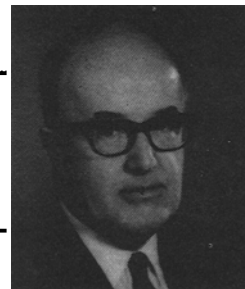

Profile

FRANK NORRIS



At the retirement luncheon for former AOCS President Frank Norris at Kraft Inc. last July, master of ceremonies Dr. Tom Applewhite described Norris humorously as "the son of an Armenian violinist and a gypsy opera singer."

Not true, but Frank makes no secret of his love for music or that his youthful ambition was to be a concert violinist. During a 40-year career in fats and oils, he's made time for music and now expects to be able to find a little more. Mind you, he already has made one consulting trip to North Africa, has been busy finishing up work as a co-author for the new edition of Bailey's Industrial Fats and Oils, and has been asked to write material for another book.

Neither Frank's father, a salesman in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, nor his mother had a musical background or avocation. But Frank does remember a family friend, an architect, who encouraged the youth to read classic literature—Shakespeare and Dickens among others, which may have begun his exposure to the humanities. This may also explain his later interests in looking outside of chemistry at times. He has worked in the commercial end of oil mills, feeds, and fertilizers, as well as being an R & D personnel manager and supervisor of such diverse activities as a research library and research kitchen.

As a teen-ager in the early 1930s, he realized that while it was fun to play violin in the high school orchestra, there wasn't much of a financial future. He decided biochemistry offered a chance to earn a good living.

Frank found little time to practice or play as an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburgh, but did play in the university orchestra as a doctoral student. His senior professor, Dr. C.G. King, initially assigned him the task of isolating a labile Vitamin C oxidation product, but after six months of fruitless work ("I don't think it's been done yet," he notes), Frank asked for a problem in synthetic fats, thus entering his eventual career field.

A fellow musician at the University of Pittsburgh was Herb Longenecker, now president emeritus at Tulane University. Dr. Longenecker, to Norris' astonishment, had the audacity to telephone Benny Goodman, playing in Pittsburgh one day, to invite the famed "King of Swing" to come play with the Pittsburgh academic group. To Frank's even greater astonishment, Goodman accepted, showed up at 11 p.m. after finishing his paid concert, and played with the amateurs until 1 or 2 a.m.

After receiving his doctorate in 1939, Frank did two years of postdoctoral work on unsaturated fatty acids at the University of Minnesota under Dr. George Burr. As a result of a seminar Frank conducted, General Mills offered him a job in 1941 in exploratory fat research. A major project during the World War II years was to find a way to stabilize lard for safe shipment across the oceans. It was in 1942 that he became a member of the American Oil Chemists' Society. "I wasn't particularly active then," he recalls.

In 1944, Frank joined Swift & Co. in Chicago, moving to the city's South Side. After unsuccessfully experimenting with athletic hobbies as a way to keep fit, he listened to his wife, Peg, who suggested he try getting active in music again. He auditioned for the South Side Symphony Orchestra and became a first violinist.

Frank had first met the former Margaret Smith when his father took Frank's tricycle to Peg's dad for repairs. "I was marked for a long time," Frank says jokingly. The two were wed in Pittsburgh on Aug. 5, 1939. While Peg plays the piano Frank says they learned a long time ago not to try to play duets. But he fully credits her with redirecting him into music more than three decades ago in Chicago, even if she now and then complains about the time he spends at the task.

"It seems like most amateur musicians are technical people," Frank said. "I've known a patent lawyer, a chemical engineer, an electronic specialist,"

Norris has found, that music indeed provides a relaxing avocation with strenuous enough demands to keep him physically fit.

A subsequent residential shift to La Grange, West of Chicago, brought a transfer to the West Suburban Symphony Orchestra. When he moved to northern Glenview upon joining Kraft, he became a member of his present organization, the Northwest Symphony Orchestra.

