

"Fitch, 75, Scoffs at Luck As Aid to Success in Life," January 28, 1945

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Picture Caption: Fred W. Fitch at his desk on his seventy-fifth birthday.

Fred W. Fitch leaned back in his chair on his seventy-fifth birthday anniversary Saturday and said that luck is not is not a factor in business success.

A man who rose in the American tradition for a barber with a formula for hair restorer to a millionaire toiletries manufacturer, Fitch declared:

"There isn't any luck that enters into anything, unless it's poker or shooting dice, maybe. There is no luck to merchandising. You have to have a product that people want and will repeat, or buy again."

Not Luck--Work

"There is no luck in going out and working from early in the morning to long after dinner. That is not luck, it's work."

College education? Fitch, once said that college teaches a man to be lazy, not to make money, save it or deal with people. HE HASN'T CHANGED HIS MIND.

He remembers when he was a barefoot lad with holes in his pants. A neighbor boy whose parents sent him to college wound up behind a broom for the Des Moines street cleaning department, where Fitch met him one day four years ago.

But Fitch, whose formal education stopped at the eighth grade in the Boone, Ia., schools, gave \$100,000 to Drake university last fall for a new pharmacy building "because you can't get along without pharmacists."

He once aspired to college. One of a family of 12, he went to work when he was 8, for Keith Beck, farmer seven miles west of Ogden, Ia. He saved his money and learned the barber trade to work his way through medical school and become a doctor, like his father, Lucius Henry Carey Fitch, an early pioneer.

Needed Diploma

"When I got to Iowa City with my barber tools," he related, "I found you had to have a high school diploma or teaching certificate."

So he went to Madrid, Ia. and barbered, and worked out his formulas with a Dr. Beckbill, whose first name he does not recall, but whose whereabouts he would like to learn.

"He helped work out the original formulas," he said, "and I think I owe him something."

The first product was "Ideal Hair Grower and Dandruff Cure," sold in the individually-blown bottles of the time.

"It would not grow hair on all bald heads, so the first part of the name was dropped," he explained, "but it grew hair on many a bald head."

41 Products.

Substantially the same product is on the market today, and there are more than 40 other Fitch toiletries made at plants at Des Moines, Los Angeles, Cal., and Bayonne, N.J.

Fitch moved to Des Moines in 1917. He started "real advertising" in the twenties, but even before that, when marketing was mostly through barber shops rather than drug counters, there were enough Fitch signs on barber-shop mirrors to make one every five feet from New York, N.Y., to San Francisco, Cal.

Sponsors Broadcast.

Fitch advertisements in newspapers and magazines are now common. In 1928, he became the first Iowa manufacturer to sponsor a national radio broadcast. The 30-minute "Fitch Bandwagon" program on Sunday evenings is now heard by millions, and costs the company \$17,000 a week.

Asked if it paid, he said "something paid--we've built quite a business." Wartime controls on alcohol have cut Fitch production about half, but the business is still in the millions of dollars annually.

At 75, Fitch is bald in the temples, but still sports a good crop of hair, which has turned silver. His color is good, and he says he is feeling fine. He did some hunting last fall, but gave up golf seven years ago.

From a living standpoint, he picks the first 25 years, rather than his second or third quarter-century.

"Those were the carefree days, the days of good times," he recalled. "Now I'm busy all the time, and I enjoy it in a way, but I am at the office every day. I would like to have quit before this, but there is no place to stop."

He enjoyed life most as a boy on the farm. In later years his greatest pleasure was in his 560-acre farm north of the city, where he specialized in dairying before the government took over the ground for the Des Moines ordinance plant.

"Watching things grow is a real pleasure for me," Fitch said. "Business is always the same old grind."

Asked about his many trips to court, he conceded you have to fight in business as well as work. But he forgives, too.

A former vice-president who left, Fitch charged in court, with secret Fitch formulas, went broke in a competitive venture, and is now in New York City as a Fitch salesman.

Fitch started his usual day at 8 a.m. Saturday. He likes an egg and bacon, or pancakes, for breakfast. It's been milk the last decade instead of coffee, which didn't agree with him.

He has lunch at the Des Moines club or Wakonda. He doesn't work nights any more, and tries to leave the office by 4 p.m.

Likes Card Games.

In the evening, he likes a highball or two, and a game of pitch or bridge before going to bed at 8:30 or 9.

His oldest son, Gail is at his desk as advertising manager again after honorable discharge from the army. He was a major, stationed at Macon, Ga. Maj. Lucius Fitch is in New Guinea. Two daughters, Mrs. Lois Sandahl and Mrs. Mildred Young, are in Des Moines.

Fitch has nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild.