CORPORATE

profile...

For over half a century, a specialist in fertilizer plants and equipment

THE A. J. SACKETT & SONS CO. of Baltimore, designer and builder of processes and equipment for the fertilizer industry, gives rein to its imagination when announcing construction of a new plant. A large sign on the construction site tells passers-by: "A new plant is born, by The A. J. Sackett & Sons Co." To enhance the effect, it shows a stork carrying a spanking new plant tenderly nestled in a diaper.

Since 1897, when Sackett itself was born, a great many of those signs have appeared, particularly in the East, South, and Midwest. Among the firms Sackett has served: Indiana Farm Bureau Cooperative Association, Fertilizer Manufacturing Cooperative, Davison Chemical, F. S. Royster Guano, Canadian Industries, Ltd., Cooperative Fertilizer Service, Inc., and many others.

Two sons of founder A. J. Sackett, Sr., now run the company. A. J. (Joe) Sackett, Jr., a mechanical engineer, is president. His younger brother, Walter J., is vice president. Joe generally sticks close to home base, turning out plans from his drawing board, and taking care of his presidential duties. Walter, on the other hand, while he does handle advertising and some general administration, is more of a traveling salesman. He is often on the road in the interests of his clients.

Each has his own duties, as he has since the two joined their father's business. Each respects the other's authority, avoids trespassing on the other's ground. As a result, says Walter, the Sackett firm functions with a minimum of red tape. Both are modest about what they have done for the company, but both like to talk about "Dad" and what he did.

He did a great deal. A. J. Sackett, fortified with only four years of grammar school education, had become a millwright early in life. He also worked in a construction crew for the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and in a Cincinnati brewery. In 1887, at 26, Sackett went with Walker & Elliot of Wilmington, Del., among the pioneers in the mechanization of fertilizer plants.

The President . . .

A. J. Sackett, Jr.

Modernize to Cut Costs

Doubtless this job influenced his future, for 10 years later he started up his own company. A small room furnished with rented lathes and other equipment served as the shop. He later moved to the Canton district of Baltimore, where the present factory stands.

Sackett incorporated the firm in 1929, a few years after his sons joined him. Son Joe stepped into company administration as vice president in 1924. Walter followed in 1926, as secretary-treasurer. Both had worked at the plant as boys, though, so they knew the company business well when they became officers.

When the elder Sackett died in 1944, he left much behind—a respected name in the design and fabricating business, a healthy company, and something like 200 patents. His first patent, by the way, came when he was 19 years of age. It covered a disc harrow.

The Sackett firm, a closed corporation, works with a client to whatever extent the client desires. If he wants a complete, packaged deal—from plans and cost estimates to machinery and plant construction—he can get it from Sackett. Or he can get any part of it—just equipment, for instance.

Perhaps of all Sackett equipment, the Sackett pulverizer is best known. It has become virtually a byword in the fertilizer industry. But a rather new item, and fast catching on, is its Star granulator, said to give a high percentage of product recovery, requiring only a small amount of fines to be reprocessed. Albert Spillman, who as manager of Fertilizer Manufacturing Cooperative handled major plant evaluation of the Star, has described it as an "outstanding, revolutionary contribution" to fertilizer technology. Oddly enough, it was Walter Sackett, with no formal engineering training, who got the bright idea for the Star. He received a patent on it in February.

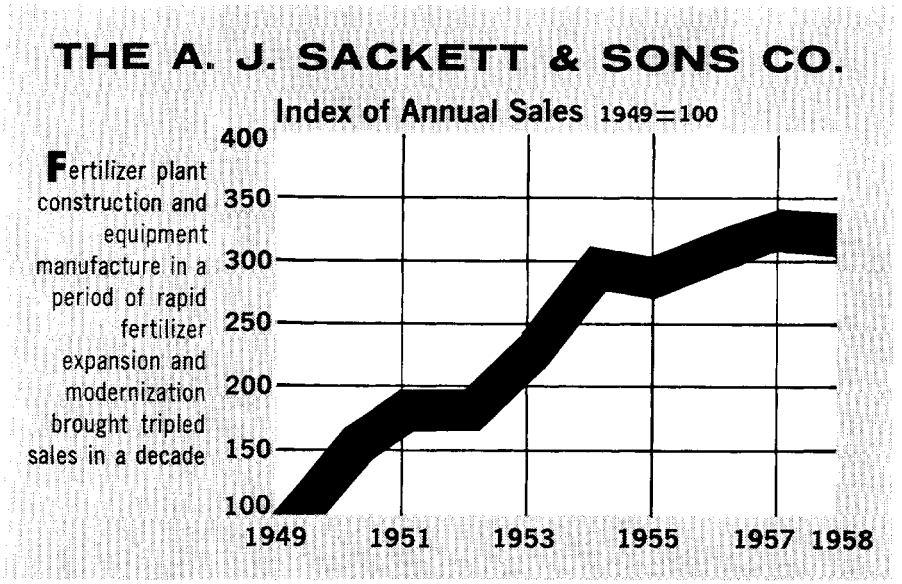
Sackett's machinery and other equipment items run the alphabetic gamut from A to W, starting with aerators, ending with weigh feeders. Its processes include compounding and blending, granulating, ammoniating, acidulating, extracting, milling and classifying, and drying and cooling.

Some Nonfertilizer Clients

A. J. Sackett formed his company to serve the fertilizer trade exclusively. But when word of its quality workmanship spread about, other industries wanted Sackett equipment. So for the roughly 1% of the time when Sackett is not on a fertilizer project, it turns out items such as those it made for two nuclear reactor installations located in Rifle, Colo.

Sackett usually carries about five or six clients on the books at one time, enough to keep everybody hopping. One of the bigger present jobs: a superphosphate conversion program at Davison's Curtis Bay plant.

Among other recent Sackett-built units are three Canadian ones for Canadian Industries, Ltd., and one in Russellville, Ky., for Cooperative Fertilizer Service, Inc. A British representative of Imperial Chemical Industries who visited the Russellville plant was amazed to learn that it took only six months to build. Noting that a modern plant now stood on what had



been a field, he quipped, in typical British accent, "From grass to granules in six months."

Sackett confines all its manufacturing to Baltimore, where it employs about 50 people and is now expanding its fabricating and warehouse space by about 10,000 square feet. The plant runs 17 hours a day. As a matter of Sackett policy, servicing of equipment it has sold is considered just as important as selling it in the first place. Not too long ago, it was called in to service a piece of equipment it had made in 1912.

Sackett's biggest growth came in the period from 1939 to 1951, paralleling major growth in the fertilizer industry. During this era, the Midwest, which had shunned large fertilizer use, found that fertilizer could revitalize even its soils. For many years those soils had been so rich and productive that plant food was almost unheard of. The new market brought fertilizer plants to the Midwest, and with them Sackett equipment and know-how.

As the Sackett brothers see things today, the fertilizer industry must modernize to cope with production costs. And the trend toward modernization is strong, they say. Granulation, of course, is here to stay, as more and more convert to a granular product. This will by no means hurt the Star granulator's chances for success.

The Satisfied Customer

Nor will the prospects of the company as a whole be hurt by the compliments and testimonials of satisfied customers. One client Sackett will long remember was a general superintendent of F. S. Royster Guano, who upon retiring wrote to Walter Sackett: "In all the years of my association with you, I have found them to be most pleasant, and I certainly wish you continued pleasant relations with those who will handle the company's business with you after my departure."

Statements like this, Sackett figures, are invaluable. They make worth while all the extra care and effort needed to put out a quality product, whether mental or material.