

The Independent Laboratory

THE relation of the commercial laboratory to laboratories maintained by industry can be very simply defined as both parallel and analogous to the relation of the independent legal firm to the legal staff of a company. The company furnishes its requirements for professional service with its salaried employees up to a point; beyond that point outside professional services are preferable. This is best established by illustrations.

In the purchase of oils, cottonseed, and many other materials the price is based on oil content, protein content, free fatty acid, etc. The seller in many cases would be unwilling to have the buyer make the analysis and pay on the basis of this analysis. The buyer would be equally averse to having the seller determine the quality of the product being sold. Large commercial laboratories are devoted almost entirely to the furnishing of data in response to such needs.



F. D. Snell

Firms abroad are making large purchases of chemical materials in the United States. The purchase contracts usually call for the chemical to be sampled at the point of shipment by a specific commercial laboratory and certified to be of the quality specified. Mistakes can occur, such as a shipment of caustic soda grossly contaminated with sodium chloride, or a shipment of an organic chemical which contained none of the material specified. The material is sampled at the dock under the control of the laboratory.

Management of a company recognizes the need for research at a given stage in their development. The company is still small. They do not feel able to invest an initial \$10,000 or much more in a research laboratory and equipment. They retain the services of a commercial laboratory for one year or five or 10 years before installation of their own research laboratory is justified. Thereafter the commercial laboratory often serves as advisors for a period of years. An association runs a cooperative program for its membership. It can install a research laboratory. More commonly the funds available for such research are allocated to a commercial laboratory. An outstanding example is the glycerine program which has been conducted by a commercial laboratory for at least two decades. But there are many others less well-known.

A large company has no bacteriological department and is not sure that it needs one. A new product which they are bringing out requires bacteriological research and control. A commercial laboratory conducts that for six months or several years. If the field grows with that company, it then installs a bacteriological laboratory. If it does not grow—perhaps the product is abandoned—they have not invested a substantial sum in a type of laboratory which they no longer need and made the concomitant investment in fitting into their organization personnel which will now have to be released.

