DECONSTRUCTING DUPONT DISCOURSE:
HOW STORYTELLING SHAPED THE IDENTITY AND REPUTATION
OF AN AMERICAN ENTERPRISE

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, as we look to the next chapter in our own story, and to my grandmothers, virtuosos of complex and compelling storytelling. For Bradley, the greatest story listener I have ever known, and without whom I could not have finished this manuscript. For my dear Granny, Mary Wade, whose own academic journey has been a lifelong one, and whose interest in my research and shared stories of her own path refreshed in my mind the value of higher education. And for my beloved Nanny, Marie Marrone, though she passed shortly after I completed my oral exam, was the most entertaining storyteller I have ever known. She is alive in the work that follows, and will live on in all the stories I have yet to tell.
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NOMENCLATURE

The establishment of powder mills in Wilmington in 1802 marked the start of
the E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, but it was not until nearly a century later,
in 1899, that the organization was incorporated under the same name. Named for its
founder, Éleuthère Irénée du Pont, the company in its early days took the familial
spelling of “du Pont,” as evidenced by a variety of internal and external company
correspondence, including public relations materials. In a memo dated April 27, 1922,
from then-president Irénée du Pont to all department heads, the editorial guidelines
regarding the spelling of the company name were expounded:

1. First word of a sentence is always a capital.

2. First word of a title is always a capital.

3. An abbreviation of, or excerpt from, a title is spelled as it appears in
   the title, except as provided in 1 and 2 above.

4. Certain classes of type are all capitals.

5. Except as provide in 1, 2, 3 and 4 above, the “d” of “du Pont” and of
   “de Nemours” is always a small letter when referring to E. I. du Pont de
   Nemours & Company and affiliated companies (“Uniform Spelling”).

As early as the 1930s, however, usage of the capital “D” for the particle *du*
appears to have slipped into regular practice and through the 1960s, the company
appears to have used both “du Pont” and “Du Pont” (changing to a capital “D” for the
particle *du*) in its documents. Furthermore, spelling outside the company (by
journalists, authors, etc.) does not always follow company editorial guidelines. In 1993, company documents alter nearly all self-references to “DuPont;”¹ all company materials, as well as external public media as of the time of this publication, take the same spelling convention. Therefore, unless a directly quoted source or family name calls for use following one of the historical spelling conventions, all references to the company will herein be made as “DuPont” or “the company.”

¹ For example, the DuPont Magazine officially changed the title spelling from Du Pont Magazine in its January/February 1993 issue to DuPont Magazine in its March/April 1993 issue (see all issues in HDA, Item location: f HD9651.9 D94A15).
ABSTRACT

Given increasing competition and decreasing consumer attention spans, businesses must find creative and compelling ways to position their brands and foster connections with stakeholders. Traditional modes of corporate communication designed with the intent to inform and sell specific products have shifted to broader messaging that reflects the institution as a whole. In particular, organizations are using storytelling as a powerful tool to reinforce corporate identity and manage reputation. This dissertation contributes to scholarship on organizational storytelling by examining the historical and current narrative practices of E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company (DuPont). DuPont has used storytelling for over two centuries to communicate the business of science and engage with its stakeholders in meaningful ways. The stories told by the company, as well as DuPont’s approaches to creating corporate narratives, have grown organically and directly reflect the marketplace, social climate, economics, politics, and technology of the day. This project traces those storytelling activities over time and through multiple media and contexts using a multidisciplinary and intertextual approach. To frame DuPont’s storytelling processes, each chapter is based on stories crafted during critical inflection points, or major changes in the company’s corporate strategy. A qualitative analysis using extensive archival resources, informed by theoretical contexts from the disciplines of
professional writing, organization studies, and corporate communication, highlights the complex relationship between narratives inside and outside the organization. The analysis builds on previous scholarship, which positions organizations as storytelling entities that use narrative to create and maintain a corporate brand, identity, and reputation to connect with stakeholders. Ultimately, I identify science, invention, performance, and innovation as the cornerstones of DuPont’s corporate story. This project also reveals the important and little-explored use of storytelling through the corporate magazine. The findings further illustrate how storytelling can move beyond a mode of connecting with stakeholders. In fact, storytelling can shape business approaches to communications and public relations strategy, and be especially useful in counteracting and overcoming negative stakeholder perceptions. Finally, this dissertation suggests that contemporary storytelling is most compelling and effective when it builds consistently from an authentic foundation in historical narratives and past performance.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“History is a more reliable guide than faith.”
— DuPont Magazine, August 1914 (6)

As contemporary organizations look to build their brands, advance their reputations, and engage stakeholders, they are increasingly turning to storytelling as an effective means of communication. From an industry and marketing perspective, the benefits of deploying storytelling for these purposes are not new, and practitioners have long lauded the story as a mode for companies to create an emotional connection with consumers, to gain the trust of stakeholders, and to solidify their image in the marketplace. And in today’s world of decreasing consumer attention spans, the use of storytelling is rapidly increasing in corporate communications activities as an effective means for connecting with audiences via emotion. For good reason, then, attention to storytelling in academic scholarship, and particularly in business (Forman 3), is growing. Professional writing scholars Jane M. Perkins and Nancy Blyler predicted in 1999 that in ten years, “a burgeoning of interest in narrative” would exist in their

2 A recent study by the National Center for Biotechnology Information at the U.S. National Library of Medicine found that the average human attention span fell 6.7 percent between 2000 and 2013. At eight seconds, it suggests that the human attention span is one second less than that of a goldfish (Brenner). Industry strategists and brand practitioners heeding this information suggest that storytelling is an effective means of capturing people’s limited capacity for attention (articles have since appeared in Time, USA Today, NY Daily News, and a multitude of other print and digital outlets).
discipline (28), while narratologist David Herman notes, “The past several decades have in fact witnessed an explosion of interest in narrative, with this multifaceted object of inquiry becoming a central concern in a wide range of disciplines and contexts” (4). Other scholars suggest the analysis of narratives and stories in organizational research has become “an especially popular approach to the study of discourse among critical and postmodern scholars” (Grant, et al. 5).

In particular, disciplines such as English narrative studies, organization studies, and corporate communication consider the ways in which institutions communicate and create messaging and examine the agency of stories created by employees. Such research focuses on how stories used in corporate messaging motivate the actions of external stakeholders, and how consumers and stakeholders interpret those messages. Through case studies of storytelling companies, scholars point to the centrality of story in the strategic branding, identity, and reputation building of an organization, ultimately concluding that messaging is the result of social interactions and communication exchanges among individuals within organizational contexts.

Through this dissertation, I respond to this scholarship on organizational storytelling by examining historical and current narrative practices in one institution through an intertextual lens. I aim to contribute further to the credibility of storytelling as an effective narrative technique for building organizational identity and reputation by positioning the firm’s communications as acts of storytelling. Moreover, I argue that storytelling moves beyond a mode of connecting with stakeholders and in fact, can shape approaches to communications strategy and public relations. In particular, I
examine the strategy by the organization of framing contemporary storytelling by grounding stories in history and past performance.

A number of iconic brands are already practicing such a storytelling approach, infusing their narratives with tributes to history to engage their audiences. Tiffany & Co., which traces its start back to 1837, recently announced its “Out of Retirement™” collection, in which it re-launched a number of jewelry pieces made nearly fifty years ago due to their “charm and wit that are an intrinsic part of the company” (“Tiffany Introduces”). In an effort to reconnect with its disengaging target audience, media conglomerate MTV responded with a “reinvention” by “bringing back its iconic acoustic performance series” and “moving forward with its first weekly music competition in two decades” (Nededog). Even fast-food companies have re-envisioned their approach to storytelling by drawing once again on recognizable icons – from a modern-day Colonel Sanders that mimics the chain’s founder of the 1930s, to a Burger King plastic-faced “King” character based on a 1950s logo – to garner publicity, but also to reengage customers by “quite literally personifying their brand” (Suddath).

Perhaps most interestingly, E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company (DuPont) recently divested its chemical assets to create the Chemours Company. Billed as “a new company with over 200 years of history” and “a startup with a storied past”

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3 Ten months after publicly announcing the collection, Tiffany & Co. reminded customers via email under the heading of “Now & Then: Looking Back to Move Forward” about its “timeless collection.” The message used phrases such as, “It’s been said that history repeats itself” and “By nodding to the past while looking toward the future…” (Tiffany & Co.).
(Chemours), the story of the spin off is an abbreviated reflection of the more complex tradition of storytelling by DuPont. In all, by curating their stories today with reflections on the past, these companies and many more are creating master narratives of their businesses to communicate with stakeholders in a compelling way.

Given its deep industrial business roots that extend through the modern day, DuPont is a rich and attractive subject for research on organizational storytelling. As the opening quotation of this chapter suggests, the company has long been keen on a storytelling strategy that merges the present and the past (“Why the Biggest” 6).

Similar to its contemporary storytelling approach with spin-off business Chemours described above, DuPont’s technique in that 1914 article was to appeal to stakeholders by emphasizing “Its century old reputation as pioneer and peerless continue[d]” (5, emphasis original). The company’s stories were grounded in the view that “The wise consumer or dealer [could not] be pried loose from the Du Pont Company by concessions or hopeful promises, even though made in good faith,” and should instead “[adhere] steadfastly to the explosives manufacturer that has ‘delivered the goods’ year after year” (6). Yet while DuPont is often in the public and academic spotlight for everything ranging from scientific research and development to environmental concerns, its storytelling has received far less attention; lacking in DuPont’s own account of its history and particularly in industry publications and scholarly research is the story behind these stories. How, over the course of two centuries, and through a variety of economic, political, and environmental issues, has DuPont navigated peaks and valleys in managing its identity and reputation through storytelling? There is
much to explore from an organizational storytelling perspective, and this dissertation thus uses DuPont as its sole subject.

To set the academic context, Chapter 2 investigates current scholarship on organizational storytelling and provides a framework for examining stories in business contexts. Beginning with a literature review, I trace the theoretical contexts that situate organizations as storytellers, and explain how they harness the power of those stories to connect with consumers and create and maintain a brand, identity, and reputation. I explore the disciplines of English narrative studies, organization studies, and corporate communication, suggesting how a methodical approach using archival repositories can further illuminate an organization’s own narrative processes. Against this multidisciplinary background, I then position DuPont as a prudent subject, given its extensive history as one of America’s oldest, continuously operating organizations, for the analysis of the effectiveness of corporate stories over time.

My approach aligns with current business communication methods. For example, Stephen Doheny-Farina finds that following writing processes in an organization for a substantial period of time enables researchers to best understand how writers’ perceptions of their organizational contexts impact their composing processes; he also suggests the researcher can avoid the misinterpretation of observations of single incidents that in reality fall along a time continuum (337). Consequently, in the remaining three chapters, I focus on inflection points – major changes identified in DuPont’s corporate strategy over the course of its organizational
history – and trace the company’s storytelling activities through multiple media and contexts.

In Chapter 3, “Once Upon a Time Along the Brandywine: Storytelling at DuPont Begins,” I conduct a rhetorical analysis of the company’s earliest storytelling efforts. From family relationships and word-of-mouth publicity to one of the first recorded corporate advertisements and formal storytelling series, Chapter 3 traces why and how DuPont initially used storytelling. DuPont’s culture of communicating to stakeholders through story was born out of necessity in response first to distinguishing itself from the competition and later to antitrust accusations. Through institutional initiatives, DuPont effectively used textual and visual stories of consumers, employees, and communities to counter public skepticism. The company did this in a number of ways, including the creation of a corporate logo and initial brand story; launch of a substantial monthly corporate magazine; and an institutional advertisement series of stories on chemical engineers. Specifically, I examine an amalgam of stories told in these various contexts in relation to administrative correspondence, and juxtaposed with public narratives, to show how DuPont used storytelling in an attempt to establish its brand credibility and subsequently improve its early reputation.

Chapter 4, “From the Page to the Podium: Scenes of Storytelling at DuPont,” shifts focus from the first century of ad hoc storytelling to the first formal corporate communications campaign launched by the company. In response to an image crisis after earning significant profits from munitions sales during World War I, DuPont for the first time enlisted the services of an outside public relations consultant. The
resulting “Better Things for Better Living…Through Chemistry” institutional advertising campaign offers deep insight into both print and performed storytelling by the company as it worked to reinvent its post-war reputation. Public exhibits, sponsorship of the *Cavalcade of America* radio program, and performed displays at the World’s Fairs illustrate how storytelling in action allowed the company to interface with its employees and the public as it attempted to further manage its identity in the marketplace.

The final chapter, “Miracles and Mergers: DuPont Stories in Modern Media,” addresses more recent tectonic shifts in DuPont’s story and in its storytelling activities. After a sixty-four year run, in 1999 the “Better Living” institutional messaging gave way to “The miracles of science™” to reflect the company’s expanded foundation from chemical and material sciences to include biological sciences. Followed by the company’s first global advertising campaigns “To Do List for the Planet” and “Welcome to the Global Collaboratory,” DuPont shifted focus to perhaps its most people-centric approach of all, placing the planet and people at the center of stories about sustainable solutions for medicines, drinking water, food security, and more. This chapter follows how the company’s “super story” has shifted, both in content and in mediums, to reflect a contemporary business approach. In particular, it explores how DuPont’s storytelling activities have progressed to embrace the digital in the context of an active public and press environment.

Each of these chapters provides unique means for exploring the storytelling processes of DuPont as the company has endeavored to create, maintain, and adapt its
identity, brand, and reputation among its stakeholders. By conducting an intertextual, multidisciplinary critical analysis of the storytelling techniques deployed by DuPont, I create an enriched understanding of why and how firms can strategically deploy corporate messaging to establish an identity and reputation among their key audiences. Finally, by tracing DuPont’s storytelling chronologically over a time continuum, I reveal how the stories of today build faithfully on the stories of the past, and suggest that contemporary organizations consider their histories as they work to establish authentic and compelling narratives today.
Chapter 2

FRAMING STORIES IN CORPORATE CONTEXTS

“...the climate is right for organizations to turn to storytelling. It can reach hearts as well as minds, garner support for initiatives, and help to articulate and strengthen core business concerns like corporate strategy, culture, and brand.”

— Janis Forman, 2013 (3)

“Rather than seeing an organisation as a single body with a single (management) voice telling one grand story, it should be regarded as an orchestra consisting of many different instruments and voices, each capable of performing in its own register and each with its own distinctive sound.”