It was at Swift that Frank became a colleague of the late Karl Mattil. Norris was doing oil mill research for Swift; Karl did refinery research. Because much of their work was routine or proprietary or both, the two decided to collaborate on academic-type research that might provide topics for publications. They finally determined upon a topic and work began; Saturdays and evenings went into the project until it appeared the material did show promise. Two papers were published. Then the pair decided they better check to make absolutely sure the work had no commercial application. Ooops! Their work led directly to a greatly improved shortening project, Swift'ning.

Frank also became gradually immersed in AOCS while at Swift, initially through involvement with the North Central Section. He became a section member in 1961, then held other offices en route to being elected section president for 1968-69, the year before he served as an at-large member of the parent AOCS Governing Board. He was elected AOCS treasurer for 1970-71, then vice-president for 1972-73, serving as president in 1973-74. He was AOCS president during the 1974 meeting in Mexico City, the first time AOCS held a foreign meeting with most of the arrangements being made via long distance. The success of that meeting gave the organization some confidence when it scheduled its first world conference for 1976 in Amsterdam.

His term as AOCS treasurer became known to other members of the Northwest Symphony who selected Frank when a new orchestra treasurer was needed.

"Well, being treasurer of AOCS is one thing — the accounting people there keep all the records, write the checks and provide reports on what's being done," Frank says. "It is an entirely different thing to be treasurer of an amateur orchestra.

"I keep the books, rent the halls, pay the bills. During the intermission, while the others are resting, I'm busy writing checks to the guest artists, for equipment rental and the rest."

When the conductor is considering adding a new composition for a concert, his glances turn toward Frank to

see if the treasury can afford renting the music and paying the performance fee for a 60-piece orchestra. If a harpist is needed for a concert, Frank has to find the funds.

"It costs \$375 to rent a piano for one night," he exclaims. "That includes delivery, set-up and tuning,"

The Northwest Symphony plays four concerts a year. Rehearsals are once a week for two hours. On concert day, there may be four hours of rehearsal before the two-hour concert.

Income is derived from a number of sources. There are receipts from the concerts; there are sustaining members who donate funds, and occasionally there are grants to be sought (but seldom received).

If writing, consulting and music fail to keep Frank and Peg occupied, there are two grandsons and a granddaughter in nearby Western Springs who occasionally need baby-sitting. Has their son, Jim, picked up a love for music from his violin-playing father and piano-playing mother?

"We gave him a violin when he was 7 years old and let him know if he ever wanted to study, just to let us know, but we didn't pressure him," Frank says. "When he became 18, we gave up, pulled the violin out from under his bed and hung it on the wall for decoration."

Some of Frank's favorite moments are when guest artists from organizations such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra appear with the amateur group. "There is a specific precedence in seating order in an orchestra, with the seat next to the audience holding more prestige," he says. "It's quite a thrill when one of these fellows comes to play with us and when you offer him the outside seat, he insists that you keep it."

Many AOCs folks would say that Frank Norris has well earned his outside chair. ●

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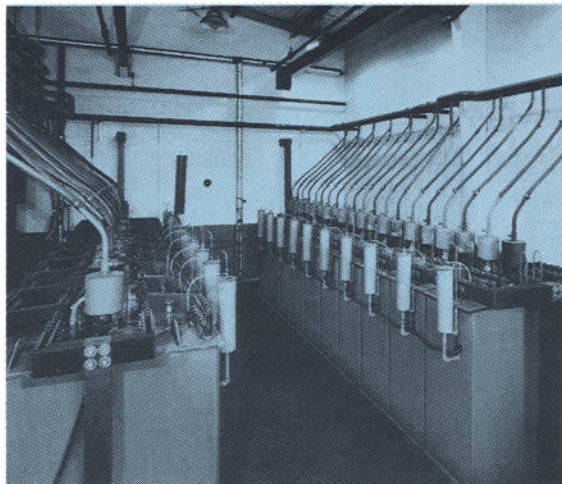
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