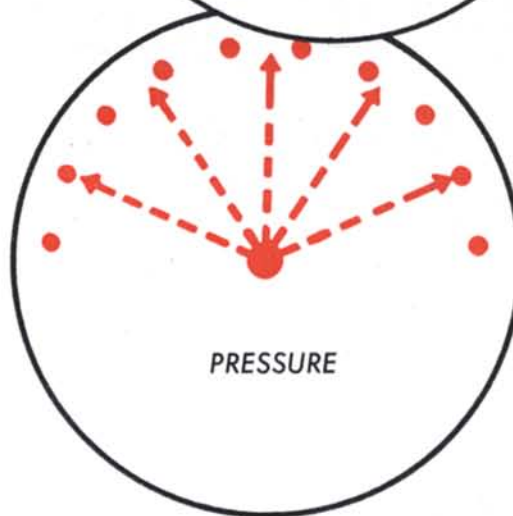
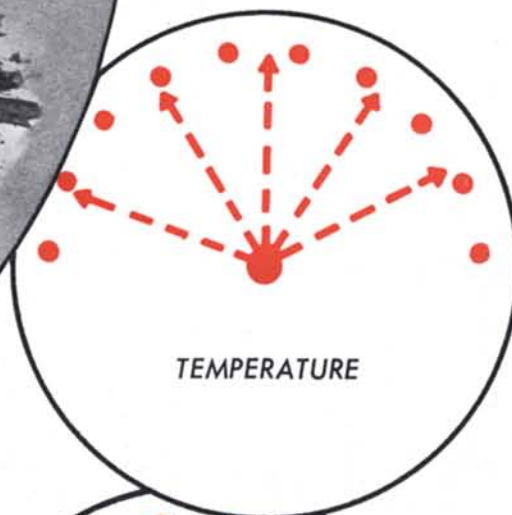
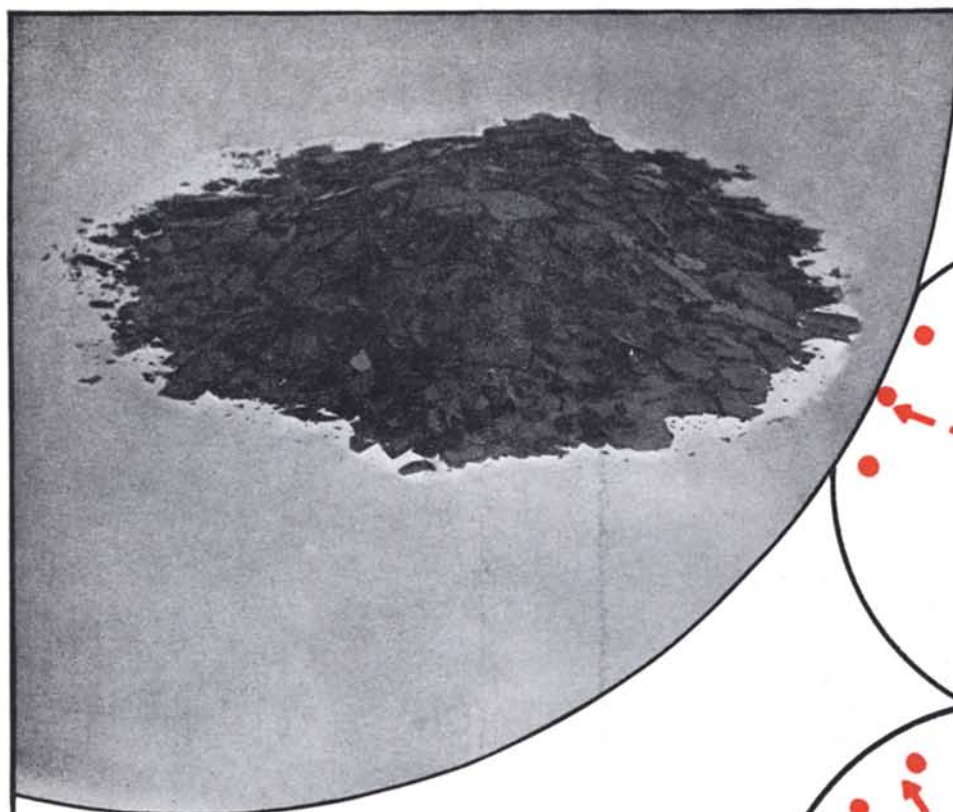
A company, large or small, needs occasional use of specialized equipment. The use is not sufficient to justify the space and investment to own the equipment and training personnel to operate it. Samples are sent out. The General Electric Company has Norma-Hoffman bomb tests on greases done by a commercial laboratory.

A company with both control and research laboratories has a temporary overload. Rather than to equip for short-term use, such work is sent out. A company has a knotty problem which its personnel have not the experience to solve. It is sent to a commercial laboratory known to have specialized knowledge in the field. A company requires ideas for guidance and amplification of its research program. It calls in a mature person from a commercial laboratory to attend its research conferences. There are many other specialized cases.

REFERENCE has been made to parallelism between the chemical and legal professions. At the next stage they approach each other very closely. Litigation arises, as it will. Perhaps the matter is a claim for product liability, perhaps it relates to the cause of a fire or explosion, perhaps it is concerned with the allegation either that the company is infringing a patent or a claim that a competitor is infringing one of theirs. It is the almost universal practice in such cases to use a commercial laboratory because of its dissociation from the management of the company. The outside laboratory is remote enough from the problem to get a more disinterested point of view. Courts give more weight to results from the commercial laboratory.

This is not the place for detailed discussion of costs. The commercial laboratory is managed and operated with the highest efficiency of which its owners are capable. In a competitive field it must render reasonably prompt service and be competitive in price. So taking it by and large, the services of the commercial laboratory cost no more for results obtained than to procure the same service inside an organization. Many companies have recognized that. Some companies have even control checks on company products done by a commercial laboratory at no greater cost than it would involve if they were to do them themselves and always with the possibility that if controversy arises, they are then prepared with an independent report. For these reasons and others some 1,500-2,500 laboratories scattered throughout this country range in staff from one to multihundred in personnel to perform an essential and useful function.

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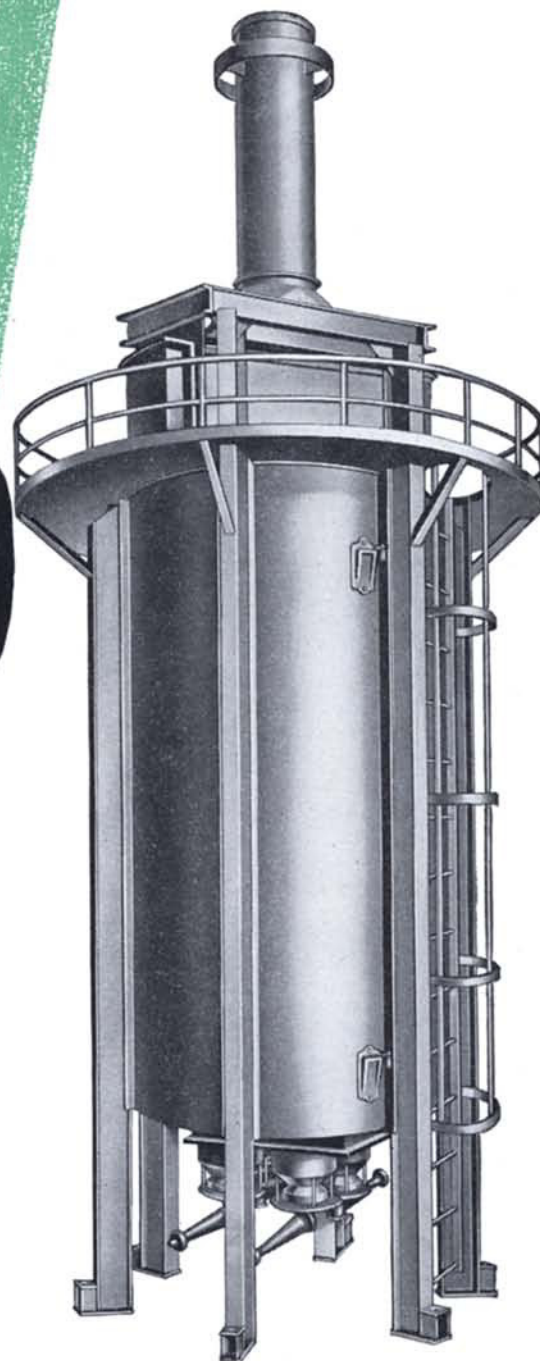
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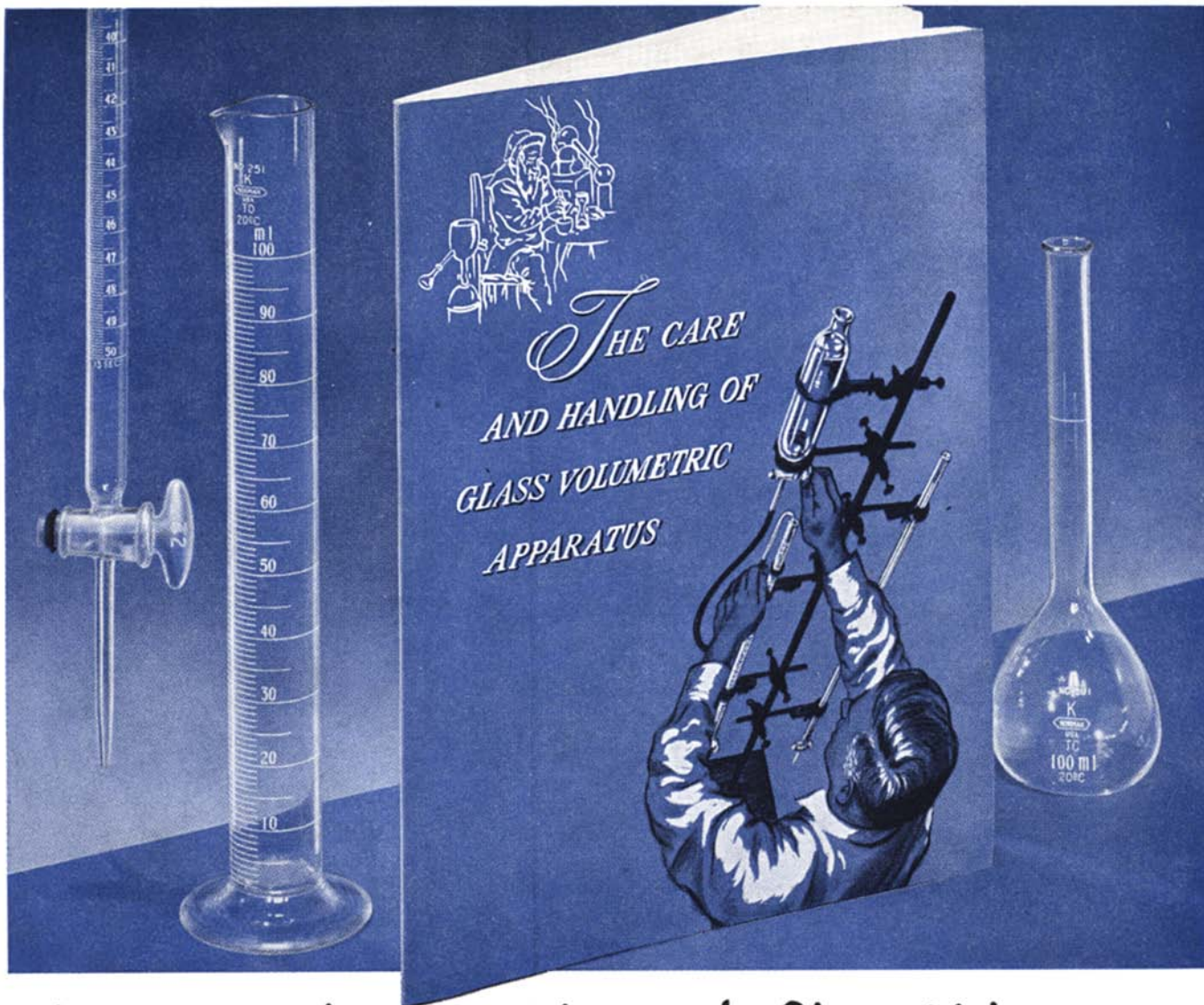
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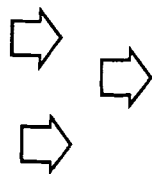