— Roy Langer and Signe Thorup, 2006 (375)

The application of stories for business purposes, particularly those related to outward-facing initiatives such as creating an identity, building a brand, and establishing a reputation, has long been practiced in industry and touted as a highly effective means for engaging stakeholders. Corporate communication scholars like Janis Forman suggest, however, that a gap still exists between research, theory, and practice. Evidenced by the first opening quotation of this chapter, Forman indicates the time for turning to storytelling in business is now (206); her research, along with that of scholars from a number of interrelated fields, makes a case for why organizations should have “greater confidence and respect for [storytelling’s] abilities” (3). For example, professional writing scholars Nancy Perkins and Jane Blyler suggest narrative in pedagogy and research was previously by-passed because of a disciplinary culture that “devalued” narrative (8). That devaluing, they suggest, could be based on
factors like the privileging of logic and science steeped in the Western tradition, links
to technical writing as objectivist, or the expression of the emotional and feminine in
narrative terms (11). Perkins and Blyler also call, though, for a narrative turn, and
suggest “With accelerated moves toward…globalization, and innovative business
designs, the need for a narrative perspective is as relevant today for professional
communication as it was 10 years ago” (28). To the scholars’ point, as organizations
become more cognizant of the roles stories play in their communications activities,
they are increasingly considering how those stories come to be told. In part, such
analysis accounts for who within the organization creates and contributes to
storytelling, and the processes by which the organization disseminates such stories
internally and, ultimately, externally. Organizations must also consider how stories
take on a life of their own outside the organization, are consumed, interpreted, and
retold by others as a grand narrative of the organization emerges. The disciplines of
English narrative studies, organization studies, and corporate communication each
offer unique theoretical contexts in which to examine organizational storytelling. This
dissertation builds on existing scholarship, and creates an enriched understanding of
organizational stories and their strategic implementation by examining corporate
narratives through the following multidisciplinary theoretical and methodological
approaches.
Theoretical Contexts

To understand the organization as storyteller, we must begin with the concept of an individual as storyteller. According to Walter Fisher’s “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument,” the capacity for storytelling is innate in human beings. Citing Alisdair MacIntyre, Fisher notes “man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal” (1) and thus assigns the term “homo narrans” (6). As for the stories themselves, preeminent folklore scholar Jack Zipes suggests, “all stories are linked to one another, yet distinct in their personal and social functions” (5), while “A tale becomes traditional not by virtue of being created, but by being retold and accepted; transmission means interaction, and this process is not explained by isolating just one side” (7). If we consider human beings by nature as storytellers who have their own unique ways of recounting information orally and textually, organizations then, as collectives of individuals, are by nature storytellers as well (Boje, “The Storytelling Organization” 106). Put another way, organizational storytelling involves the writing and telling of varied, intricate narratives that originate from a multiplicity of voices.

A deep understanding of the processes by which these voices can come together to tell organization stories is essential to being able to analyze those stories. In part, this means understanding that “instead of one reality, there are multiple realities to be uncovered, spoken, heard, and understood as one seeks to develop a holistic picture of an organizational culture” (Boyce 11), and it can be helpful to consider a variety of narratives, including histories, institutional messaging, even
taglines and brand slogans. It is also essential to understand how stories become operationalized in organizations as “the preferred sense-making currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders” through which “people engage in a dynamic process of incremental refinement of their stories of new events as well as on-going reinterpretations of culturally sacred story lines” (Boje, “The Storytelling Organization” 106). While some scholars refer to the multiple realities and ongoing reinterpretations of stories, narratologist David Herman suggests that narratives are situated and “shaped by the broader sociocommunicative environment in which they are produced” (17); in a similar vein, corporate communication scholars Roy Langer and Signe Thorup describe the processes of organizational storytelling using the orchestra metaphor in this chapter’s second opening quotation (375).

Though these scholars represent different disciplinary views, the general idea that stories play off of one another in a type of collective expression can be traced to Russian scholar and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, “the pioneer in theorizing that whereas narrative is a monologic bid for order, story can be more dialogical” (Boje, Storytelling 2). Bakhtin discusses the multivocalic nature of discourse in his landmark “Discourse in the Novel.” Although his writing centers on the novel, the implications of his critique on literary analysis are applicable to organizational discourse and stories, as the editors of The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism note:

Living language exhibits heteroglossia, the term Bakhtin famously uses to describe the “internal stratification” of language: the interplay among its social dialects, class dialects, professional jargons, languages of generations and age groups and of passing fads, “languages that serve
the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour.”
Heteroglossia…celebrates not, as structuralism does, the systematic
nature of language but the multiplicity of all those “centrifugal” forces
at work in language, the variety of social speech types, and the
diversity of voices interacting with one another. (Leitch, et al. 1188)

Much as there is heteroglossia in stories, there is also multiplicity in terms of the
research itself in organization studies, which is reflective of contributions from
scholars in a number of disciplines, and at the core stems from roots in social
constructionist and organizational symbolism perspectives. The former presumes “the
reality we collectively experience has, in fact, been constructed by our social
reactions” (Boyce 5), while the latter views “organizational stories and the process of
storytelling as primary ways in which meaning, both individual and collective, is
expressed” (9). Yet other scholars, like Langer and Thorup, echo Bakhtin;4 it was
Bakhtin who, in his discussion of the novel, first used the orchestra metaphor:

The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects
and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity
of speech types [raznorecie] and by the differing individual voices that
flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of
narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those
fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia

4 Extant research points to challenges for newer scholars of organizational story
studies to better attribute previous research given the complex and diverse approaches
to narrative analysis. Dale Cyphert notes that often the delineation between disciplines
like corporate communication can cloud the fact that scholars are doing parallel work
(271), while Boyce suggests “many story and culture studies seem to hang in the air
without apparent genealogy” (20) and “there is not a “pure” study or organizational
story or culture. Much of our research is multidisciplinary and should be demonstrated
as such” (21).
[raznorecie] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (Leitch, et al. 1193)

Bakhtin also notes how the traditional scholar, in lacking a method for approaching the multiplicity of voices that appear in the novel, reverts to “transpos[ing] a symphonic (orchestrated) theme on to the piano keyboard” (1193). In other words, to resolve the challenge of fully examining various individual perspectives, scholars turn away from a simple approach (as in playing an elementary scale on the piano), to a more complex approach (as in performing a full musical production).

Suffice it to say that scholars of organizational discourse have thus drawn, especially in recent time, on theories and approaches of polyvocality and intertextuality because they recognize the value of considering narratives within diverse historical and social contexts: intertextual approaches “override representationist concerns that location cannot explain organization” (Grant, et al. 12), while “demonstrat[ing] that the negotiation of meaning unfolds through the complex interplay of both socially and historically produced texts that are part of a continuous, iterative and recursive process” (qtd. in Grant, et al. 12). To return to the music metaphor, the same way in which an orchestra comes together to create a symphony,  

5 Herman notes “The past several decades have in fact witnessed an explosion of interest in narrative, with this multifaceted object of inquiry becoming a central concern in a wide range of disciplines and research contexts” (4), while Grant, et al., note the analysis of narratives and stories in organizational research has become “an especially popular approach to the study of discourse among critical and postmodern scholars” (5).
so is storytelling an instrument for communicating a “uniform impression of a company’s identity” to result in “a ‘super-story’ addressed to interested parties both inside and outside the organisation” (Langer and Thorup 374).

*Methodological Approach*

As organizational story studies stem from multiple disciplines and take into account a multiplicity of voices, so too are the approaches to research varied. Notes Boyce, “There is not one authoritative voice of interpretation for the researcher utilizing an interpretive paradigm. There are many voices and many meanings whose understandings overlap, collide, enhance, and silence one another. Organizational symbolism draws attention to the kaleidoscope of symbols and meanings sustained in organizations” (12). Considering the range of such approaches, some organizational management scholars acknowledge the necessity of analyzing texts within their organizational contexts, recognizing “The relationship between a text and its context is fundamental to how we understand narrative and discursive organizational research; how we fashion this relationship profoundly affects not only what we see, but what we should and shouldn’t say” (Barry, et al. 1091). This approach has roots in theories of intertextuality, which consider how the construction and consumption of discourse is impacted by social and historical contexts. Julia Kristeva, who drew from Bakhtin’s work, “proposes that a text does not exist only on its own, but exists in an interconnected dialogue with other texts. The text itself is a manifestation of this interconnection, as it borrows words, quotations and meanings from other situations,
genres and speakers” (Grant, et al. 201). In other words, stories in organizations begin with one utterance and over time, through conversation and communication (or even a lack of communication) and various situations, undergo interpretations and possibly changes in meaning until a new utterance(s) emerges.

A challenge arises, though, when one methodological approach is not sufficient to analyze the data, and some researchers attest “the problems inherent in using solely one approach or the other have led to a variety of multi-method efforts” (Barry, et al. 1095). So while business communication scholars might draw from theories that corporate communication scholars do not, and organizational studies scholars employ theories that business communication scholars might not, simply combining methods to carry out new research on the use of stories and narrative in organizations will not do.

Rather than merely aggregating methods by “building an intertextual mosaic,” recent scholarship suggests

diatextual researchers fashion a kaleidoscope, both in the deriviational sense of a portal (scope) to beautiful (kalos) forms (eidos), and in the homophonic sense of a ‘collide-o-scope’, an illuminated chamber where eye-opening collisions occur. The colored glass or jewels in such a device are the textual elements that rearrange themselves in a multitude of ways through the twist of the scope. (1104)

The result, suggests Barry, et al., is that endotextual methods (text itself as read or interpreted) and exotextual methods (“meanings are supported and contested through the production and reproduction (performance) of texts within a context”) become
juxtaposed, turning into a “kaleidoscopic diatextual method…[that] involve[s] endo and exo approaches at every stage” (1107). In other words, an effective analysis of organizational stories must incorporate approaches from multiple disciplines; examine stories told by both the organization and by outside entities; and move beyond mere identification of stories. To this last point, as organization studies scholar Barbara Czarniawska aptly suggests, “‘Look, Ma, there is a narrative!’ type” of studies simply won’t do. Instead, Czarniawska urges scholars to make inquiries into “the consequences of storytelling – for those who tell the stories and those who study them” (Narratives 41). At its core, this is what intertextuality helps to accomplish: it “mediates the connection between language and social context, and facilitates more satisfactory bridging of the gap between texts and contexts. Consequently, it takes us beyond simple examinations of verbal and written interaction and allows us to appreciate the importance of ‘who uses language, how, why and when’” (Grant et al. 12). Historian Pap A. Ndiaye also suggests that scholars must “go beyond monographic work and the study of organization. [They] must take into account interactions among organizations as well as between organizations, society, and politics. Such interactions blur the boundaries between what is “internal” and “external” to a company” (275). To these ends, this dissertation draws on methods represented by the interdisciplinary research above as a means for positioning narratives in complex contexts to reveal a broader perspective.
**Bridging Disciplinary Boundaries**

Three disciplines in particular, when used in combination, provide useful frameworks for examining organizational storytelling. Professional writing research, informed by English narrative studies, examines written discourse and writing in the workplace; in the context of this dissertation, analyzing internal memos between company employees, for example, offers a window into how social processes in the organization unfold over time and result in writers’ comprehension of audience and purpose. In particular, the work of Stephen Doheny-Farina on writing in an evolving organization shows the importance of following writing processes for a substantial period of time. In “Writing in an Emerging Organization: An Ethnographic Study,” Doheny-Farina suggests this approach is beneficial in order to best understand writers’ perceptions of their organizational contexts, as well as misinterpretation of observations of single incidents that in reality fall along a time continuum (337).

Kathryn Rentz notes, too, in her “What Can We Learn from a Sample of One? – The Role of Narrative in Case Study Research,”

In contrast to experimental research or correlation studies, which draw conclusions from numerous subjects, treat them as comparable rather than unique entities, and pare away extraneous contextual influences, studies of the single case typically have examined a unique individual or constellation of events within its specific, detail-rich, and nonreplicable social setting (37).

As such, this dissertation focuses on one organization and follows its storytelling over the course of a significant timeframe to minimize the occurrence of misconstruing
information.

Research in organization studies explores the use of story as a vehicle for creating meaning in organizations, and provides an opportunity to illuminate how a company expresses its culture, motivates action, and creates meaning for individuals. Barbara Czarniawska has conducted a wealth of research on narrative in organizations. In particular, she examines how narrative functions to create an “illusion of controllability” for managers (Narrating 38) as well as how narrative contributes to the personification of organizations. Her work is especially useful for critically examining the intent of organizations in creating stories and the inevitable misinterpretation of those stories by some stakeholders. Also in this discipline, Nancy B. Stutts and Randolph T. Barker discuss the reliance of businesses on “their stories, or images that suggest a story, to engender loyalty” (209). They suggest using a narrative approach as a way to assess and predict “the long-term success, believability, and saliency of image advertising” (212).

Like Stutts and Barker, corporate communication scholarship provides more specific approaches to message creation at the institutional level, particularly in relation to image, identity, and corporate advertising. The narrative focus here tends to be on how internal agents use corporate messaging to motivate the action of external stakeholders, with attention focused on intent, interpretation, or both. Scholars like Janis Forman, Paul Argenti, and Barbara B. Stern have produced a body of scholarship with regard to the role stories play in organizational identity, branding, and reputation, and suggest stories are a key mechanism for how corporations can influence
audiences. Argenti’s research explores the role messaging plays in corporate strategy, and sheds light on some of the sub-functions of corporate communication that relate specifically to modern-day firms. These sub-functions include image, or “a reflection of the organization’s identity” (77); identity, or “the visual manifestation of the company’s image as seen in the corporate logo, its stationery, its uniforms, its buildings, its brochures, and its advertising” (78); and corporate advertising and advocacy, or how the company “sells itself” through strategic messages (79). Forman in “Strategic Communication as Persuasive and Constitutive Storytelling” explores specifically how “seeing communication as storytelling…help[s] connect disparate pieces of data into coherent and persuasive accounts, while also enabling…multiple versions of a given story line for different audiences and purposes” (Perkins and Blyler xi). Forman’s most recent publication, Storytelling in Business: The Authentic and Fluent Organization, further presents evidence for storytelling as a key organizational strategy, with specific attention devoted to the formative role of stories and narrative in strategy and corporate branding. Argenti and Forman together in The Power of Corporate Communication focus on corporate communication methods and how corporations create a voice and reputation. In their discussion on the use of messages, “advertising motifs,” and campaigns (108), Argenti and Forman specifically address advertising as the way a company tells its story, and suggest that because companies have “many stories that might be told,” corporate strategists need to ask “‘Why this story?’ and ‘Why this story now?’” (114).

In some cases, narrators and characters serve as a means for giving
organizations a voice. With regard to branding and narrative, Stern explores storytelling techniques using first-person narrators, third-person narrators, and dramatic characters as presenters in advertisements. By defining each of the narrative presenters, explaining potential strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and providing examples of real advertisements, Stern creates a framework for analyzing narrative forms in television, radio, and print media. She also briefly touches on the potential for further research regarding hybrids (or using more than one unique narrative type at a time) and parodies (17), ultimately offering a lens through which to examine how organizations employ certain narrative types to accomplish specific goals (20).

One major distinction in the presentation of this research is that analyses of company stories takes an approach informed by corporate brand story rather than product branding or advertising. That is to say, attention is paid to the company versus any singular product brand. In the corporate image framework, brand stories are directed to all organization stakeholders at an institutional level, while product branding has a sole focus on purchasers of those goods (Cornelissen 75). Much like Doheny-Farina’s approach to studying acts of writing in an organization, Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schulz extrapolate from the corporate brand framework a “time horizon” that considers and reflects the life of the company, rather than the life of a single product, since “corporate brands can increase the company’s visibility, recognition and reputation in ways not fully appreciated by product-brand thinking. The corporate brand contributes not only to customer-based images of the
organisation, but to the images formed and held by all its stakeholders” (Hatch and Schultz 1042). In order to fully represent the effectiveness of storytelling by an organization, then, this dissertation considers the lifetime of a company.

Within a time horizon, there are also particular elements within corporate stories that can be indicative of success. Research on corporate identity and reputation suggests that while a company’s success may often be attributed to storytelling, an authentic brand story is a primary driver. This notion of authenticity can be examined by individual stories, but by following the lifetime of a company, it may be possible to determine additional elements or patterns that contribute to success. For example, Forman theorizes another framework for identifying the relationship between corporate brand and stories, particularly in terms of authenticity but also fluency. Using Chevron’s “Human Energy” brand campaign (among others), Forman presents how “Stories about a brand that are credible, realistic, tangible, and intended to be truthful give people confidence in the brand, and well-crafted stories engage and hold people’s attention” (91). Although the notion of building authentic stories for impact is gaining popularity, in fact, the idea of crafting a story to influence public opinion and gain consumer trust dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While I rely on scholarship in organizational storytelling, it should be noted that this emphasis on authenticity also pervades industry best practices. For example, marketing consultant David Aaker suggests that businesses should locate a “sweet spot” in their storytelling efforts, which can “create or enhance perceptions and engender trust and authenticity” and “elevates the role of signature or strategic stories” (22). Other strategists suggest that “understanding how to craft story is an important 21st-century marketing skill, enabling the weaving together of a brand story across consumer touchpoints to have an indelible impact” (Oneto).
More specifically with regard to corporate image, the use of stories can be traced to the rise of big business (see Marchand).

