

Testimonial to Frederick Henry Leonhardt

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Testimonial

to

Frederick Henry Leonhardt

on the occasion of his

Sixtieth Anniversary

with

Fritzsche Brothers, Inc.

*

Saturday, April 17, 1954

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Starlight Roof

Waldorf-Astoria Hotel

New York City

Frederick Henry Leonhardt

“I love to work and I love my work.”

On August 28, 1871, at 62 Cedar Street in lower Manhattan, a new firm opened its doors. Its name was Fritzsche, Schimmel & Company and its business was the importation and sale of essential oils.

Just two years later, in a town some 4000 miles away, there occurred an event that was to have far-reaching effect upon the eventual success of this modest little importing establishment. On Friday, August 8, 1873, in the happy home of Friederich Wilhelm Leonhardt and his wife, Louise, in Boelitz-Ehrenberg near Leipzig, Germany, there arrived a son and heir. To this, their second child, the proud parents gave the name of Frederick Henry.

The one thing, perhaps, that linked these two situations – the birth of young Leonhardt and the now struggling New York import house – was that each had its origin in the important commercial and industrial city of Leipzig, home of the chemical firm of Schimmel & Company, sponsor and silent partner of the distant Fritzsche, Schimmel organization. Not for many years, however, were the paths of these to meet.

Young Frederick enjoyed a happy, healthy childhood. He and his older sister, Elsa, participated in many an escapade together and his mother’s anecdotes, told over and over again to delight of her grandchildren, are replete with their exciting adventures. The matter of schooling came along in the normal course of events and for little Fritz this began in Gohlis, then a suburb of the “big Seestadt” Leipzig. Early in his career, his abilities pointed clearly to the advisability of a practical education in preference to a humanistic training. When, therefore, his father’s business took him to the City of Leipzig, he transferred from the Humanistic Gymnasium to the “Real Gymnasium” which stressed modern sciences and languages as opposed to the former’s curricula of Latin and Greek.

Graduating from here, he joined the well known wholesale and retail drug firm of Gebrüder Lodde in Leipzig. It was with this concern that he served his apprenticeship. It was here, too, that his aptness was observed and appreciated. There was too limited incentive, however, in that division of the drug business for one of his leanings and aspirations. Therefore, when an opportunity presented itself to go with Schimmel & Company, one of Leipzig’s leading chemical houses, he accepted immediately. So diligent was his application and so favorable was the impression he made upon his superiors that when the firm’s New York agency, Fritzsche, Schimmel & Company, acquainted the home office with their need for technical assistance in handling the demands being made upon them, the now 20-year old Leonhardt—young, ambitious and dependable—was the one chosen. He leaped at the opportunity. This was the fulfillment of a wish long cherished—a burning desire to visit this vigorous new world and to become a part of it. On April 4, 1894 he boarded the s/s “Spree” at Southampton bound for New York. He arrived eight days later and on April 15th he joined Fritzsche Brothers to begin a business relationship that on April 15, 1954 completed a remarkable span of sixty years.

Mr. Leonhardt loved his new work and his new country. Ten years after his arrival, on December 20, 1904, he became a proud citizen of his adopted land.

At the time he joined the firm, Carl Brucker was President. An excellent executive, Mr. Brucker felt somewhat handicapped, nevertheless, by his lack of technical background. It was to fill this need, made increasingly evident by growing customer demands, that one of Mr. Leonhardt’s qualifications had been sought. His acquisition gave stature to the company and as quality, uniformity and reliability of product became—under his direction—more and more the distinguishing characteristics of all the firm’s offerings, the name and reputation of Fritzsche grew.

In May, one year after Mr. Leonhardt’s arrival, F. E. Watermeyer joined the firm to direct its sales. Mr. Watermeyer was, himself, a man of great integrity and he found reciprocation of interests and ideals in Fritz Leonhardt. As time went on, there developed between these two gentlemen a deep, personal friendship that survived nearly forty years of almost daily association. Many of Mr. Leonhardt’s most cherished memories are these years—the early 1900’s ... their Saturday-after-work treks to Luchow’s on 14th Street ... their joint ownership of the “Minka,” a small boat abroad which they spent many happy hours cruising Long Island Sound and the picturesque Hudson ... their memberships in the Columbia Yacht Club and the New York Athletic Club ... their “discovery” and purchase of lovely Lake Yokum in the Berkshires near Becket, Massachusetts, and the subsequent development of Yokum Lodge. These were, indeed, happy years.

In 1913, Mr. Brucker died and Mr. Watermeyer was elected his successor. The team of Watermeyer and Leonhardt functioned smoothly and the prestige of the company grew. It had long since outgrown its former locations and was now established in a building at 82-84 Beekman Street. Branch offices had been established in a number of key cities.

March 31, 1915 was probably the most important date in Mr. Leonhardt's entire career. On that day the Reverend Otto Pederson officiated at his marriage to Miss Anna Haakonson. The arrival of a daughter, Dorothea Louise, on May 14, 1918, to bless the Leonhardt home, and a son, Frederick Haakon, on July 23, 1922, brought inestimable joy to both their lives.

For the firm and its executives, these were busy, important years. Mr. Leonhardt devoted long hours to laboratory direction and company policies. No detail escaped him and the divisions over which he had entire responsibility were models of good order and efficiency. In his later years as President, the greater breadth and scope of his activities have permitted the stamp of his high principles to be reflected in every facet of the company's operations.