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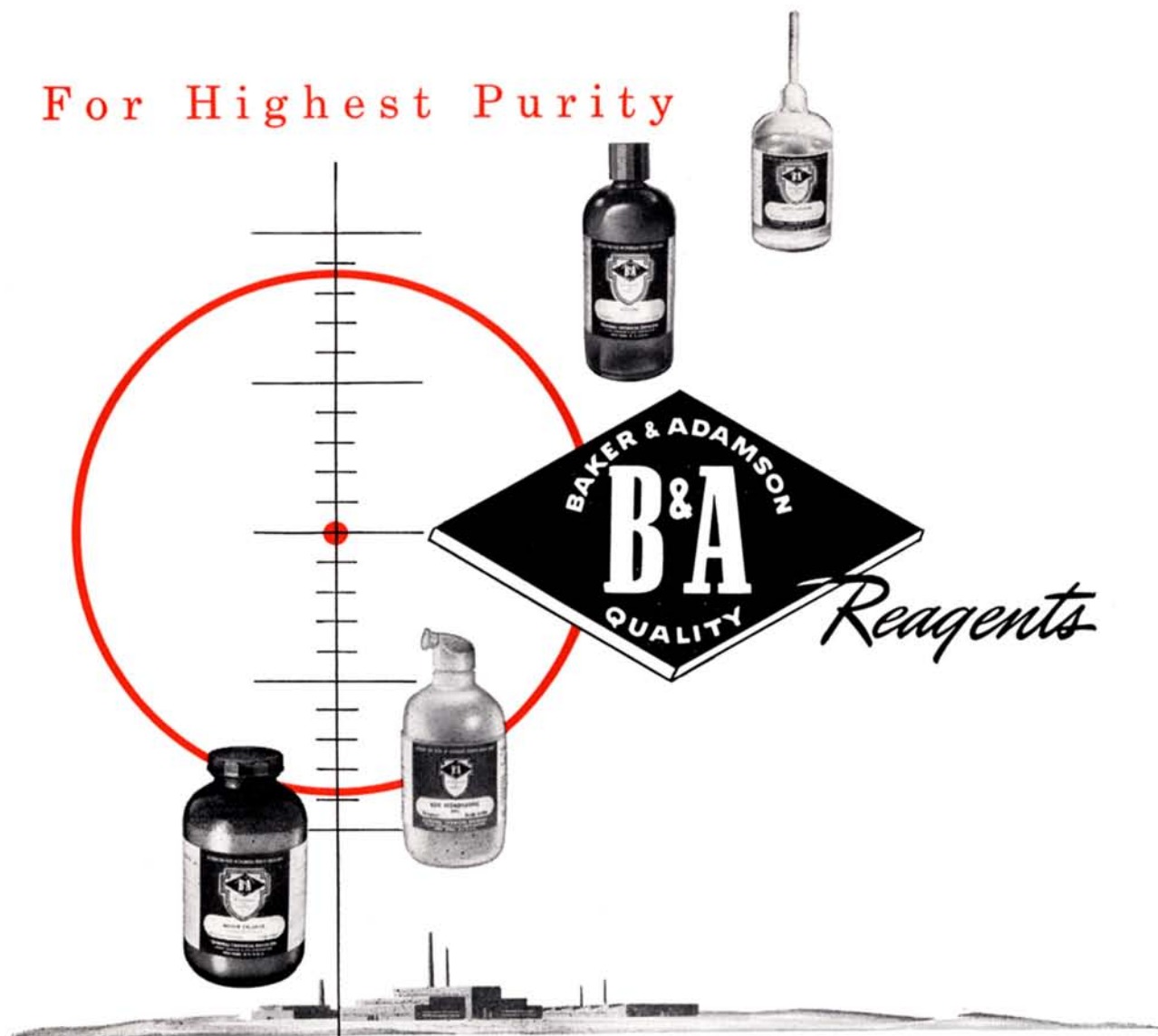
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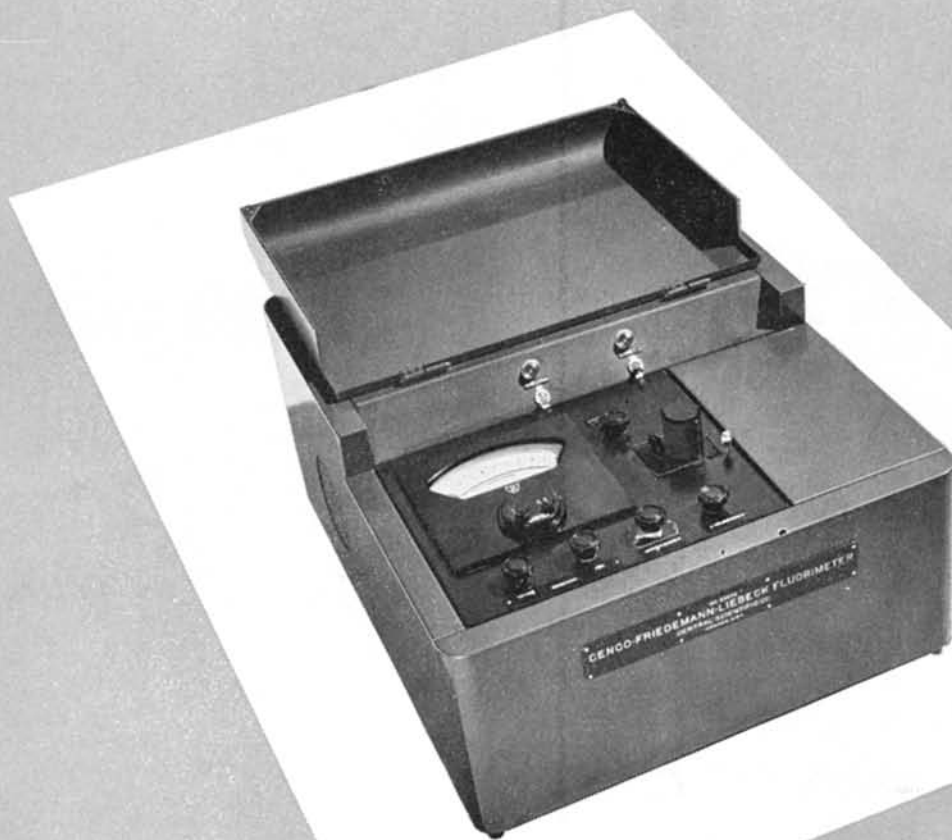