As one of the oldest companies (and brands) in the United States, E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company (DuPont) traces its roots – and storytelling activities – to the earliest years of the nineteenth century, and the company thus offers a unique lens through which to examine the role of storytelling in developing a corporate identity. Further, the methods of inquiry cited above offer a framework for examining how DuPont has employed various storytelling techniques to build its identity and reputation for over two hundred years.

**DuPont as Storyteller**

Much research on DuPont has been done in both industry and academic scholarship, particularly with regard to the company’s role in shaping the modern world through discoveries and inventions. Most prevalent in the form of extensive reports, essays, press releases, and journal articles are examinations of DuPont inventions such as nylon, cellophane, Tyvek, Kevlar, and more, innovations all deeply embedded in not just American, but global, life and lexicon. Though few in number, substantial book-length treatments on DuPont also exist. Historians David A. Hounshell and John Kenly Smith, Jr. chronicle the company’s role in shaping modern-day processes of industrial research, development, and organizational structure in their *Science and Corporate Strategy: Du Pont R and D, 1902-1980*. Though published over three decades ago, this text by Hounshell and Smith remains the most
comprehensive publication on the subject. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., whose extensive research and publications on the strategy and structure of the modern enterprise lay the groundwork for the field of business history, details with Stephen Salsbury the growth of the DuPont company from its early days under familial leadership to its standing as a global enterprise in *Pierre S. Du Pont and the Making of the Modern Corporation*. And Pap A. Ndiaye’s *Nylon and Bombs: DuPont and the March of Modern America* follows, through DuPont’s chemical engineers as its subjects, the company’s integral role in shaping industry and public consumption through the creation of nylon and plutonium.

The company itself has also published a variety of texts that tell stories about its research and development contributions and impact on society. Though condensed for a public audience, a detailed and interactive timeline on the company’s web presence tells the history, and stories, of how DuPont came to be an industrial behemoth (“Innovation”). Inclusive in this digital history, as noted above with regard to external examination and research of the company, are stories about the individuals, locations, discoveries, and activities of the enterprise. Six time frames from 1802 through the present, parsed notably based on the company’s earliest days in the gunpowder business, through its significant transitions, first to a chemical company and later to a life science business, are interspersed with tales of chemists’ discoveries and CEOs’ visionary ideas, global expansion efforts, and product launches (“Innovation”). Most, if not all, of this content appears in story form. Text is written from an historical perspective, and many of the vignettes are accompanied by imagery.
– paintings and scanned ephemera or photographs in the early days, and digital photography as time progresses. Researchers become company characters, laboratories become scenes, the very construction of the timeline itself becomes an historical narration of DuPont, and the super story of DuPont as a leader in innovation and science emerges. But despite over two centuries of managing relationships with employees, customers, government, and the general public, the history specifically of communications activities at DuPont – and the ways in which all those stories were told in their time – is condensed to a mere 1,300 words on its website; just twelve paragraphs on the webpage discuss the company’s historical and current public relations practices.

That said, DuPont has also been in the practice of creating book-length treatments of its corporate activity, namely on the occasion of notable anniversaries in the company’s history. The earliest of these was written by Bessie Gardner du Pont. In *E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company: A History, 1802-1902*, du Pont provided a retrospective of the company for its centennial. A few decades later, William S. Dutton, an author and eventual employee of the company, attempted to convey at the time of the company’s 140-year anniversary “the Du Pont Company as seen by Du Pont men…an ‘inside view.’” (*Du Pont* vii). Though not published for a typical anniversary year, Dutton’s work is important because it reflects an effort by someone close to the company to tell a story in the midst of a difficult public relations climate. Shortly thereafter, the company for its 150-year anniversary published *Du Pont: The Autobiography of an American Enterprise*. A text with only a corporate authorial
voice, the autobiography is unique in that it clearly represents how the company presented itself. In the words of one corporate communications employee, it is “a crucial document in the history of the company telling its story” (Carisio, Second).

Finally, in 2002, DuPont commissioned a book in celebration of the company’s bicentennial, specifically to reach a more public audience.\(^7\) *DuPont: From the Banks of the Brandywine to Miracles of Science* offers perhaps the most comprehensive look at the organization’s history. Importantly, this most recent book was written not by DuPont but by a professional historian. Two DuPont employees served as executive and managing editors, but did not control the creation of the manuscript nor conduct a heavy edit (Carisio, Second). Each of these texts certainly reflect important sources in examining the company’s storytelling efforts, yet at the same time, they still provide only the occasional glimpse specifically into DuPont’s public affairs – and thus, branding, communication, and storytelling – practices.

To return to scholarly research, the closest links to storytelling at DuPont relate specifically to surveys and studies of corporate image. A few records exist of industry and academic surveys that in their research of public relations practices included those

\(^7\) See Foreword of *DuPont: From the Banks of the Brandywine to the Miracles of Science*. By the company’s own admission, this book is the only full-text treatment written specifically for public consumption.
of DuPont,\(^8\) while a few book-length treatments use the company as one of a number of corporate subjects in their analyses. Roland Marchand’s historical account of the shift in public relations activities by American big business during the first half of the twentieth century calls on DuPont as just one of many corporate subjects who accepted and implemented a more structured communications response in an effort to influence public opinion.\(^9\) Borrowing a phrase from DuPont’s first official organized corporate campaign that began in 1935, William Bird, Jr. in his “Better Living”: Advertising, Media and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership chronicles a brief history of how enterprises interacted with their publics, particularly through film and radio, though DuPont is again just one of a handful of companies examined. Both Marchand and Bird focus in particular on DuPont’s Cavalcade of America as their prime subject matter for the company, which while substantial is just one example of storytelling efforts by the company to connect with the public and influence opinion. Further, corporate image is just one piece of organizational storytelling, and there has yet to be a narrative analysis of the evolution of DuPont’s storytelling along a time continuum.

\(^8\) An early comprehensive review of historical public relations activity at DuPont appears in response to a 1938 questionnaire submitted by the National Industrial Relations board (“Memorandum re: Public”); there is also record of a research study in 1950 by Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations conducted on “the public relations practices and procedures of 30 leading American corporations” (Hyatt).

Turning to Archival Materials

Given the limitations of the above sources, this dissertation also deploys archival research methods to more fully explore organizational storytelling at DuPont from an intertextual approach. To borrow from Lynée Lewis Gaillet, archival research can be advantageous in “Unearthing and interpreting facts, layering stories of rhetorical engagement, bringing to light multiple histories and perspectives that reveal the complexities inherent in humanistic study, [and] weaving facts and research into persuasive narratives” (37). Physical and digital materials in the archives of the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware, detail the creation and dissemination of DuPont’s stories. From internal correspondence and publications, to special exhibits, pamphlets, advertisements, photos, and other artifacts, these extensive archival materials help to tell a more complete story from inside the company, and provide a context for situating external stories, thus resulting in a more complete picture of DuPont as a storytelling entity.

Further, scholars Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan, editors of Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process, suggest “space and location as a way to understand the sites where a historical subject lived” (2). It is important to note here Hagley itself as a means for telling the DuPont story in that historical context. Prior to the 150-year anniversary of the company, there was extensive discussion about what to do with the powder mills. Production had stopped in the early 1920s, and the mills sat abandoned. The company still used some buildings, like the Hall of Records, for storage, but otherwise the property was unused. Importantly, the development through the 1950s of
other historic restorations and projects like Williamsburg and Jamestown, along with the formalization in 1960 of the United States’ National Historic Landmark Program (Frank and Petersen 66) likely influenced the decision to transform the mills. For the du Pont family as well as the company, the establishment of the museum was a means for recording their impact on American industrial history, and for telling their story to the American people. Plans were announced in 1952 in celebration of the 150-year anniversary of the company, and the museum was formally dedicated in 1957. Eventually, Hagley became the official archives for DuPont, and today is one of the premier industrial museums in the country. Hagley thus offers a unique opportunity to experience the locus of DuPont corporate activity given the site is home to the original company powder mills.

In terms of methodology, Gaillet urges researchers to ask specific questions and carry out specific tasks in order to fully benefit from the use of archival materials. She offers tactical advice for those visiting museums and manuscript libraries such as Hagley’s (e.g., how to access resources, who to talk to, ways to seek grants, when to plan travel, etc.), as well as pertinent steps and inquiries when it comes to examining actual data. Though each step she suggests is helpful, some in particular are essential to achieving the intertextual approach described earlier in this chapter. For example, Gaillet advises the researcher to “Couch both archival materials and…analyses/stories within political, social, economic, educational, religious, or institutional histories of the time;” situate the “subject within contemporary rhetorical artifacts and events;” and “Carefully analyze the original audience for the artifact, both intended and
secondary,” to name a few (35). This becomes possible through the variety of both company-created and non-DuPont resources cited earlier, which serve as a means for contextualizing the archival materials found at Hagley.

While archival materials offer a wealth of information, there can be limitations to their use, and this is the case with Hagley. While the majority of archives must be accessed in person, an increasing number are available digitally. Digital archives afford quick and easy access, but it is also the case that they may not fully represent the original material. For example, through my research, I had first used the hard copy issue of the first DuPont Magazine and later found the digital version was missing a page, and had incorrectly ordered the first few pages. I notified the staff of my discovery so they could right the resource, but had I not engaged with the original hard copy magazine, I would have missed an important article that ultimately became a key source in understanding the founding intent behind the magazine. Thus, whenever possible, I use and cite original archival material, with reference to the digital archives when I used those for secondary review. The exception to this is in the case where a digital image was better used as a figure than my own scanned reproduction, or where I did originally access a source digitally. Entries in the “Bibliography” correspond to this approach: the Hagley ID (the library’s version of a digital object identifier) is listed along with a full citation when I used it on secondary review; alternatively, when I accessed only a digital version, I use Hagley’s preferred digital citation method for that object.
An additional limitation at Hagley is that although the archives contain a wealth of information on DuPont, some collections do have restricted access. A 25-year time seal applies to certain records at Hagley that contain more current materials concerning individuals who are still living. Accordingly, though corporate correspondence and other documents reside in the archives, they remain inaccessible for public use until the time restriction expires. In an effort to bridge that gap, this dissertation also incorporates data obtained from correspondence with a current DuPont employee in the corporate communications department, as well as information on public record, such as press releases and news and magazine articles.

Communication scholar Dawn R. Gilpin suggests such public records, specifically the news release, are in fact their own narrative genre, and provide a mechanism for deconstructing corporate identity. In her article, “Narrating the organizational self: Reframing the role of the news release,” Gilpin concludes that “news releases help negotiate organizational identity by constructing a narrative about events and the organization’s role in them;” she also recommends documents outside an organization “make it feasible to explore other embedded narratives for which the news releases offer insufficient material” (16). Therefore, this dissertation also incorporates news media in the form of traditional press and later digital assets, in order to address gaps resulting from limited access to the archives.

Ultimately, this combination of theoretical and methodological approaches reveals how DuPont’s stories over the last two centuries about its past, present, and future have weaved through a multiplicity of voices and channels, being told,
consumed, perceived, deconstructed, edited, reconstructed, embellished, and retold, to result in an intricate fabric of organizational tales. This rich narrative history, along with the company’s longevity as one of the oldest organizations in the United States, make DuPont a prime subject for examining the role of stories in establishing a corporate brand, identity, and reputation.
Chapter 3

ONCE UPON A TIME ALONG THE BRANDYWINE: STORYTELLING AT DUPONT BEGINS

“The printed word has become the most powerful, most far-reaching means for publicity, and therefore possesses the greatest potential power for progress. Editors and authors still use the printed word with telling effect in expounding theories, recording the events that make history and prophesying the near future, but we advertisers use publicity with greatest power in the practical working out of human relations.”

— George Frank Lord, 1919 (“The Supremacy” 1)

DuPont today is a master storytelling institution, with an established brand and identity; extensive units and staff to manage its public relations, external affairs, and communications; and contractual relationships with marketing agencies that help the company connect to its many stakeholders around the world and perpetuate its reputation through institutional advertising campaigns. But the DuPont of the nineteenth century was a vastly different storytelling organization than it is now. This chapter explores how the firm communicated with its audiences during its first one hundred years of business through the first quarter of the twentieth century. Though this is an extensive time period, the company was fully controlled and operated by family members from its start in 1802, and had just begun to diversify beyond gunpowder and explosives as it moved into the 1900s. Storytelling occurred on an ad hoc basis; the company’s earliest reputation was built from personal relationships, word-of-mouth publicity, and singular advertisements that told brief stories predicated
on public trust of the du Pont family name. Eventually, though, DuPont’s excessive profits from wartime activities resulted in public skepticism; changes in corporate structure and the need to diversify the business resulting from antitrust convictions also saw the first formation of organizational units devoted to advertising and publicity. These changes forced DuPont to consider more organized efforts around telling a cohesive and consistent story to the public in order to repair and sustain its identity and reputation. This chapter reviews those efforts, specifically the company’s very first advertisements; the creation of a corporate logo and initial brand story; the launch of a substantial monthly corporate magazine; and an institutional advertisement series of stories placing the chemical engineer as protagonist. Reviewing these initiatives chronologically and in the context of internal correspondence and archival notes, we begin to see a cohesive narrative take shape and ultimately, DuPont’s super story emerges with historical performance as its cornerstone, and science as a means for creating superior goods.

When du Pont and DuPont Were One in the Same

Naturally, as a family-founded business, personal reputations preceded formal storytelling in the company’s earliest days. Family relationships, individual connections – the du Ponts as Fisher’s “homo narrans,” if you will – and the occasional print advertisement formed the basis of the company’s outreach efforts in the 1800s. For example, Pierre Samuel du Pont and his son, Éleuthère Irénée (E. I.) had a personal relationship with President Thomas Jefferson that began years earlier
when the du Ponts lived in France and Jefferson had served as American minister to Paris (Kinnane 17). In fact, it was this relationship with Jefferson that led U.S. Secretary of War Henry Dearborn to enlist DuPont in 1803 to refine saltpeter for the army – the first time DuPont would work for the government (Dutton, Du Pont 39); Jefferson also used DuPont powder for hunting at his Monticello home, while Pierre played a role in facilitating the Louisiana Purchase (Kinnane 17). This part-personal, part-business relationship is one of the earliest representations of viva voce publicity for the young company. Historian Adrian Kinnane suggests “Jefferson even acted as a salesman for DuPont, telling E. I., ‘Having distributed the canisters among the merchants and gentlemen of this quarter, I presume it will occasion calls on you from them’” (17). What better method of building institutional reputation than to have the U.S. President promote the sale of your company product?

Family dynamics also played an important role in how the company and its relations with employees and stakeholders were managed throughout the first century of operations. E. I. and his brother, Victor, lived with their wives and children in close proximity to workers at the mills, which made one of the company’s earliest work-culture statements; the family “shared the plant’s dangers, working alongside their employees and showing by example their commitment to the business at every level” (Kinnane 16). Gunpowder was a dangerous product to manufacture. Explosions were not uncommon, and in fact, the DuPont buildings where the product was created were specifically designed to minimize damage should an explosion occur. It was from this
sometimes unpredictable work environment that the du Ponts initially faced the need
to respond to public concern over the dangers of its goods.

The first fatal accident occurred in 1815, while a fire caused by a worker in 1817 claimed Pierre Samuel du Pont’s life (Dutton, Du Pont 55). The following year, the brothers’ commitment came notably into play when a disastrous explosion killed forty people and permanently injured E. I.’s wife, Sophie (57). Quick repairs were made to the facilities, “and when E. I. and Victor announced that they would operate the works by themselves if need be, most of the men returned to their jobs. Over the years, as workers handed their steady, well-paying jobs and their DuPont homes down to their sons, employees developed an exceptional loyalty to the firm” (Kinnane 19). It was also this dedication to the business that enabled the company to stay afloat while paying the cost for the catastrophe. Author Benjamin Ferris notes, “the benevolent disposition of E. I. Dupont had ample room for exercise” in the wake of the explosion (Dutton, Du Pont 58n), while Kinnane suggests, “E. I.’s reputation for integrity and the demand for his product persuaded the Philadelphia banks to provide the loans needed to keep going” (23). These accounts speak to an important period in the company’s efforts to protect its reputation, and how personal relationships helped it to do so.

The business and personal qualities of other family members fueled the company reputation as well. Lammot had a “personal reputation as a skilled chemist and businessman,” while Henry “personified the self-reliance so often associated with 19th century entrepreneurs;” it is said of Henry that “few men in the 19th century did
more…to change the face of America” (Kinnane 32). In fact, as Kinnane points out, “the efforts and energy of Henry, Lammot and 218 workers and their families during the Civil War had made E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company the nation’s premier powder manufacturer” (34). That said, some broad-based advertising came to supplement the reputation built by the company’s forebears almost as early as the company’s inception.

*From du Pont to Du Pont: Company Advertisements Advance Reputation*

The earliest DuPont advertisements and company messages were created in the absence of any central public relations structure or function. They could be described as both product-specific and institution-wide, namely because through the 1800s, the company’s products were limited to gunpowder and explosives, and the ads supported the awareness and sale of those products that were the sum of DuPont business. Taken together, these early print advertisements come close to resembling a company-wide publicity effort, and in effect began to tell an institutional story.

In the tradition of the times, advertisements followed “the ‘tombstone’ variety, consisting of little more than a few lines of type, sometimes an illustration of the product and the manufacturer’s name” (Mill 105). There is a slight discrepancy, though, over which were the company’s first advertisements. Kinnane cites a news clipping dated 1804 and labeled “Gun-Powder. The subscriber offers for sale” as the first advertisement for DuPont. Ad copy suggests the product’s quality was “warranted equal and believed to be superior, to any imported from Europe, and at prices much
under those of the imported Powder” as well as “much stronger and quicker than the
generality of that which is imported from Europe” (15). On the other hand, in the first
published history of the company, family member Bessie Gardner du Pont suggests a
different ad, written in 1804 by Victor du Pont, was the earliest:

E.I. du Pont de Nemours Gun Powder / Manufactory / Wilmington,
Delaware / This new and extensive establishment is now in activity and
any quantity of powder, equal if not superior to any manufactured in
Europe, will be delivered at the shortest notice. / Samples to be seen at /
V. DU PONT DE NEMOURS ET CIE / New York (22).

The ad identified by Gardner du Pont, however, does not reveal any particular
publication placement, nor that it was ever published (Dutton, Du Pont 40). Writer
George Sumner Albee further suggests (in alignment with present-day archival
notes,10 but misaligned with Kinnane’s report of the 1804 news ad) that the first
advertisement to be printed in a newspaper occurred “in Wilmington in 1806 by a
local grocer named William Pluright, in The Mirror of the Times & General
Advertiser” (12). In this early ad, a single line of copy reading “Dupont & co’s.
Gunpowder, superior to any imported” was sandwiched in an assorted grocery list
between “Raisins by the keg and box” and “Old PEACH BRANDY, by the barrel”
(“Pluright’s”). Author and former DuPont public relations executive William S.
Dutton reaffirms the one-liner as the earliest ad in his comprehensive book about the

10 A typed note attached to a photocopy of the ad refers to “The first mention of du
Pont in Wilmington newspaper that can be authenticated (Box 34, Folder DuPont,
General History, Acc. 1410 HML).
company (Du Pont 36). Another print notice from June 11, 1807, suggests both existing customer loyalty and early brand authenticity. The ad headline read, “Caution! To Dealers in Gun-Powder” and followed with a message warning powder buyers to distinguish DuPont powder from Brandywine powder: “…the subscribers find it necessary to inform the public and their customers, that to prevent mistakes, they have declined using the name of Brandywine, by which their powder has been heretofore known. In future it will be designated only as Du Pont & Co’s. Powder. The kegs and barrels will be marked D. P. & Co.” (Kinnane 15). Based on the concern of branding the company under a new name, it is likely the ad cited by Albee did exist, but perhaps after 1807 given use of the company name (versus “Brandywine powder”).

To call any of these earliest ad copies a story is debatable; they may be, though the copy falls more along the lines of the purported six-word story by Ernest Hemingway. 11 But we must consider, as corporate communication scholars Paul Argenti and Janis Forman note, that corporate advertising tells a story about a company (114); Forman also suggests separately that when taken in the aggregate,

11 Peter Miller, author of Get Published! Get Produced!: A Literary Agent’s Tips on How to Sell Your Writing, said he learned from “a well-established newspaper syndicator” that “Ernest Hemingway…claimed he could write a short story that was only six words long…The words were ‘FOR SALE, BABY SHOES, NEVER WORN.’ A beginning, a middle and an end!” (27). In fact, such “stories” appeared when Hemingway was just a child, most notably in newspapers as early as 1906 and 1910 ((Urban) Legend), but it reinforces the idea that minimal content can still result in a story.
“smaller stories can tell a bigger story about a firm” (18). Thus the story we find here is a straightforward one – that DuPont is selling a product, working to establish its name in the marketplace, and distinguishing itself as superior to any other gunpowder on the domestic market. An issue of the *DuPont Magazine* later confirmed this intent: “…the first Du Pont advertisement of which we have record, was published to inform buyers that because powder was made on the Brandywine it was not necessarily the well and favorably known Du Pont make, unless the packages were so marked” (“Du Pont Advertising” 17). These advertising claims tell even more of a story when taken in the context of the gunpowder market at the time.

DuPont may have been able to boast about a superior product in the American gunpowder market, but its entrée into the business was not without competition. In *Du Pont: The Autobiography of an American Enterprise*, the company chronicles its own story in the context of historical events. Written for the company’s 150-year anniversary, the book explains that explosions and a lack of safety mechanisms, coupled with competition from the British, had caused most domestic mills of the early 1800s to close (11), though a few were still in operation (Dutton, *Du Pont* 28). By the time Irénée arrived in America, though, he found the domestic gunpowder to be overpriced and to perform poorly. He wrote of the competition and his idea to start a gunpowder business that it “should not be formidable to one who, having studied this manufacture for several years in the powder works…directed by M. de Lavoisier, can add to the extensive knowledge of that administration the important modifications which have been in use since the Revolution…” (29). This reference to study under
Lavoisier, a highly trained and well known chemist of the time, is perhaps the earliest internal reference in DuPont’s account of the use of scientific knowledge to produce a superior good; the claim of superior quality made in these earliest company advertisements is predicated on that same idea. As a later company article also described, “advertising as was done was protective in character, seeking to hold trade against domestic and foreign competition” (“Du Pont Advertising” 17). Subsequent advertisements show similar motivation to protect the DuPont name, as seen in Figure 1, in addition to further grounding DuPont’s reputation and establishing the firm’s credibility.

Another way to describe DuPont’s approach to these early advertisements is in terms of authenticity. Forman suggests the element of authenticity, coupled with that of fluency or the act of crafting and presenting information to engage and appeal to audiences’ emotions and intellect, form the basis for successful organizational stories (23). Internal to the company, E. I.’s emphasis on having learned from Lavoisier is one of the earliest invocations of formal training as a measure of authenticity, and this translates through claims of DuPont’s superior products in company advertisements. The advertisements don’t just make blanket statements; they are backed up with “credible, realistic, tangible” evidence that DuPont’s gunpowder was made using

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12 See also HML Accession 500, which contains a collection of correspondence in October 1804 between Archibald McCall and E. I., as well as company letterbooks, regarding issues with wording of newspaper advertisements and the need to distinguish from competition.
Figure 1  “To the Public.” Notice to DuPont customers in the August 2, 1816 New York Post warning of counterfeit powder and urging purchase via “sole agent” for DuPont gunpowder in New York (15-1700212). Courtesy HML, Acc. 500, Series 1, Vol. 777.
proven methods only E. I.’s company was familiar with. Forman’s storytelling framework equates success with organizations who are able to tell authentic and fluent stories, and positioning DuPont’s early ads in this framework, we can see how the firm’s reputation started to take shape in print.

At the end of the first quarter of the century, advertisements eventually moved beyond the “tombstone” text, and DuPont’s copy advanced beyond solely establishing a reputation and defending against the competition to more specifically engendering loyalty among stakeholders. This shift aligns with the remainder of Forman’s storytelling framework, which suggests both general and specific business objectives that serve “to gain or strengthen the trust of the intended audience(s) and, with this achieved, to inform, persuade, and even inspire them” (23, emphasis original). Albee describes a specific advertisement from 1825, which featured both artwork and factual points to perpetuate the growing DuPont brand story of a superior American product. Though his article does not show it, Albee describes the visual as

a quaint illustration of a gentleman hunter afield with his pet setter. Garbed in a tall beaver hat, skin-tight breeches and high jack-boots, the candid cameraman of the period—a patient engraver—limned this imposing sportsman in the act of letting off a fowling piece considerably taller than himself. Du Pont’s gunpowder for sporting, rock-blowing and shipping, it was stated, was “constantly for sale” by the subscriber (12).

The description provides information that helps to identify audience and product appeal. The “imposing sportsman” was smartly dressed, suggesting a clear image of the DuPont customer, and had shot himself a significantly sized fowl, suggesting the
rewards of using a DuPont product (Albee 12). The advertisement also presented a statement on product performance:

This Powder was last week compared with some English Cannister Powder, --sent from England by Lord Wellington to Mr. Patterson, of Baltimore, as a present…Lord Wellington’s Powder gave 95 degrees. Du Pont’s Powder gave 109 degrees. (Albee 12)

We can extrapolate some of DuPont’s competition from this copy, as well as see the very specific information given to the customer to engender trust and describe product performance to persuade them in making a purchasing decision – not only did the powder outperform the competition, it did so by a significant margin of degrees. The heat of the powder reflected power and consistency of performance, and buyers would have found the fourteen-degree difference of DuPont’s powder the mark of a superior product. Forman suggests, “since the brand is the expectation or promise of performance, stories, their concrete agents and actions, show that a company is trustworthy—has ‘lived the brand,’ has delivered on expectations, has ‘walked the talk’” (91). Herein, DuPont is developing trust via promotion of a brand promise of performance in an American-made product, and used Mr. Patterson as an authentic, living example of the brand; it also continued to emphasize its claim of superiority through science – the implicit influence of Lavoisier’s scientific approach is revealed in the product’s performance.

Again, it is important to consider that DuPont had no organized public relations effort for the remainder of the nineteenth century. Most advertising was
actually conducted primarily “by independent sales agents who simply were making their presence known” (Kinnane 63). During this same time period, DuPont experienced limited product expansion, moving from black gunpowder to an improved blasting powder invented by Lammot du Pont in 1857. The Union Army sought its gunpowder supply from DuPont during the Civil War, which is perhaps the earliest in a number of times throughout the company’s history that the press drew attention to DuPont’s profit from gunpowder sales to the Army (Ndaiye 8). Despite this early public scrutiny, DuPont continued its manufacture of explosives, expanding to production of dynamite and nitroglycerin in 1880, while the research and development of smokeless powder began in 1890 with the arrival of Pierre S. du Pont (“DuPont Historical” 3). Yet even without an organized public relations unit in the company, DuPont still had an impact on the market.

Kinnane credits DuPont with “reviv[ing] a faltering sporting powder market by popularizing trap shooting and creat[ing] a new market by persuading farmers that the best way to clear their fields of rocks and stumps was to use DuPont dynamite” (63). One of the ways the company did this was to sponsor trap-shooting tournaments in the 1890s where people could personally test and experience the superior product:

13 The first instance was the War of 1812, during which the purchase by the U.S. government of a half a million pounds of powder caused skepticism abroad, and “French stockholders soon demanded dividend payments from all the profits they imagined to be flowing into company coffers,” and E. I. had to explain those profits were actually used for plant expansion to meet increased demand (Kinnane 19).
These shooting tournaments were organized into daily contests for both experts and amateurs. Cash purses for each totaled $1,220 – no small sum in those days. However, the strict tournament rules included the stipulation that contestants “must burn only DuPont smokeless powder.” DuPont sold the ammunition at less than cost in order to provide sportsmen with the chance to “be in full accord with the thousands who have already pronounced DuPont Smokeless ‘the best Nitro in the world.’” (Kinnane 37)

The tournaments served to popularize the sport, but did so specifically via promotion of DuPont powder. Subsequent advertisements built on this idea, and it wasn’t long before DuPont shifted to more intentionally tell a story – sometimes promoting its product and sometimes promoting a general idea – with added illustrations and customer accounts to more explicitly build trust and engage audiences. As the company explained,

In 1907, the sales department concluded that the sale of sporting powder had reached its apex…Rather than face a steady decline in sporting powder business, the Company decided to undertake the promotion of trapshooting…From an advertising viewpoint this decision was most important. It was the first organized effort by the Du Pont Company to use advertising in a constructive and promotional way. (“Du Pont Advertising” 17)

For example, a full-page ad in the April 1913 issue of Country Life in America, sold not DuPont gunpowder but the “sport alluring” of trapshooting for men and women under the DuPont name; an identical ad appeared in the September issue (“Trapshooting” 81). The copy urged readers to participate in the “highly commendable means of recreation,” and not only described the “charming surroundings, invigorating atmosphere” but illustrated a picture-perfect scene of well-
to-do individuals participating in the sport (see Figure 2). Here, DuPont shifted its approach to be both authentic and fluent. To return to Forman’s storytelling framework, in addition to credible and true stories, fluent stories “draw the attention of stakeholders by engaging their emotions and their intellect; by using the craft that makes this form of communication compelling; and in some instances by using technology, anything from photographs to state-of-the-art social media” (23, emphasis original). In the instance of the trapshooting advertisement, DuPont appealed to readers’ intellect by suggesting the sport required “training of eye and hand to quickly follow mental direction,” and persuaded them by encouraging them to “join the ranks of Trapshooters.” The illustration at the top of the advertisement brought it all together, providing a tangible expression of the sport’s allure. Here we also see DuPont making a clear effort to engage a specific type of audience. The placement of the ads in publications like Country Life in America, Country Gentleman, and Literary Digest appealed to country and rural-dwelling, well-heeled consumers.

Similarly, copy and photographs promoted the use of dynamite for farming purposes. In fact, a regular section of the new DuPont Magazine (a publication discussed at length later in this chapter) was called “Farming with Dynamite.” The section featured letters from professional blasters and other customers that told personal stories about their experiences with DuPont explosives. For example, one Mr. Howard from Indiana bragged that he earned close to nine hundred dollars in just one month from blasting work (Wilson, “FwD: Blaster” 19), while a Mr. Ivans from Montana boasted his use of more than thirty tons of the DuPont product to clear land
and create ditches (Wilson, “FwD: Used” 20). The magazine section grew to include photos to show the successful use of dynamite. In one image, Mr. Ball from New Jersey showed the effectiveness of DuPont explosives to help him clear a large stump (Wilson, “FwD: A Neat” 25); in another, blaster Orion V. Dudley shared before and after photos of clearing “A Ditch in a Jiffy” (Wilson, “FwD” 29). Effectively, each of these blasters became characters in DuPont promotional stories and served as authentic and credible representations of the brand, further building DuPont’s reputation among audiences.

While successful, the tournaments and sport-selling were not a sustainable long-term public relations strategy, although in truth, as the company notes today of the publicity climate of the time, it was able to rely “on its earned reputation for honest dealings and quality products to assure the public of its good intentions” and “like most businesses, regarded its motives to be a private matter” (“1939 Better”). A 1903 advertisement supports this idea, noting only the company’s longevity as a sign of its reputation (see Figure 3). This also meant brief advertisements served as the only safeguard of the company’s earliest brand; “in fact, the first federal trademark law was not passed until 1870. The earliest DuPont labels juxtaposed images of the rugged, independent hunters of rural America with the company name” (“1999 The miracles”) – and that was enough (see Figure 4).

In all, these examples represent DuPont’s earliest brand characters – the sportsman in country dress posing with his rifle, a farmer in his field blasting tree stumps – who played an essential role in promoting the company. They served as
Figure 3  “The Reputation of 100 Years Is the Guarantee of DuPont Powder.”
Simply the company’s longevity authenticates reputation in this 1903 ad. Courtesy HML, HID dpads_1803_00013.
Figure 4  “DuPont Smokeless: The Best Shotgun Powder for All Kinds of Work,” and “DuPont Smokeless: A Bulk Shotgun Powder Backed by the Strongest Guarantee.” These advertising tear sheets circa 1907 assert authenticity through text and illustrations. At left, an illustration shows men and dogs at “The End of the Day’s Hunt” authenticating proof of quality; at right, a man “leaves nothing to chance” by purchasing DuPont smokeless powder for sport. Courtesy HML, HID dpads_1803_00001 and dpads_1803_00005.
representatives of DuPont’s reputation, living evidence of an authentic brand. We also see, as in the “Reputation of 100 Years” ad, the reliance on company history and performance emerge as a way for DuPont to tell its stories. But as the company entered the twentieth century, old familial leadership and a changing outside world meant DuPont could no longer stay the course of relying on its family name and reputation, and a small, ad hoc run of singular advertisements to perpetuate its brand.

Building a DuPont Identity: Organizational Changes and Logo Development

DuPont’s organizational narratives began a more significant transition as the company leadership changed, and modifications to operational structure meant DuPont needed to refine its corporate voice. In 1902, one hundred years after its founding, a “signal event” for the company saw a management transition from “the older du Ponts…[who] were tired, leaderless, and ready to sell out to anyone, including businessmen who were not du Ponts” to “three younger du Pont cousins, T. Coleman, Pierre S., and Alfred I.” (Hounshell and Smith 11). The firm also “adopted a functionally departmentalized structure during 1902-03 as part of the overall consolidation and moder[n]ization effected by [the cousins],” and this new structure included a Sales Department (see Appendix A). Under the direction of Harry G. Haskell, by March 1904 the Sales Department was organized into a few districts and four bureaus, of which one was the Advertising Bureau and one was the Information Bureau (Chandler and Salsbury 140). In this structure, the former “supervised nationwide promotion of the Du Pont products and checked on the method and content
of advertising by local branch offices” while the latter “prepared the reports on sales made by the Du Pont Company and its competitors and also carried out more general studies on the nature and activity of the market and of the competition” (Chandler and Salsbury 140). It is important to underscore that at the time, the Sales Department under which these bureaus resided “was far more concerned with pricing” (Chandler and Salsbury 155) than with advertising, a sign that management was only beginning to understand the value of organized publicity. A few years later in 1909, an Advertising Division came as an outgrowth of the department intended “to help influence the buying public” (Kinnane 63).

Shortly thereafter, DuPont’s own formal storytelling in manuscript format emerged. As alluded to in Chapter 2, Bessie Gardner du Pont wrote the first extensive corporate history of DuPont in celebration of the company’s centennial. The publication traces the journey of Victor and his son E. I. from France to the United States; their establishment of powder mills along the Brandywine; as well as family ties, personal and business relationships, and government contracts. Chapters are parsed by time period as a way of describing historical events. For example, “Chapter II: 1802-1804” includes a discussion of the earliest advertisement and availability of powder for sale as described earlier in this dissertation chapter, while “Chapter XI: 1890-1902” explains the reorganization of the business and changes to ancillary units as described above. Yet while the main intent of the publication was to record a comprehensive history, we see from a familial perspective, and not just a company one, the emergence of a formal DuPont story with invention and performance at its
foundation. Wrote Gardner du Pont: “In 1802 E. I. du Pont de Nemours started to build his mills; in 1902 the fourth generation of his family began the second century of the industry that bore the name – his name – under which it had, as he hoped it would, ‘earned a reputation greater than that of others’” (161).

Simultaneously, external events began to have a more substantial influence on how the company conducted its business, both in terms of operations and in managing its identity and relationship with the public. As DuPont entered the next decade of the new century and continued to grow,

its relations with the public [became] more impersonal, older notions of propriety gave way to a new questioning that extended to businesses as well as to individuals. More than ever before, public trust had to be earned by not only introducing diligently but also informing accurately. DuPont would soon learn that the most effective way to address public perceptions was to work with, rather than against, the public’s desire for information (“1939 Better”).

In other words, DuPont needed to revisit its storytelling modalities. Leading up to that time, one of the first ways the company addressed the need for speaking to the public with one voice, especially as it began to diversify its holdings, was to standardize its identity.

Such standardization was a turning point in DuPont’s efforts to maximize the influence of its products on the company reputation, as well as one of the first steps in beginning to tell a more formal institutional story. As Argenti and Forman note, “the three chief contributors to [an] organization’s reputation are: the identity it shapes; the overall coherence of the images the public perceives; and the alignment of [the]
organization’s identity with the images held by its constituencies” (68). The authors suggest that as the only “controllable” part of reputation management, shaping an identity – or the “consistent self-presentation, effective names and logos, memorable symbols and brands” (70) – should be the primary concern of a firm. The earliest representation of the DuPont company identity was actually textual, and DuPont did exhibit concern over its safeguard.

According to an article that appeared in an early edition of the DuPont Magazine, the company’s “first advertising, while protective and not constructive or promotional in character, is interesting because it emphasize[d] the value of a trademark in protecting the consumer against substitution of the product and the manufacturer against division of trade through misleading information as to the origin of competing products” (“Du Pont Advertising” 17). The article references, no doubt, advertisements such as the ones from 1806 and 1816 examined earlier. In addition to an identity in print ads and prior to a formal internal structure of sales and advertising, the company name appeared on its products (typically powder kegs) in the form of the “Du Pont Arc, so-called because it consisted merely of the name ‘Du Pont’ with the letters arranged in an arc around the bunghole of the powder keys” (“DuPont Historical” 4; see also Figure 5). Over time, “a standardized label featuring an American eagle and the DuPont name all enclosed in an oval” (“1999 The miracles”) came to represent the company’s identity (see Figure 6), and is said to have become “synonymous with quality gunpowder, confirming the importance of a standard product brand in developing customer loyalty (“1999 The miracles”). As the firm
Figure 5  Zoom of an illustration featuring the original “Du Pont Arc,” excerpted from an article in the *Cellophane Observer*. Courtesy HML, HID 20110628_093.

Figure 6  An early visual representation of DuPont using the oval eagle graphic, excerpted from an article in the *DuPont Magazine*. Courtesy HML, HID 1941_35_07-08 (Albee 12).
diversified its assets, though, it “sought a ‘superbrand’ to connect all products to the DuPont name” (“1999 The miracles”), exhibiting recognition that solidifying its identity in the marketplace should be of utmost concern.

In 1906, the company commissioned artist G. A. Wolf to create a trademark that “would identify [DuPont] in people’s minds” (Albee 13). Albee states it was utility more than artistry that resulted in the trademark shape – Wolf “decided upon an oval because the letters of the name ‘Du Pont’ fitted into it harmoniously” (13) – but he also suggests the earlier eagle gunpowder mark had something to do with it as well, since it “had an established reputation for quality early in the nineteenth century” (12; see also “1999 The miracles”). Thus, the trademark from its outset took advantage of pre-existing positive and authentic market associations. Interestingly, Wolf’s design was initially rejected by the company but ultimately accepted, used as early as 1907 but not officially adopted until May 1909 (Albee 13). The initial design featured “a serpentine ribbon entwined in the letters, bearing the words ‘Established 1802’” (see Figures 7 and 8) but out of practicality, was removed to facilitate the cutting of “satisfactory stencils for marking wooden kegs and shipping cases” (Albee 13). This minor modification aside plus the removal of the spacing in “DuPont” in 1993, the distinctive oval trademark lives on in near-original form as of 2016 (see Figure 9).

Notwithstanding production details of the trademark, such accounts of how the oval (often capitalized “Oval” by employees and in publications produced by DuPont in what seems to be a tribute) came into use also make intentional reference to
Figure 7  A snapshot of the DuPont oval as designed by Wolf, excerpted from an article in the *DuPont Magazine*. Courtesy HML, HID 1941_35_07-08 (Albee 12).

Figure 8  “DuPont Shotgun Smokeless: Black Sporting Powders.” This 1908 advertisement in *Cosmopolitan* featured a modified version of the DuPont oval. Courtesy HML, HID dpads_1803_00008.
Figure 9  The DuPont oval, as appears here on the cover of a corporate identity manual circa 1989, appears unchanged in 2015 save for the spacing in “DuPont.” Courtesy HML, Lavoisier Library, Box 30.
its critical role in establishing DuPont’s identity and reputation. As Kinnane points out, “as the company diversified and began competing in an increasing number of markets, the distinctive oval trademark…kept the company’s identity before the public” (63). In addition, Albee’s mid-century account posits of the oval:

Its utility may be tested, however, by asking a simple question. The question is: “What would the Company do without it?” With some 5,000 products to identify, with literally millions of contacts between the Company and the public established each year, a ready, quick way of saying, “This is made by Du Pont” is necessary…With thirty-four years behind it, and with a century of tradition behind those thirty-four years, the oval is a worth-while item indeed in the Company’s inventory.

It is never the trade-mark alone that counts. It is the standing of the Company behind the trade-mark. The oval is symbolic of the benefits of chemical research and development and has come to mean “Better Things for Better Living…Through Chemistry.” (13)

About a decade after Albee’s “The History of the Du Pont Oval,” an issue of a newsletter for employees at the cellophane plant at Old Hickory, Tennessee, again described highlights in the company’s trademark history:

Today, Du Pont has 452 trade-marks. Best-known is the Du Pont Oval, adopted in present form in 1909. The Oval appears in advertisements and on cartons, labels and stationery thousands of times each year and has great value as a badge of the Company’s business reputation. Every employe[e] benefits in job stability and new opportunities from customer acceptance of the Oval as a mark of product quality.” (“DuPont Historical” 4)

14 As referenced earlier in this section, historical records indicate the oval was first used in 1907 and adopted officially in May 1909 (Albee 13).
It seemed as though the company leadership at the start of the century clearly understood the need to more consistently represent itself visually in the marketplace. What management was less prepared for was an organized public relations effort that extended beyond its visual identity – those other building blocks of public perception and corporate image alignment with constituencies that Argenti and Forman point out as key to reputation management – to face an increasingly turbulent public environment.

*Selling Stories: Promoting, and Repairing, Reputation through the DuPont Magazine*

Historians Hounshell and Smith have called the second decade of DuPont’s next hundred years, from 1911 to 1921, “the most volatile one in the company’s entire history,” citing four organizational restructurings, antitrust suits, transfer and acquisition of family stock, World War I, expansion into new business areas and a national recession as great challenges facing the changing company (11). In particular, public concern over big business and the monopolization of industries brought about the Sherman Antitrust Act. DuPont could no longer uphold its reputation through a familiar logo on a non-diversified, albeit high-quality, product line, and after the acquisition of 108 competitors in just five years beginning in 1902 (Kinnane 71), DuPont quickly came under the scrutiny of public media. In 1903, the *New York Times* assigned the moniker of “Smokeless Powder Trust” while “the military grew increasingly suspicious” (Hounshell and Smith 31). In addition, accusations by Robert S. Waddell, a former sales agent for the company who later became president of his
own company, made headlines. According to historians Alfred D. Chandler and Stephen Salsbury, Waddell “launched a bitter attack against his former employers” and asserted that the du Ponts ‘daily, continually, and openly defy and break the [antitrust and other] laws of the states and the United States’...the attack made sensational reading and it received widespread newspaper coverage. “Nation in Grip of Powder Trust” headlined the Chicago Tribune, which continued in subcaptions, ‘Robert S. Waddell of Peoria Files Charges Against the Du Pont Company—Says Law Is Violated—United States Declared to be Mulcted of $2,520,000 a Year in Illegal Profits’” (261).

It wasn’t long before DuPont faced an antitrust suit filed by the U.S. Justice Department. Between the summers of 1907 and 1911, DuPont was involved with antitrust proceedings, ultimately found to be in violation of the act, and by 1912 was forced to divest its explosives assets, resulting in the creation of the Hercules and Atlas Powder Companies. In the words of Kinnane, “The prolonged antitrust battle should have alerted DuPont executives to the importance of public relations, but their righteous indignation blinded them to this valuable lesson” (75). Chandler and Salsbury’s account of managerial reaction aligns, noting “Pierre spent relatively little energy combating antitrust activity during the early years of the attack” (228). However, all was not entirely lost on the executives.

One of the company’s first substantial organized outlets for storytelling as a means of public relations was the Du Pont Magazine and Agricultural Blaster, which
launched publication shortly after the antitrust dealings in 1913. Though Kinnane suggests company leadership lacked awareness of the need to better engage with the public, this magazine was an important first step in the right direction. The magazine ran for one year before its name was abbreviated in 1914 to *Du Pont Magazine*, and maintained publication under the same name with one small shift in editorial style (removal of the spacing in “*Du Pont*” in the March/April 1993 issue), until ultimately ceasing publication in 2003. Despite the longevity of its print run, the magazine had fewer than fifteen editors, and in fact, much consistency in presentation of content over long periods of time. However, little to no examination exists of the *DuPont Magazine*. As a “substantial yet relatively little-known and seldom-acclaimed sector of American magazine publishing” (Riley xiii), corporate magazines offer a window into the broader storytelling activities of firms. This dissertation presents the first close analysis of the *DuPont Magazine* – from cover art and circulation data to taglines and timely topics – and offers unique snapshots of how DuPont told its story in print and responded to increased public scrutiny as it moved beyond its first hundred years of business.

Kinnane suggests the publication was intended to “promote DuPont products” (63), though other accounts both within and outside the company suggest product promotion was just one of a few reasons behind its creation. According to Sam G. Riley’s *Corporate Magazines of the United States*, such publications gave companies the opportunity to “exercise control to one degree or another in getting across the desired message to their target audiences” (xiii). Indeed, the magazine was an outlet
for DuPont to select content to suit its goals, and craft narratives to inform and persuade constituents in a post-antitrust dealings world. Plus, with a formal company identity established shortly before publication began, the magazine took advantage of regularly putting the DuPont oval visual identity in the hands of the public. This idea that Riley suggests of control over messaging deserves a note of caution. As organization studies scholars like Barbara Czarniawska have shown, narrative can function to create an “illusion of controllability” for managers (Narrating 38). In other words, stories told by a company privilege institutional motives, while the perceived understanding of those stories by consumers and stakeholders may be affected by external or other factors. This idea is similar to Argenti and Forman’s building blocks of reputation, wherein “identity-building is the only part of reputation management [firms] can completely control” (70). Thus, the analysis of storied content in the early issues of the DuPont Magazine reveals the company’s attempts at shaping information at the same time it considers the context of public and government scrutiny.

Riley suggests “When the magazine was conceived…with George Frank Lord as its editor, the idea of an external publication designed to strengthen the reputation of the company while openly selling its products and services was new” (71). Lord’s editorial message to the “Du Pont Army of Customers” confirms the publication was created with the intent to “keep all members of that army in touch with developments in our manufacturing process and selling plans…to keep our entire line of products before each of our friends, believing that a customer in one line may be interested in something else we have to offer;” at the same time, though, he noted the “army”
included the “good customers of ours, together with our own manufacturing and selling organization” (1). This is a crucial point because it helps to not only understand the audience for the magazine, but to explain the variation in content.

For example, the inside cover of the first edition featured a full-page advertisement for DuPont brand blasting powder (see Figure 10), as well as anecdotal and informational stories on the use of blasting powder and dynamite, and DuPont’s newest venture in manufactured leather. But the periodical also included advice to those internal to the organization. In articles like “Letters from Customers Make Good Advertising” (Lord, _Du Pont_ 20), and “Send Items to Newspapers,” the company spoke directly to its sales force, offering advice like, “It pays to let the newspapers know what you are doing. Send them descriptions of your work. They will publish the matter as news and it makes excellent advertising for you…” Don’t fail to let the newspapers know all about what you are doing. Get all the free advertising you

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15 Though this examination focuses on institutional storytelling for external audiences, it is interesting to note the influence of the political climate on those articles intended for employees. As historian Roland Marchand states, the rise of magazines for employees in the first part of the century “suggests that the particular labor problems of the wartime period, together with the culmination of labor turnover rates in major industries, had inspired employers to look to internal publications to bind employees more closely to the corporation.” This included editors who “revealed a compulsion to sermonize” (109), and we see restrained evidence of this in the July 1915 edition of the _DPM_ in the article, “The Experience of an Office Boy,” in which Guy Davis gave a firsthand account of the “many pleasures of [his] position,” and the editor suggested he was an essential “link in the machinery of the organization that may well be studied by all” (7).
Figure 10  Inside cover of the first *DPM* promotes a DuPont product while emphasizing both “a Century’s experience” and the “Scientific incorporation of high grade materials by the most modern methods…” Courtesy HML (Lord, *DuPont*).
can” (Lord, *Du Pont* 23).

A retrospective in a later *DuPont Magazine* article also gives deeper insight into the public relations climate of the company and the intent behind the magazine. The company first sought assistance from an external source around 1910 “to devise an organized plan for determining the extent of expenditures, and character of advertising most likely to benefit the business” (“*Du Pont Advertising*” 18). In fact, that expert was Lord himself, who was ultimately invited to become the advertising manager at DuPont in March 1911. A report in the March 1919 issue of the magazine on the value of DuPont advertising credited Lord as then director of the unit with publishing the *DuPont Magazine*, affectionately calling it “the most pretentious house organ produced” (“*Du Pont Advertising*” 20). The first issues also generally refrained from directly addressing any leftover anti-DuPont sentiment from the antitrust findings against the firm, but instead touted the qualities, benefits, and brand promise of DuPont products through informational articles, photos, and stories (see Figures 11-12).

The start of World War I marked a shift in the general tone and authorship of the *DuPont Magazine*, and the August edition in particular offers insight into how the company responded with counter-stories to the damage its reputation sustained during the antitrust proceedings. In a front-page editorial, then-vice president of the DuPont Powder Company E. G. Buckner responded to two articles published in *Harper’s Weekly* on June 27, 1914, “The Powder Trust” and “The Powder Plot.” Calling the articles a “great injustice,” Buckner retorted: “As a matter of fact there is
Figure 11  An early cover of the DPM reveals contents containing informational articles focused on products and stories to engage stakeholders. Courtesy HML, HID 1913_01_05.
The recurring “Farming with Dynamite” section of the DPM, as seen here in the December 1913 issue, used photos and brief testimonials with customers as characters to reinforce the DuPont brand promise (13). Courtesy HML, HID 1913_01_06.
no statement, inference or conclusion reflecting on the Du Pont Powder Company in either article that is not wholly fallacious” (1). Asking readers, “What are the facts?” Buckner went on to describe the company’s manufacturing processes, contracts abroad, involvement of the U.S. government, and falsities of the “powder secrets” (2), ultimately concluding that he was “justified in contending that the charges carried in the two articles in Harper’s Weekly are without warrant or excuse and are grossly and outrageously unjust and unfair” (5). A one-and-a-half-page article, “Why the Biggest is Best,” followed Buckner’s response, and acknowledged the division in the previous year of the company into three “competitive corporations” that maintain “unquestioned leadership in [the] research, manufacture and development of explosives” and asserted that the company’s “century old reputation as pioneer and peerless continue[d]” (5, emphasis original). This is one of the earliest detailed and public responses clearly designed to counter public perception as the company grasped at maintaining control of its reputation.

By calling on past performance, the corporate narrator of the second piece attempted to assert authenticity by speaking directly to the reader and emphatically pointing out “the Du Pont Company made dynamite a mercantile commodity;” the narrator further appealed to emotion by suggesting “the wise consumer or dealer cannot be pried loose from the Du Pont Company by concessions or hopeful promises, even though made in good faith. The best outlook for profit to him lies in adhering steadfastly to the explosives manufacturer that has “delivered the goods” year after year. History is a more reliable guide than faith” (“Why the Biggest” 6).
Distinguishing the authorial voice in this follow-up piece as a general author is actually a play on organizational identity. As Czarniawska points out:

The introduction of a Narrator is a common device. Here is a person who is telling the story, but the author could equally well have been somebody else—although this may be the Narrator acting within the text in the role of Author…In terms of organizational identity, this strategy opens up many possibilities. A Narrator could be a PR officer, for instance, who is telling a story of a mighty Author, a founder, perhaps, or a CEO. Or the Narrator might be the representative of a collective Author, perhaps an Organization… (Narrating 50)

In an authorial role, the narrator becomes a character, fashioned perhaps by Lord as managing editor, then situated as a follow-up article to Buckner’s piece, rides on the coattails of the previous story’s executive authorship. By using this technique, the voice is “given special reflective status to increase their credibility” (Czarniawska, Narrating 51).

Subsequent editions of the DuPont Magazine resumed a less defensive tone, and the magazine continued publication in a similar format through the later part of the year, when for reasons not specified outright, but likely due to the war, it suspended printing from October 1916 through April 1918. Following that absence, DuPont was succeeding financially but “its public image was faring less well. Americans were deeply divided over the war before weighing in for the Allies in 1917” (Kinnane 76). The effects of public skepticism were not lost on Pierre du Pont, though, who “knew the risks as well as the opportunities of war production” and
absorbed quickly the many public relations lessons the Big Company had taught him. The antitrust suit, along with the war profits charges, suggested that diversification might be a prudent strategy for DuPont...the company soon tapped into [the nearly $310 million it earned during the war] and scientific expertise for a new purpose—serving American consumers (82).

Post-war editions of the magazine reflected this change.

When the magazine reappeared in May 1918, it did so with an illustrated, full-color cover that would last, save for black and white printing in the early 1930s, for the remaining life of the periodical. Not long after, an article from the editor in the January 1919 edition signaled a changing era for corporate advertising. “We are at the beginning of a greater advertising epoch which will be notable in an increase in the number and kind of advertisers,” wrote Lord ("Advertising World" 3), who continued with a similar sentiment in the March issue, as the opening quotation of this chapter suggests. Recognizing that “each satisfied customer, like the pebble thrown into still water, becomes the center of a widening circle of buying influence,” DuPont for one of the first times overtly recognized the impact of public opinion (and likewise acknowledged, “each dissatisfied customer becomes the similar center of a circle of antagonism” (Lord, “The Supremacy” 2)). The company’s subsequent efforts moved beyond the magazine to tell the DuPont story to an even broader audience.

*Moving Beyond the DuPont Magazine*

While the *DuPont Magazine* constituted a concerted effort to communicate with constituents and solidify the company’s identity and reputation through story, it
was just a singular tool in the company’s still-uncoordinated public relations arsenal. It wasn’t until the 1920s that both the company’s organizational structure, and as a result its storytelling approach, shifted. During 1919 to 1921, DuPont “proved unable to cope with the effects of war-related growth and the post-war depression” under its organizational structure, and by September 1921, reorganized into a number of departments dedicated to product lines, as well as ancillary units assigned to execute specific staff functions including advertising and publicity (see Appendix A). This shift in unit structure also marks one of the biggest inflection points in DuPont’s storytelling history.

A reprint of a piece that had been previously distributed to employees and stockholders appeared in the July-August 1922 issue of the DuPont Magazine under the headline, “The Most Important Communication the du Pont Company Has Yet Made to the American Public” (1). Through the institutional voice (no author attributed), the company took responsibility for extant public misperception of its activities; acknowledged the public’s desire for more transparency; and announced its objectives to clarify company history, its products, and its goals through a new national advertising campaign. Hindsight afforded the company a new perspective on how it might approach the task at hand, and so the article started with an abbreviated history of DuPont, from E. I.’s relationship with Jefferson in the early 1800s, to the company’s role in providing powder to the U.S. government in numerous battles and wars, from the Mexican-American War of the mid-1800s through the most recent
World War ending in November 1918. Although it did not explicitly address the antitrust proceedings, the article wryly asked of the reader, “Do you suppose for one minute that the desire for personal gain could keep men at their desks and machines, hours after brain and body had tired, with nothing left but the will that held them to their tasks?” and later called DuPont’s involvement “as a defender of our country in times of war…inspiring and dramatic” (2). Having thus felt it clarified the first twelve decades of the company’s manufacture and sale of explosives, the corporate author then turned once again to aiding the public’s understanding of its latest diversification strategy.

DuPont focused on chemistry to facilitate its transition between peace and wartime activities and to explain the many new products it was then manufacturing:

…the subject of greatest interest and greatest practical value today, the point least understood by the public, the basic reason why the du Pont Company is not clearly understood by the public: the reason for the present du Pont family of diversified products and the reason for their outstanding quality and reasonable cost.

Explosives, Pyralin, Fabrikoid, Paints and Varnishes, Lacquers and Enamels, Dyestuffs, Chemicals and Pigments—in fact, each product that bears the du Pont Oval is a product developed through chemistry—either made from the same basic materials or through application of a similar chemical control in manufacturing processes.

Each du Pont product is a result of chemical research and applied chemical knowledge. (“Most Important” 2, emphasis original)

16 This approach to neatly packaging the company’s history is a key element in the perpetuation of the DuPont super story, and is a technique that will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.
The company concluded it was for these reasons the chemical engineer would be the subject of its new institutional advertising series, which aimed at both elucidating company diversification efforts while simultaneously supporting promotion of individual DuPont products.

There are important implications to the company’s decision to run this institutional advertising campaign (versus solely singular product advertisements). According to historian Roland Marchand, corporations typically implemented broader company advertisements as part of strategic planning efforts and to engage employees and stakeholders – which the DuPont case explicitly confirms at the article’s opening. Marchand suggests that “series disclosed the didactic impetus that lay behind many an institutional campaign,” and “corporate leaders believed that the public ought to be grateful to receive the broader civic edification of institutional ads” (170). We see this in the tone of the DuPont Magazine article, with statements such as, “The company is credited by the uninformed public with a hundred and one activities with which it has nothing to do,” and “We are proud of what the du Pont Company has accomplished. We want the public to know the facts. Knowledge of the facts cannot fail to build a stronger feeling of good-will towards the du Pont Company on the part of the nation at large” (“Most Important” 1). The institutional voice spoke with a slight air of condescension, while conceding its obligation to educate the public if it wanted to improve the company’s reputation.

DuPont’s choice of the chemical engineer as protagonist is also an important one. According to historian Pap A. Ndiaye, it was chemical engineers who “changed
the culture of [DuPont], drawing it into the public sphere, while responding to a massive demand for everyday consumer goods” (3). Gunpowder and explosives brought DuPont much success as a company and enabled its growth into a diversified firm, but with that expansion came a need to explain the company’s changing direction to the public and the need for a reformulated story. It was for this reason that “chemical engineers proved to be valuable assets when it came to diversifying the range of products and coordinating the synergies needed to deal with massive simultaneous investments in several fields” (Ndiaye 61). In this sense, the chemical engineer served as teacher, educating the public through science on the benefits of DuPont products as well as DuPont’s contributions to society. Understanding these implications of DuPont’s choice to (1) run an institutional advertising series, and (2) replace the earlier farmers and trapshooters with the chemical engineer as the main character, informs the following analysis of the advertising narratives.

At the broadest level, each advertisement explicitly identified itself as part of a series, an element which Marchand suggests could be common practice for internal identification by advertisers and agencies, but was selected intentionally for institutional ads to support their prominence and “distinguish corporate image” (169). DuPont also used this opportunity to continue to assert authenticity through the oval, noting the intent of the advertising series was to “obtain the full measure of the nation’s good-will which the Company needs and deserves, and so bring added sales value to the du Pont Oval wherever it appears” (“Most Important” 1). These are two important points in relation to Forman’s storytelling framework. For Forman, “a
corporate brand serves as a frame for stories, showing the common themes about the company that unite apparently very different stories” (52). This is precisely what the chemical engineer advertisements accomplished, as Figures 13 and 14 show. The chemical engineer was the consistent character throughout the series, portrayed via an illustration of a man clad in a lab apron, holding up a test tube for examination. The DuPont oval was also a central figure in relative proximity to the engineer and was summoned in an attempt to clarify how plastics, paints, and varnishes could all belong to one company. Explosives, once the primary focus of DuPont ads, were buried a few paragraphs deep while newer innovations were brought to the fore. But despite this shift, the foundation of the super story – emphasizing scientific innovations from a science-based company – remained. The ad in Figure 13 in particular noted, “The du Pont Oval appears on this varied, this seemingly unrelated family of products, because of the ability of du Pont Chemical Engineers, who have been able to utilize the chemical knowledge…in making these articles that the du Pont Company feels are of value and service…to the public” (“This is DuPont” 257).

Another consistent element in the series was attribution of knowledge to the chemical engineer. While the specific subject matter varied from broader societal implications to product-specific items like paints and textiles, ads regularly included commentary such as “In little more than a Century He has advanced Civilization by Ten Centuries!” (“Most Important” 2; see also Figure 14). The physical stance of the chemical engineer added to the fluency of the story; he stands skillfully swirling a beaker overhead while examining its contents, suggesting he is continually at work
“This is DuPont Oval.” One in a series of DuPont’s institutional advertising campaign featuring the chemical engineer. This advertisement appeared in Forbes magazine, December 9, 1922. Courtesy HML, HID dpads_1803_00064.
Figure 14  Excerpt from the July/August 1922 *DPM* showing mini reproductions of initial ads in the series (“Most Important” 2). Courtesy HML, HID 1922_16_04.
and looking to the future to find solutions through chemistry. Forman suggests, “especially for technical products and services that are not easily understandable, stories about people enjoying the benefits of the technology humanize a company and what it sells” (35). The focus on technological development in DuPont’s case also reflects an increasing reliance on the implications of scientific knowledge to its product innovation. Using the chemical engineer, and connecting seemingly disparate items through a narrative series, DuPont also addressed public skepticism about its diversified and expansive post-war growth.