Fritzsche Brothers incorporated in 1919. It passed its half century mark later and in 1923, Fritzsche Brothers of Canada, Ltd. was organized. In the late 20's, the company inaugurated its first field studies of flower and essential oil production in Europe, which ultimately was to embrace—with few exceptions—producing regions in every country of the globe. This work, unique in the annals of American industry, gained its greatest impetus under the encouraging direction of Mr. Leonhardt. There could be no greater testament to one man's foresight and good judgment than the prodigious six volumes, "The Essential Oils" which was the crowning result of this work and which Dr. Ernest Guenther, its author, dedicates in these words: "To Frederick H. Leonhardt ... whose vision and generosity made this work possible. "

Throughout these years, Mr. Watermeyer had been giving the company extraordinary executive leadership. On March 19, 1934, this fine gentleman died, and on April 2nd, the responsibility of his office was transferred to Mr. Leonhardt. The elation that might have accompanied this high honor under other circumstances was sadly lacking in this instance, for his gain had come at heavy cost—the loss of his closest and most devoted friend.

Leadership came naturally to Mr. Leonhardt, therefore it was not difficult for him to adjust himself to his increased responsibilities. Furthermore, he and his predecessor had worked almost as one for many years and this, too, helped to make the transition an easy one for all concerned.

On March 27, 1935, disaster struck the firm's Beekman Street headquarters. Early arrivals at the office that morning found their business home gutted by fire. Calamitous though it was, this stroke of ill fortune proved a pivotal point in the company's success, for it led directly to the establishment of new quarters, five months later, in the modern, stream-lined plant it now occupies in the port Authority Building, twelve stories above bustling 9th Avenue and 15th Street.

In 1937, death claimed another old and trusted associate and friend, Dr. Clemens Kleber, who like Mr. Leonhardt had also received his early training in the Leipzig laboratories of Schimmel & Company. He had for many years, handled the firm's manufacturing operations on an executive basis, first as director of its Garfield plant and later through his own factory and laboratories in Clifton, N.J. It was good business judgment tinged with sentiment that decided Mr. Leonhardt in favor of purchasing Dr. Kleber's Clifton property now that he was gone.

During this period, ominous war clouds were gathering in European skies. In spite of this, new offices were being set up, including one in Mexico City, to handle more conveniently the company's rapidly expanding business. Suddenly the deluge broke. Europe was reeling when Pearl Harbor was struck and from then on all business was geared for war. Deprived of many of its sources of raw materials and essential oils, and with increasing military demands, management during this period was taxed to the utmost to provide substitute materials to enable manufacturers to keep going. The stress of these times did not, however, prevent the firm from tendering Mr. Leonhardt a memorable testimonial dinner on Saturday, April 15, 1944, in honor of his Fiftieth Anniversary with the company. Two years later—in 1946—the firm itself had a gala celebration, its Diamond Jubilee Seventy-Fifth Anniversary. In commemoration of this, Mr. Leonhardt authorized the establishment of a Gold Medal - \$1,000 Fritzsche Award to be presented annually for "outstanding achievement in the field of essential oils and related chemicals." International in scope and administered by American Chemical Society, this is recognized today as one of chemistry's most coveted awards.

When the war ended, most of those who entered the various services, returned to begin anew where they had left off. Among these was Mr. Leonhardt's only son, Fred, honorably discharged from the Tank Destroyers following combat service in Africa and Italy. It was Mr. Leonhardt's policy that no employee who had given service to his country should lose seniority or position upon his return. In fact, employee welfare has always been one of his chief concerns and this is reflected in the liberal Pension, Security and Health Benefit Plans that have been put into effect with his generous endorsement. A system of group insurance inaugurated in the early 20's has been replaced by the more complete program of employee protection now in effect. He has insisted that in addition to having ideal working conditions, every member of his Fritzsche family shall enjoy just as much security and protection as is financially possible for the firm to provide.

One would think with so many large accomplishments behind him, with over half a century of company service to his credit, and with business moving at an ever-increasing tempo, that the zest for further achievement would tend to wane.

Not so with this vigorous gentleman even as he approached four score years. In 1952, after a trip to the Hawaiian Islands with Mrs. Leonhardt, Mr. Leonhardt accepted a challenging business proposal that would have deterred many a less courageous man. He sanctioned the purchase and operation under strong, competitive management, of Dodge & Olcott, Inc., one of the industry's largest, most respected and oldest essential oil firms. Several months later he officiated at the opening of the fine, new plant and office building erected in Toronto for accommodation of the firm's Canadian affiliate. As truly now as when he began his career was he living his life's motto: "I love to work and I love my work."

But all good things must end some time, and it was probably at this point as he approached his sixtieth anniversary, with his organization smoothly running and efficiently managed, that he felt he could and perhaps should relinquish a part of his burden. So, in a bulletin made public on May 20, 1953, it was announced that the office of President of Fritzsche Brothers, In., was being turned over to his 1st Vice-President, John H. Montgomery, a veteran of thirty years of service and that he, himself, would occupy the newly created post of Chairman of the Board.

Still active and keenly concerned with every operation of the company's business, reporting to work as regularly now as he has for the past sixty years, Mr. Leonhardt retains the clear mind and vigor of men many years his junior. A happy life philosophy and a genuine affection for his fellow men have brought their rewards and these attitudes are clearly reflected in the fatherly warmth of his amiable, friendly smile. No one will ever know the full extent to which he has shared his own worldly goods for the benefit of others.

In the town of Douglaston, where he has made his home for many years, a new wing has recently been added to the lovely Community Church of which he is a long time member and Trustee. It is characteristic of him that this building, financed entirely from his own funds, should be primarily for the accommodation of a Sunday School and for the religious training of that community's youth. The Leonhardt Memorial Chapel will long serve as a reminder of those fine human qualities which have endeared him to his many fiends and neighbors in the community which he loves so well.

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