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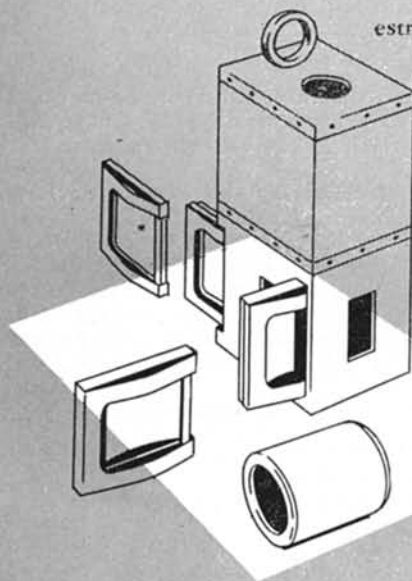
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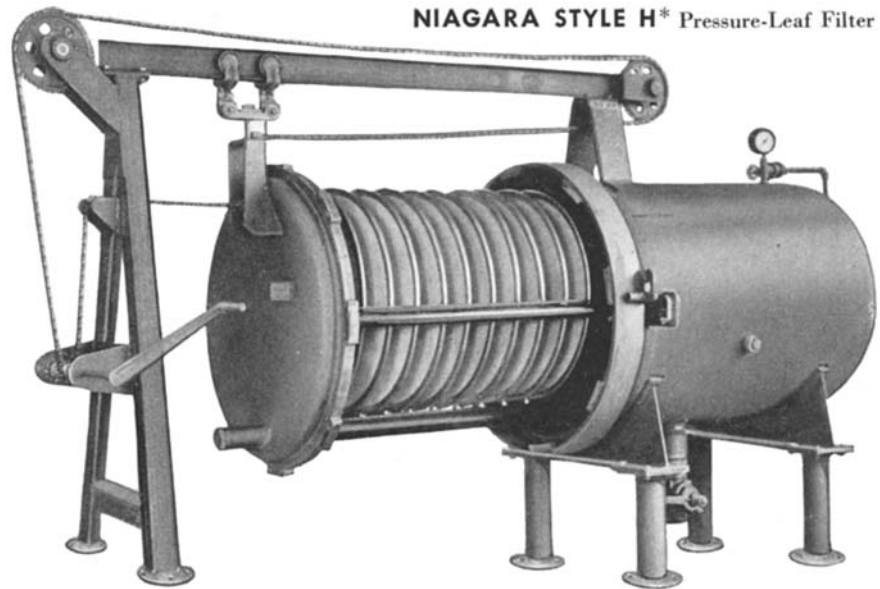
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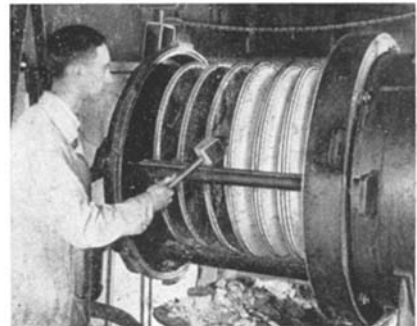