Importantly, the promotion of scientific products and heavy reliance on the character of the chemical engineer signaled the growing absence of DuPont promotions around gunpowder and explosives. This is perhaps the first of what would become many formal instances where narratives by brevity or omission reduced the company’s first century of storytelling to that of gunpowder manufacturer. We also see the emergence of chemistry itself as a character,¹⁷ both in DuPont’s corporate strategy and in its storytelling as a means for communicating the innovations it was bringing to a wider consumer audience. The scientific character clearly marked a transition from directing promotions at the upper class, country club elite to appealing more generally to a broad audience across classes by emphasizing the virtues of modern chemistry and industrialization.

¹⁷ See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth analysis of chemistry personified.
Despite this broader coordination and the use of clear and compelling stories, internal correspondence showed the campaign was actually short lived due to a lack of funding. In November, general manager C. W. Phellis wrote in a note to then president Irénée du Pont, “Our Advertising Department, a majority of the Executive Committee members and a majority of the General Managers favor a continuance of the campaign,” citing “a preponderance of expert and practical opinion on the subject” (1). He also explained the lack of willingness of other general managers to contribute funding, which seemed to be an issue because of apparent perception that the campaign favored one department over another. To that claim, Phellis emphasized

The objective is to protect and promote the name DU PONT, not PYRALIN. As to what particular department or business of Du Pont ownership will receive the most benefit through the process of general advertising, no one can say with certainty. and [sic] that feature should not influence the decision to go ahead, because the idea is for the Company to so favorably impress the public with the name DU PONT that all of its businesses will be favorably received, insofar as the question of good will is involved.” (2, emphasis original)

Ten days later, Irénée responded that, after discussion with the Executive Committee, the institutional advertising would not continue. Marchand suggests that the committee had only “briefly suspended its disbelief in the usefulness of institutional advertising” (194) and that the committee’s “lukewarm support” meant the enthusiasm of a few general managers willing to support the campaign could not withstand “an effective veto by several divisional general managers who refused to contribute to the cost” (Marchand 219n47). Still, the series effectively advanced public understanding of its
growing product line and further solidified “an all-embracing corporate persona” (195). And despite appearing formally as part of an ongoing series, ads particularly in the paint division continued to appear at least through 1924 in publications like the *Saturday Evening Post* (see Figures 15 and 16).

The *DuPont Magazine* also perpetuated the character of the chemical engineer through at least 1926, with articles like “When Farm and Factory Team Up” (see Figure 17). Through his skill and research, the chemical engineer was positioned as the scientific sorcerer finding solutions to agricultural overproduction and waste “by transforming corn, wheat, cotton…into a thousand and one commercial products—from motion picture film…to articles resembling marble…pearl and linen” (Stine 6). While the accompanying illustrations diverged from the established character (the chemical engineer in this article sat instead looking through a microscope), the narrative worked on the assumption of extant perception of the chemical engineer both as a DuPont employee and as an important contributor to societal wellbeing and change.

In all, the chemical engineer campaign tells an important story about DuPont’s attempt to be more transparent with the public about its activities; it also offers a window into the company’s first organized efforts to refine its identity through the use of the oval and scientific claims of invention and innovation to support a brand promise. In the words of Marchand, as happened with many institutional advertisements of the time, the chemical engineer series became “works of art both
"The final test of quality is use—but the du Pont Oval guarantees Quality in the can"

—says the Chemical Engineer

Open a dozen cans of prepared paint—the eye finds little difference in their contents. But when you start painting, then one brand stands out—it covers more surface and covers it better.

And when wind and rain and sun have tested it, the superiority of that brand, its durability, uniformity and fastness of color are proven by service.

That’s du Pont.

The basic reason for du Pont quality lies in a new idea—the union of paint bases and chemical brains, of leading paint manufacturers and du Pont Chemical Engineers. Now to the experience of over a century of paint making is added a scientific system of control which positively ensures uniform high quality.

The du Pont Oval on the can guarantees satisfactory service; whether it be paint, varnish, enamel or stain. The dealer who displays this Oval will gladly help you select the right du Pont product for your use.

R. J. DU PONT DE NEMOURS & CO., Inc.
Chicago, Varnish Works
Chicago, Ill.

Dow & Co., Ltd.
18th St. & Golf, Hines Road

Du Pont offers a special “Paint Prescription Service” to Industrial Plants, specifying the proper paint or varnish product for every purpose and every manufactured article. Write nearest office.

Figure 15  “The Final Test of Quality Is Use – But the Du Pont Oval Guarantees Quality in the Can – Says the Chemical Engineer.” This 1923 advertisement in the Saturday Evening Post continues the story of the chemical engineer and promotion of the DuPont oval. Courtesy HML, HID dpads_1803_00058.
Figure 16  “Chariots of Content: DuPont Duco.” This 1924 advertisement appeals more to human emotion with the illustration of a family, while still perpetuating the character of the chemical engineer with the appearance of the now-familiar expert in the upper right of the ad. Courtesy HML, HID dpads_1803_00074.
Figure 17  Articles like “When Farm and Factory Team Up” advanced the chemical engineer character (seen in the circle at upper right) through at least 1926 (Stine 6). Courtesy HML, HID 1926_20_08.
individually and as a collection. In sequence, they…constitute[d] a company epic” (170). What DuPont learned, though, was that its epic story was about to enter a new chapter, one in which executive leadership needed to more fully embrace the benefits of institutional advertising and turn to outside expertise to better tell its story.
Chapter 4
FROM THE PAGE TO THE PODIUM: SCENES OF STORYTELLING AT DUPONT

“I do not favor at all the proposition of Institutional Advertising under the title of “Deeper Significance of the du Pont Oval.” It is my recollection that we have been through this trip twice before, and both times came to the conclusion that the advantage was not worth the cost. I don’t see any reason to feel that we would do better now; in fact, it seems to me that, necessarily, Institutional Advertising is of less value in depressed times than in prosperous times.”

— Lammot du Pont, 1932 (“Letter to Brown”)

“By [1920], the Progressive Era’s muckraking attacks on big business had subsided. Business leaders were now more inclined to fret about labor radicalism and about a diffuse problem that affected their internal functioning as well as their external repute and political security: the widespread perception of the giant corporation as impersonal, aloof, and devoid of any ‘human touch.’”

— Roland Marchand (131)

Public relations at the DuPont company during its first century and a quarter were predicated largely on the reputation of the firm’s founders and its proven history as a manufacturer of high quality gunpowder and explosives. The telling and retelling of the company’s creation coupled with production of a corporate identity through the oval formed the foundation of the DuPont super story, while ad hoc advertising established the firm’s market position and protected its name. When the company faced antitrust charges and public scrutiny as a result of postwar profits and diversification, though, it was forced to think differently about conveying its narrative to the public. Through the short-lived institutional campaign of the early 1920s that featured the character of the chemical engineer – advertising not a singular product but
instead the idea of chemistry’s contributions to everyday living – DuPont began to tell a more formal story with the goal of educating the consumer on how its people and products were advancing society and improving everyday living through science.

But as the opening quotations of this chapter suggest, DuPont faced two hurdles before it would ultimately be forced to more formally organize its efforts around a campaign designed to strengthen the brand and engender trust: a perception by executive leadership that institutional advertising was not entirely necessary (L. du Pont, “Letter to Brown”); and a need, fueled by public desire for transparency of institutional motives, to appear more “human” (Marchand 131). In this chapter, I examine performed storytelling initiated by DuPont to elucidate how the company became more strategic in engaging with its stakeholders. The analysis begins with the earliest DuPont public exhibits, from an electronic display to boardwalk demonstrations. I then explore the impact of the Nye Committee hearings on DuPont’s involvement in the munitions trade post-World War I, including the scrutiny and infamous “merchant of death” charges the company faced from the public and press. Finally, I trace the company’s public relations operations in response to the tensions of the 1930s, namely the decision to enlist external consultant Bruce Barton. This section explores Barton’s rollout of the “Better Things for Better Living…Through Chemistry” slogan as the firm endeavored to reinvent its reputation. In particular, I examine stories performed within the campaign, from sponsorship of *The Cavalcade of America* radio program to World’s Fairs exhibits, including specific narratives around nylon. Taken together, these scenes of storytelling illustrate how the DuPont
interfaced with employees and the public in an attempt to further manage its identity and refine its super story.

_Some Storied Things Before “Better Things”_

DuPont profited significantly from wartime production of gunpowder and explosives in the early 1900s, but that success did not come without a cost. As Chapter Three discusses, DuPont faced scrutiny from the public and the government, and was forced in 1912 to divest its explosives assets upon being found in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. The chemical engineer storytelling series was a brief entrée by DuPont into organized institutional storytelling designed specifically to counter public misunderstanding of the company’s diversification strategy – its first major inflection point. But when a handful of general managers from some units refused to contribute additional funds to support the ongoing cost of the campaign (“Administrative Papers”), advertising slowly faded back into ad hoc mode. Historian Roland Marchand also notes that the firm “remained skeptical about the need to spend large sums for image creation” (193), and had only “briefly suspended its disbelief in the usefulness of institutional advertising” (194) to run the chemical engineer campaign. Much of this resistance came from the leadership, who did not yet entirely accept the idea of corporate advertising to influence public opinion. According to historical correspondence, Lammot du Pont, who led the company from 1926 to 1940 was adamant on two points: first, that Du Pont should waste no funds on institutional advertising or publicity that did not directly promote the
sale of its products, and second, that since most Du Pont products were fabricated by another manufacturer into consumer goods in which the Du Pont material was no longer identifiable, Du Pont should not concern itself much with the ultimate consumers (Marchand 218).

The first opening quotation of this chapter, from Lammot to one Mr. J. T. Brown on November 10, 1932, further evidences this attitude of resistance. Lammot was blunt about his lackadaisical sentiment toward organized communications; even years later as chairman of the board, he called himself “a “bear” who did “not really take much stock in institutional advertising,” feeling instead that “advertising should be indulged in only where it serves to sell or to acquaint the public with the manufacturer’s product” (“Letter to Shannon”). He expressed his lukewarm views on other forms of outreach as well, for example, calling himself “all wet” in his “thinking about moving pictures” (“Letter to Hart”)—and he was not alone in his view. A number of large corporations found themselves in the midst of public relations initiatives at the turn of the century in what Marchand calls the “corporate quest for social and moral legitimacy” (3). Because they often discovered themselves in a position to produce reactive public relations, or what Marchand calls “a defensive response to actual or anticipated external criticism,” organizations questioned the efficacy of advertising at the institutional level (3). Despite such apathy surrounding public relations, though, a variety of continued marketing efforts – albeit absent any formal strategic coordination – still contributed to DuPont’s expanding super story.

Though DuPont’s most famous institutional campaign did not begin for another two decades, the company did connect with audiences through a variety of
public displays in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In 1916, “R.R.M. Carpenter, then director of DuPont’s Development Department, recommended establishing a Publicity Bureau. At the end of the month, the Executive Committee approved the idea, and DuPont took its first step toward shaping public opinion at the dawn of a new era of mass communications” (Kinnane 75). It was around that same time that the company announced a plan to use twenty-four billboards in a specific campaign to promote trapshooting. The painted displays (see Figure 18) appeared alongside railroad routes in seven states, as well as along the eastern seaboard, in Pennsylvania, and in Illinois. At a size of twenty- by eighty-feet, the billboards promised to “boost the game” by drawing attention of passersby (“1916 Advertising” 4). The company also invested in “a more spectacular display [consisting] of the largest electric motion sign in America and probably in all the world…on the roof of Young’s Million Dollar Pier at Atlantic City” (4), which was scheduled to run “from dusk to about midnight every night for three years” (6). What’s more, the sign was expected to be seen by millions of people from around the world, thousands of whom would not be familiar with trapshooting, and the company felt it was the most effective way to show them the sport “better than could be done by any moving picture or cut or story” (6). Yet through the outdoor visuals, DuPont was telling a story: this was just the first time the company used a graphic display to do so (see Figure 19). In fact, the article detailed, much in the way vignettes would be detailed for a play, fourteen specific scenes depicting the progression of the visual spectacle.
Figure 18  “Miniature reproduction of [DuPont’s] new painted bulletins recently erected along the railroads.” Courtesy HML, HID 1916_06_01.
Figure 19  A reproduction of DuPont’s first electric sign that appeared in 1916. Courtesy HML, HID 1916_06_01.
The electric sign was not the only publicity DuPont sought in Atlantic City. In April 1916, the company opened a storefront on the boardwalk to visually exhibit its product lines. The move was an "outgrowth of a sales promotion idea to establish another route to public understanding, and to combat the prevailing impression that the Du Pont Company was engaged solely in the manufacture of explosives" ("Du Pont Products" 7). The exhibit was ever-changing, with the latest DuPont products and their uses displayed for public consumption. The main point of the boardwalk exhibit was distilled by the company to one word – service:

The exhibit serves the general public, the Du Pont Company and its customers, particularly dealers and manufacturers who handle of use Du Pont products.

The exhibit renders an educational service. The public is invited to view the products displayed; to ask questions about them; to learn what products are used in making merchandise of all kinds, and why some types of materials are better than others for specific uses ("Du Pont Products" 9).

More than just service, though, the boardwalk exhibit brought DuPont’s story – now one of serving the consumer through science and technology versus solely explosives – to life. The exhibit was not designed solely to criticize the competition, but by default, “the superior advantages of Du Pont products [were] made clear by explanation, and where practicable, by demonstration” (9). The recurring themes of quality and superior products made possible by scientific advancements were clearly emphasized through DuPont’s real-time storytelling at the Atlantic City exhibit.
Per Janis Forman’s storytelling framework, using modes like DuPont’s boardwalk displays represents authentic and fluent storytelling, which engenders trust and reinforces a brand. “Stories about a brand that are credible, realistic, tangible, and intended to be truthful give people confidence in the brand, and well-crafted stories engage and hold people’s attention” (91). The DuPont Magazine added further substance to the company story. While the boardwalk exhibit offered a public display of the DuPont service-through-science story, “The Du Pont Products Exhibit” article in the December 1920 issue told more specific stories about both consumers and products. For example, the article highlighted “three or four classes of visitors” who frequented the exhibit. Those classes included the casual passerby prompted by curiosity; the confused customer looking for “a high-class retail store;” the “regular visitors…who habitually visit the exhibit each year to see what new products have been developed;” and a “class of tired, jaded business men” who, after a few days of vacationing, found “the business instinct reassert[ed] itself” and were thus drawn into the exhibit to see if anything piqued their interest (9). To illustrate the impact of the exhibit on the latter two classes, the article offered sample stories in which inquiries translated into business:

Another visitor enters. He has been attracted by a window display of lamps finished with Pyralin enamels. He is Mr. James, a buyer for a Milwaukee department store; he is stopping in Atlantic City only for the week-end and expects to leave for New York the following Monday. His question is, “Where can I buy these lamps?” The Du Pont representative furnishes the address of the New York City sales office of the lamp manufacturer. By next mail a letter goes to the manager
with full details and a statement that Mr. James will call. And the buying transaction is concluded there (10).

This direct-to-consumer interaction represents one of the earliest opportunities the public had to engage directly with DuPont products, but also with company representatives. Notes the corporate authorial voice:

Considering that the Du Pont Company is a manufacturer, selling through jobbers, dealers and wholesalers, it has little opportunity to know, except indirectly, what the public needs and wants. The Atlantic City Exhibit, attracting as it does thousands of visitors from all parts of the country, furnishes a meeting place where the ultimate buyers and users of Du Pont products can express their ideas and state their wants. And they do…Second, and perhaps most important, it enables the company to increase its output by developing new trade channels” (“Du Pont Products” 9).

