gypsum Company, joined U.S.G. as a sales manager in 1938. During World War II he served in the U.S. Air Force until 1945 when he returned to U.S.G. as a paint salesman in the Pittsburgh district. After performing in a number of sales and marketing positions, he served as Vice President of Merchandising, Vice President of Advertising and Promotion, Vice President of Marketing and as Senior Vice President. In 1962 he was elected to the Board of Directors and in 1969 he was designated an Executive Vice President.

Watt is a director of A.P. Green Refractories Company, Mexico, Missouri, and Kinkaid Industries, Inc., Chicago, Illinois, both U.S.G. subsidiaries. He is past president of the American Hardboard Association and the Gypsum Association.

GDCI Founder's Day Luncheon Message Omaha (Nebraska) Hilton, October 2, 1975

I have been requested to keep the timing of this talk on the short side of 20 minutes, and the direction of it pointed to the "Spirit of '56."

It is not possible to accept this invitation or to meet this request without some reservations for some of us looking backward to 1956 could be nostalgic, and with nostalgia as a test the whole thing could turn into a sermon.

In that connection I am reminded of a rather aged lady who had been a long time member of her community and her church. After the service one Sunday morning she shook hands with the minister and commented, "That was a wonderful sermon—just wonderful! Everything you said applies to someone I know."

My fondest hope would be that each of you would take what I am going to say more personally than the aged lady, but even if I lead you to think it is good for others I will have fulfilled part of my purpose.

To set the stage I intend to quote in part from a speech I was privileged to read some time ago. I do not want to be accused of plagiarism so I will tell you that the speech was made by Walter B. Wriston, Chairman of the First National City Corporation, in February of 1974.

"Anyone in our society whose eyesight and hearing are not totally impaired is likely to believe that we are on a collision course with Doomsday. Certainly the energy shortage has produced no scarcity in the rhetoric of crisis. Considering the amount of time and space devoted to predictions of impending disaster, it would

appear that the media have sought to validate a variation of Gresham's Law. Bad news drives out good."

"The compulsion to turn every scrap of bad news into a full blown crisis distorts our perspective. It neglects to remind us that troubles may be new, but they are by no means new. This negative emphasis ignores the decisive role of human ingenuity in a free society."

"Prophets of doom have a second weakness. They fail to appreciate man's inherent ability to adjust and innovate. The British economist Thomas Malthus predicted in 1798 that the imbalance between population growth and food production would cause the world to starve to death. The doomsayers called it Malthus' iron law. As time has passed, it was neither time nor law. Like many of our current crop of transient experts, Malthus fell into the oldest trap of all in the prognostication game. He underestimated everyone's intelligence but his own; he was incapable of imagining that out of the Industrial Revolution would come reapers, threshers, combines and tractors. He did not foresee the era of cheap energy. Nor did he envision chemicals and fertilizers creating such abundance that foolish governments would pay farmers not to cultivate the soil."

"A third fault accounts for the inability of the doomsayers accurately to predict what will happen. They cling to the belief that there are accepted absolutes in a world of rapidly changing value systems. As the French poet Paul Valery put it, we often tend to be marching backward into the future."

"Examples abound. A Presidential commission appointed by Herbert Hoover in 1929 later re-

ported to Franklin D. Roosevelt on how to plot our course through 1952. The report was in 11 volumes prepared by 500 researchers. The summary required 1,600 pages. Yet there was not a word about atomic energy, jet propulsion, antibiotics, transistors or many other significant developments. The World's Fair of 1939, which was dedicated to the World of Tomorrow, not only failed to suggest any of these advances, but did not even entertain the idea of space travel. Herman Kahn's essay on the year 2000 never mentioned pollution, nor was there any real emphasis on the energy shortage. The people who have come closest to predicting the future are some of the science fiction writers, unencumbered by elaborate research or prestigious committees, but with the courage to dream. Jules Verne's wild imagination proved to be more prophetic than the calculations of Malthus."

"Our later-day Malthusians, whose forecasts are often dignified with computer printouts, which substitute for oxen trails in modern day occult prediction, appear oblivious to the fact that man, given the proper incentive and freedom to act, has repeatedly found substitutes for dwindling materials. The United States was denied 90 percent of its sources of natural rubber during World War II, but technological ingenuity created synthetic rubber which is now more widely and flexibly used than the natural product. One of the most common substances in the world is bauxite, but it was not regarded as much of an asset until the way to make aluminum was perfected. Coal was not even considered a resource before the Steam Age, nor was uranium highly valued

before the Atomic Age. Since the Industrial Revolution, resources have grown exponentially, step by step, with man's ability to apply fresh technology to his needs. These experiences of yesterday are relevant today. I do not assert that history repeats itself, but offer a reminder that the human story did not begin with today's crisis."

"Energy is no exception. Few Americans ever remember that from the time of the American Revolution until the Civil War, a major source of artificial lighting was the whale oil lamp. No one should have needed a Congressional commission to predict that the supply of whale oil could not forever keep pace with the demand of a growing nation."

"The tragedy of our Civil War disrupted whale oil production and its price shot up to \$2.55 a gallon, almost double what it had been in 1859. Naturally there were cries of profiteering and demands for Congress to do something about it. The government, however, made no move to ration whale oil or to freeze its price, or to put a new tax on the 'excess profits' of the whalers who were benefitting from the increase in prices. Instead, prices were permitted to rise. The result, then as now, was predictable. Consumers began to use less whale oil and the whalers invested more money in new ways to increase their productivity. As an example, men with vision and capital began to develop kerosene and other petroleum products. The first practical generator for outdoor electric lights was built in 1875. By 1896 the price of whale oil had dropped to 40 cents a gallon. Whale oil lamps were no longer in vogue, they sit now in museums to remind