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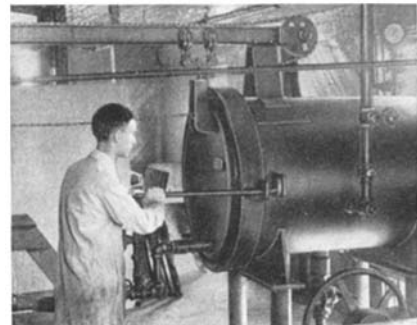
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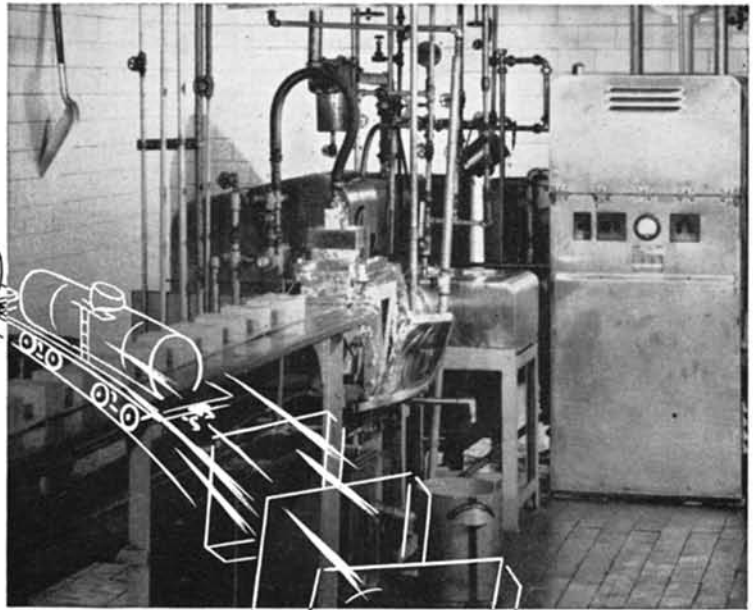
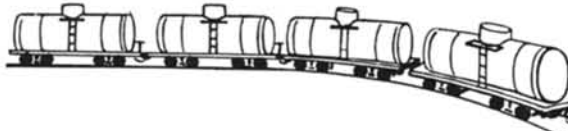
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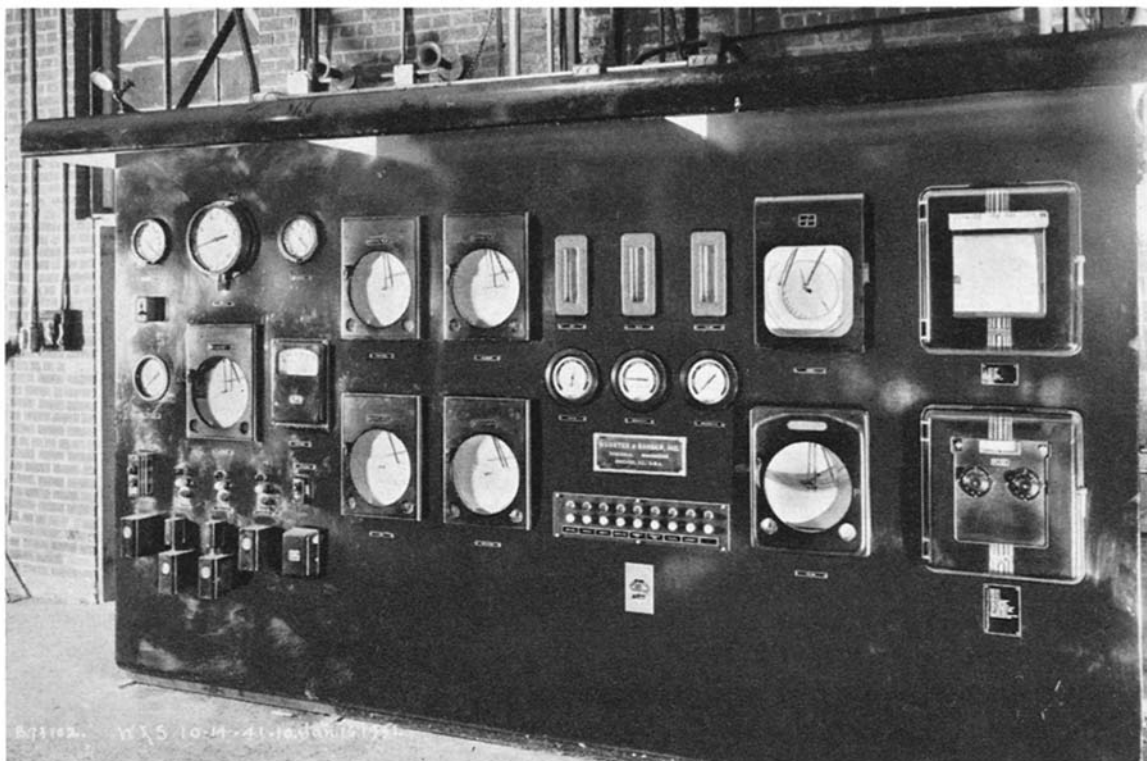
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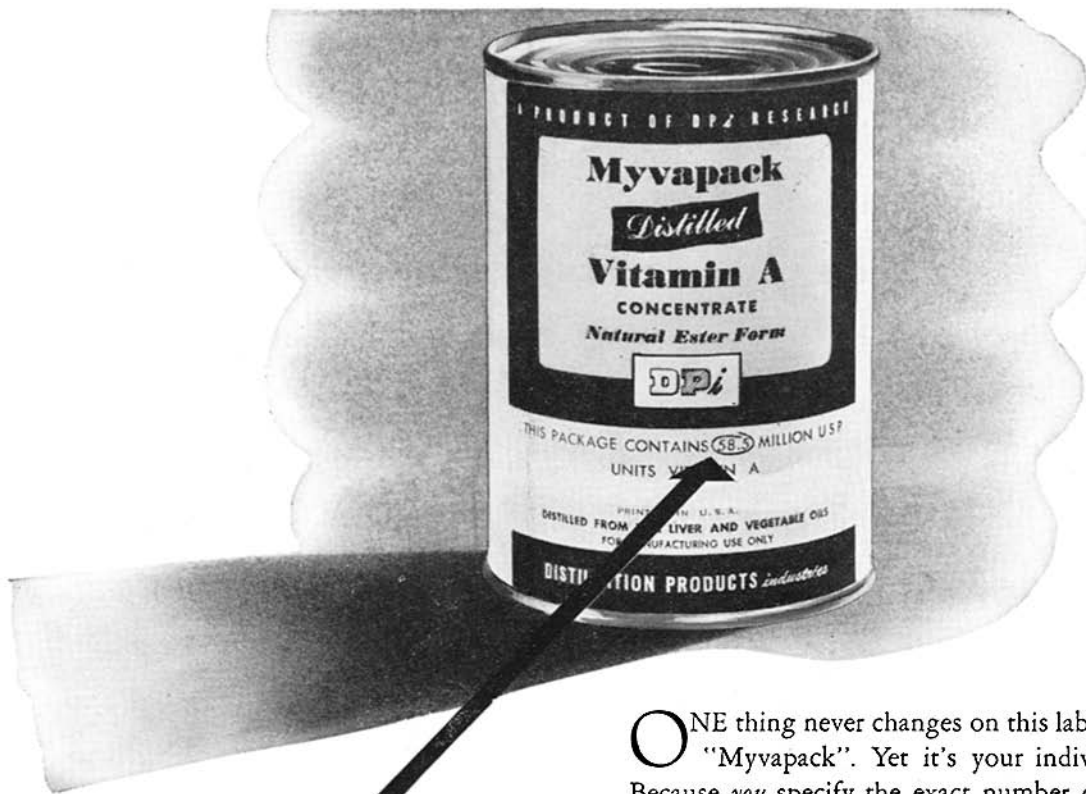
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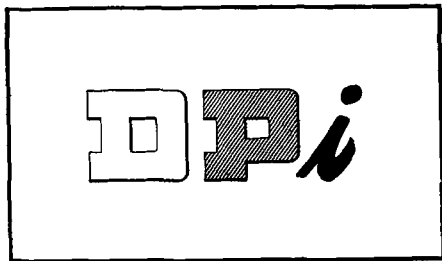
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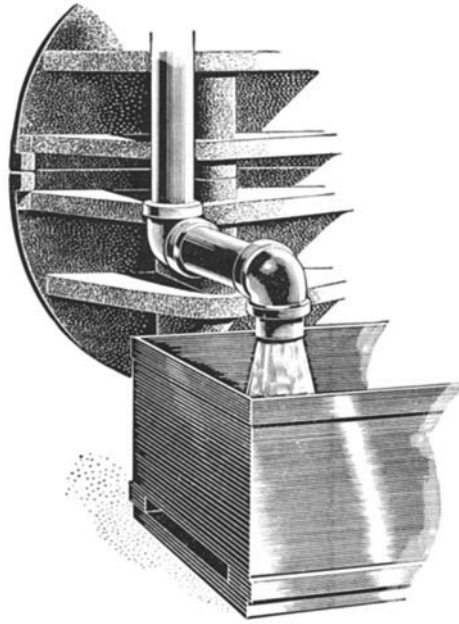
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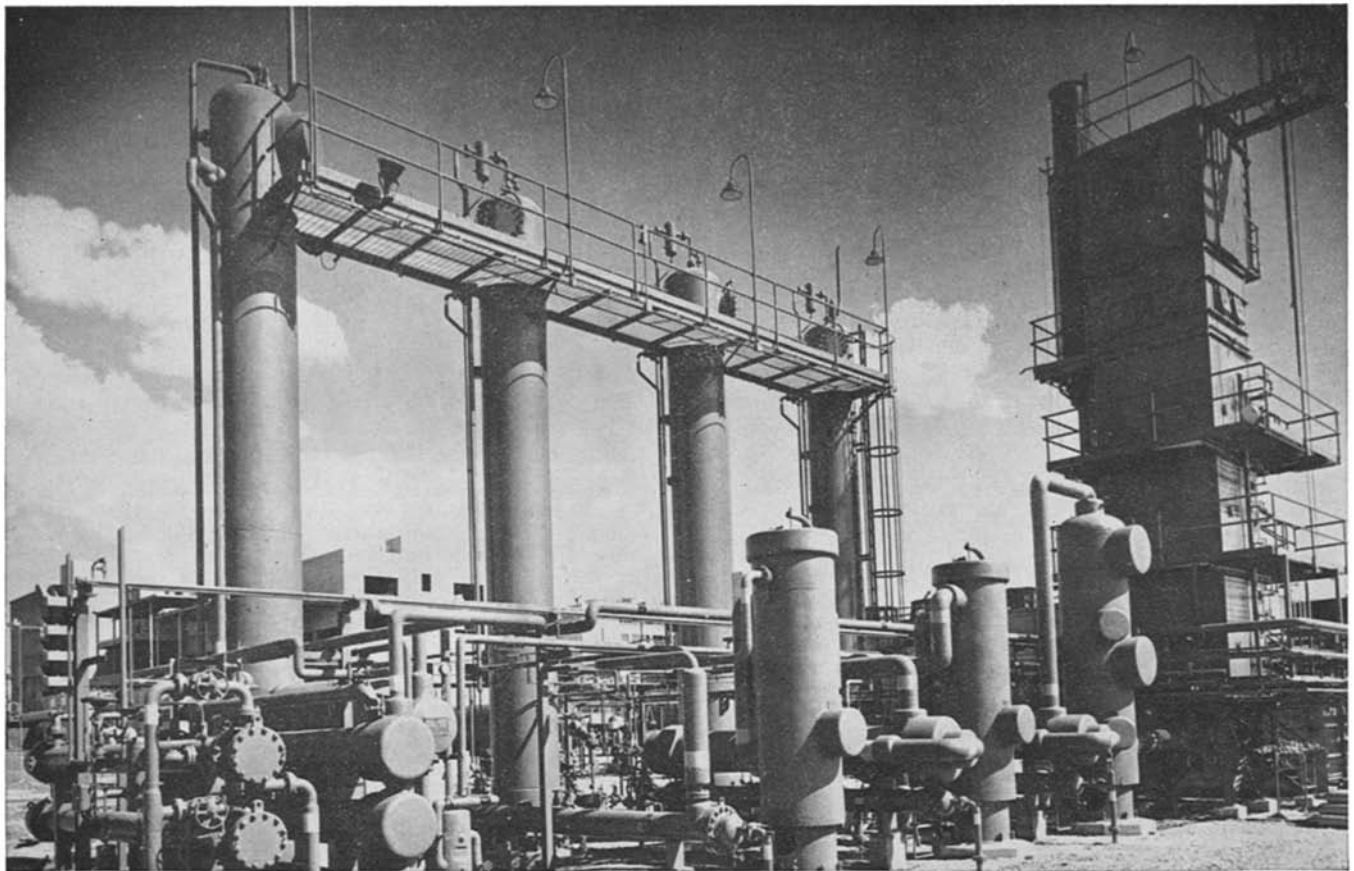
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