Ten years later, the exhibit was described in a similar manner, with more explicit reference to the scientific aspect – a clear trend in the refinement of the company story – again by a corporate voice in an article titled, “What Does the Du Pont Products Exhibit Mean to the Millions:”

The exhibit visualizes the part industrial chemistry plays in the manufacturing activities of the nation. It promotes a better understanding of the character and utility of du Pont products. It presents an advertising advantage to the manufacturers who show merchandise there, and likewise builds prestige for the du Pont Company. And it educates the public” (5).

The Atlantic City boardwalk exhibit lasted for nearly four decades (see Figure 20), ultimately closing in 1955, and having entertained – but more importantly from company perspective, educated and served – over 26 million people. It was public
relations of this sort that Lammot du Pont favored (Kinnane 127), but not all those in leadership positions shared this view, particularly once the external business and political environment called for more strategic and responsive communication with the public.

A Different Story Beyond the Boardwalk

Though public exhibits like the one in Atlantic City were telling an increasingly scientific public service story about DuPont, political activity by the du Pont family and wartime business for the firm told another story. Just a few years prior to the burgeoning of the boardwalk exhibit, the company had sourced much of the smokeless powder and explosives to Allied forces for use during World War I – and its primary customers included the United States Army and Navy. However, the business-to-government relationship was not without its difficulties. In the words of historian Pap A. Ndiaye, company and government relations “were fraught with tension and punctuated by periods of crisis that became acute in the first years of the new century, during World War I, and particularly in the 1930s, the first years of the New Deal” (106). Catalysts for the tension included du Pont family political actions, a Senate Committee investigation on the munitions industry chaired by Senator Gerald

18 The DPM notes the exhibit, “started in a modest way, [had] attained proportions scarcely dreamed of by the originator of the idea” between 1916 and 1920, having doubled in size and attracted almost 100,000 people in 1920 alone (“The Du Pont Products” 7).
Figure 20  “Display of the DuPont story at DuPont Company exhibit in Atlantic City, New Jersey.” One of the many non-motion displays first used at the Boardwalk Exhibit, circa 1950/1959. Courtesy HML, HID 1972341_0123.
P. Nye of North Dakota, and the publication of *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* by Helmuth Engelbrecht and Frank Hanighen. On August 22, 1934, the American Liberty League, an anti-New Deal association, launched with financial subsidization by the du Pont family (namely Irénée and Lammot) a campaign “to ‘oppose the radicals’ and ‘protect the Constitution’” (Ndiaye 118). According to Ndiaye, “The du Ponts had launched the Liberty League like a commercial product, with a major advertising campaign. They felt that the essence of politics lay in the presentation, in marketing, rather than in militancy on the local level” (120). But by advertising around personal interests instead of those necessarily representing the firm, the du Ponts exacerbated the public relations climate for DuPont. Though the family and the firm were not one in the same – as Ndiaye says, “Americans could have clearly distinguished between the [two]. After all, to buy a can of DuPont paint was not to agree with the political stance of the family;” that said, ultimately “the marginal political positions of the directors did harm the company” (123). With DuPont still under family control, stakeholders associated familial actions with firm motives. Ndiaye suggests that the du Ponts could have aligned with other associations instead of the Liberty League, but instead their “political passion” blinded them to the greater implications their support had in the eyes of the public – “[compromising] the image of their firm” (122). Connection to the Liberty League, however, was just the beginning of a more severe public relations crisis for the company.
To further complicate the matter, just weeks after the Liberty League launched, Senator Gerald Nye chaired an investigation committee on the munitions industry and war profiteering, bringing DuPont’s role in providing munitions during World Word I under the microscope and further tarnishing the company’s image. It is true that DuPont profited significantly from wartime business; both the financial data and then acting company president Pierre du Pont attest to this fact. Drawing numbers from annual reports, historian Alfred D. Chandler points out that in 1916 alone, “the company’s gross receipts and net earnings both exceeded the combined totals for all the prewar years since [Pierre and his cousins] had taken control!” in 1902 (360). Pierre’s testimony before the Senate Committee also acknowledged the profit, under which he “tried to insert into the record the correct statistics” yet “commented, ‘I am not trying to fight the figures, because no matter what the figures are, the profit was very large’” (Chandler and Salsbury 360n3). But accusations during the hearings were nonetheless inflammatory, “billed by the press as an investigation of ‘the Krupps of America’”19 (Zilg 309), and thus caused the DuPont image severe damage.

Despite the harsh accusations, after three months of munitions hearings DuPont did not face a single indictment (Zilg 315), but during the course of the investigations yet another development set the company’s reputation back.

Engelbrecht and Hanighen published Merchants of Death: A Study of the International

19 Krupp, a German, family-run business and the largest producer of armaments in Europe in the early 1900s, was a major supplier to the Nazis, which severely tarnished the family name (“Krupp dynasty”).
Armament Industry, an “exposé of the immense profits reaped by munitions traders during World War I” (Marchand 219). With the book reaching “notoriety as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in April 1934” and “An article of similar bent appearing that March in Fortune [that] achieved wide circulation in Reader’s Digest” (Bird 66), the company quickly earned, and then faced an uphill battle to shed, the appellation “merchant of death” among its audiences. One DuPont public relations executive later noted, “the attacks almost drove the du Ponts out of the military-explosives business” (Dutton, “Du Ponts: Conclusion” 150). In fact, the company stayed in the business for years to come, but its gunpowder and explosives eventually faded to less than one percent of the company’s business (“Three Minutes” 16). This shift is also evident in the stories told by DuPont, as later examples will show.

Surveys at the time also confirmed public perceptions of the company were not good. A Gallup poll found just “20 percent of Americans had a good opinion of DuPont, as opposed to 80 percent for General Motors or General Electric” (Ndiaye 123n51), while a survey conducted by the Psychological Corporation “had reported to the Du Ponts that fewer than half of the 10,000 people questioned had a favorable opinion of the company, and 16 percent had a downright hostile view” (Zilg 388). It thus seemed clear that something in the firm’s public relations needed to change, but as described earlier, Lammot was slow to warm to the idea of institutional advertising. Instead it was Walter Carpenter Jr., treasurer of DuPont’s board of directors from 1921 through 1940 – and the first director who was not a du Pont family member – who quickly grasped the problem and the need for action. “Why in hell don’t we do
something?’ he explained in frustration to a fellow member of the Executive Committee in February 1935. ‘Nothing we can do will be 100 percent right. Doing nothing is 100 percent wrong’” (Kinnane 127). Indeed, mass communications were entering a period where people sought a more human element to connect them to firms, and the aftermath from the events of World War I coupled with the tensions of the 1930s meant DuPont needed to enter new storytelling territory to repair its reputation and modernize its image.

From Public Relations Crisis to Coordinated Communications

In dealing with the munitions hearings after World War I, DuPont had retained the New York firm Ivy Lee and T. J. Ross as publicity consultants. No formal storytelling strategy per se is evident from this contractual relationship, but DuPont did engage in a variety of counter-stories, both during and after the hearings. Archival materials in the form of correspondence between company public relations executives and the editors at Fortune magazine provide a context for this approach. In January 1935, Fortune planned to publish an extensive piece on DuPont, presented in three parts on “The Family,” “The Corporation,” and “The State.” In a letter to the managing editor at Fortune, Charles K. Weston, manager of the publicity bureau at DuPont, wrote on behalf of Lammot that the magazine had failed the year before in a
story about DuPont to accurately and fairly present material, and that “there [was] not much hope that any story prepared at [the] time, with the Senatorial Munitions Investigating Committee about to act, would be other than a continued presentation along the same lines.” As a result, Weston appealed, “We do not ask anyone to champion us, but we do request that further stories about du Pont should, in all fairness, be withheld while the senatorial investigation is pending” (“Letter to Ralph”). Fortune did indeed go ahead with the story, but under the agreement DuPont would have the opportunity to proof it, in what Fortune managing editor Ralph McA. Ingersoll called an exchange of courtesies” (“Letter to Lammot” 1).

DuPont’s sentiment of unfairness continued later in the year when, after being given a draft of the upcoming article for review, Lammot demanded Ingersoll forward a revised proof to address the “many mis-statements of fact, and many implications which tend to impeach the integrity of and hold up to ridicule the personalities mentioned” (“Draft of letter”). In response, Ingersoll called Lammot’s response “unfair,” clarifying the draft had been given to him at that point “solely for the purpose of obtaining [Lammot’s] criticism on the basis of which its final accuracy was to be insured” (“Letter to Lammot” 1). From Fortune’s perspective, after the first part

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20 This refers to the aforementioned March 1934 Fortune article “of similar bent” to Merchants of Death that “achieved wide circulation in Reader’s Digest (Bird 66).

21 Ingersoll referenced a letter from Lammot du Pont dated October 16, 1934. No such letter appears in the archive (Acc. 1410 Box 38, Folder “FORTUNE article, 1934-35,” HML) however, one can deduce that the unsigned draft letter was likely modified before Lammot signed it and mailed to Ingersoll at that slightly later date.
of the story was sent to press, DuPont reneged on “its half of a gentleman’s agreement” (“Letter to Lammot” 1) to provide input on the next two parts, despite the magazine feeling it represented the company fairly in the first article.

Each party felt under attack through the process of constructing the story. On October 23, 1934, Weston expressed his frustration with the situation in a personal note:

> The fact that du Pont has been a prosperous and constantly growing industry for 132 years (with only eleven years of war out of which to make profits,) is entirely ignored, as is the fact that the growth of the du Pont Company through a century and a third is an industrial romance unparalleled in the history of the world…

> I personally, and I am sure the du Ponts with whom you spoke, appreciate your interest and your desire to help in this matter, and I am sorry that the attitude of FORTUNE as shown in the handling of these du Pont stories makes cooperation impossible. (“Letter to Philip”)

On the *Fortune* side, Ingersoll countered Lammot’s accusations, writing, “FORTUNE is proud of its fairness and of its reputation for fairness. We are no more happy about the inferences you draw than you would be about similar allegations of unreasonableness and irresponsibility which you believed unsoundly raised against you” (2). More than a contentious debate, the DuPont-*Fortune* correspondence ultimately affords a lens through which to see DuPont’s attempt at controlling a narrative at odds with external media.

> For organization studies scholar Barbara Czarniawska, the truth of the matter is that neither DuPont nor *Fortune* would have been in control of its story. She suggests
when it comes to crafting narratives that “an illusion of control is maintained in a situation where no one is or could be in charge” (Narrating 40). Part of the issue between the two organizations also comes down to power: “other people or institutions sometimes concoct narratives for us, without including us in any conversation…But even as puppets in a power game, we are still coauthors of history, that other enacted dramatic narrative in which we are also actors” (Narrating 14).

While Fortune did include DuPont input, in the end it had final say on the manuscripts that went to print; similarly, DuPont through its own publications had the opportunity to craft messaging. Ultimately, though, stakeholders received any one of a number of combinations of stories, informed by one or the other organization, both, or neither, thereby drawing their own conclusions and withdrawing both power and control from DuPont or Fortune.

Separate from its struggle with Fortune regarding publicity during and in relation to the munitions hearings, DuPont applied tactics of omission and redirection in response to the “merchants of death” public stigmatization as well. Mention of the phrase in any DuPont external-facing materials is all but negligible in the years immediately following 1935, a signal perhaps that the words held no place in the DuPont story. A rare instance occurred in an October 1941 issue of the DuPont Magazine, but in an article celebrating DuPont workers for their role in producing smokeless powder for the war. Without directly naming Nye, the Senate investigation, Engelbrecht, or Hanighen, the article decried “A small but determined group of men in high public places [for their belief] that making and possessing munitions of
war…would cause wars,” and called them “zealots [who may have been] well-meaning citizens, sane and sound in all other respects” (Perry 2). Then, without naming itself or other afflicted munitions makers, the article continued, “Private companies undertaking such work were scourged and reviled by these men, and branded as ‘merchants of death.’” (2). The authorial tone aimed to disavow the phrase’s credibility. Further, the phrase’s mention in the context of a story about service and the “‘miracles of production’ that met the emergency confronting the nation” (3) redirected attention, placing a positive spin on DuPont’s role as a munitions maker and avoiding the negative implications of its wartime activity.

In addition to DuPont Magazine narratives, storytelling that redirected attention to positive applications of DuPont goods and services also occurred in the output of more formal and planned publications. William Dutton’s Du Pont: One Hundred and Forty Years, mentioned in Chapter 2, was written in celebration of a company anniversary and with the aim of creating “a better understanding of one American corporation” (vii). Dutton also later contributed extensively to the Saturday Evening Post through a five-part feature story on both the du Pont family and the company. In issues of the magazine from October through November 1949, Dutton chronicled “the full story of America’s No. 1 industrial family” (“Du Ponts” 22). Ndaiye suggests DuPont commissioned such books and other publicity, like Du Pont: Autobiography of an American Enterprise for its sesquicentennial, with the goal of “depicting [the company] in a highly favorable light” (269). That goal may be particularly true in the case of the 140-year anniversary book, as the number is not a
traditional or notable anniversary mark, yet the literature was useful in countering the “merchants of death” charges of the mid-1930s.

Suffice it to say DuPont’s strategy of attempting to coordinate with external media such as Fortune, withhold all public stories about the company (as evidenced earlier by Weston’s correspondence), and control messaging through its own publications, could only repair the company’s reputation so much. Though their contract with Ivy Lee and T. J. Ross had ended with the close of the hearings, in a candid letter accompanying a final bill for services on January 1934, T. J. Ross addressed Lammot with his predictions of continued public perception of big business. He focused his rhetoric particularly on those involved in the munitions industry, and offered suggestions for repairing and managing the company’s reputation.

Ross recognized that DuPont had no ongoing strategic response prepared for the tough public relations climate ahead, and ascribed the situation partially “to the fact that no effectively counteracting conception of [the] company’s business policies and activities seemed to exist” (1). As a result, he suggested “it is quite likely that the du Pont name will be used synonymously with munitions making generally, with all the implications which have become popularly associated with munitions manufacture” (2). Ross went on to speculate about the impending political climate and explicitly suggested the company define its position as a munitions producer (implicitly emphasizing its role as a manufacturer versus a supporter of war), and explain “its function as a great industrial corporation” (2). To these ends, Ross suggested specific actions, including a memo, potentially for use in the press, from the
company responding to the “insinuations” made against it in the hearings; an article for publication in popular media of the times such as the Saturday Evening Post, to be written by one of the du Ponts from “the constructive point of view of the company as a citizen and as a corporation performing a useful industrial service;” clarification of the company’s position through personal networking; and engagement “in an effort to tell more about [DuPont’s] peacetime functions so that the public may know the company’s contribution to the everyday lives of the people” (3). DuPont ultimately did not engage Lee and Ross as consultants on their next public relations efforts, but Ross’ advice resonated enough with Lammot that he shared the consultant’s letter in a memo to company leadership one week later (“Memo”).

While Ross placed his advice in the context of the post-investigation environment, other internal factors also clearly evidenced the need for better communications with the public. For example, DuPont experienced a significant shift in its product mix between 1914 and 1935 – in fact, “from 97 percent explosives to 95 percent non-explosives. Yet the company’s image in the public eye remained that of a munitions maker – an image wholly out of line with reality” (Kinnane 127). As the company’s directors reflected on the increased diversification of the firm, they began to grasp the need to promote their products and appeal to a mass consumer base.

The need to create mass-market appeal was also well understood by one individual in particular outside of the firm. Bruce Barton, of the agency Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BBDO), had been keeping a watchful eye on DuPont and took advantage of the public stigmatization of the company when he reached out to
Lammot. Four months after Ross’ letter, Barton wrote that in order for the public to stop seeing DuPont as “the powder people” and instead as “a peace-time manufacturer” (“Letter to Lammot” 1), it would be absolutely necessary for the company to engage in institutional advertising. Much as Forman suggests that fluency in storytelling engages stakeholder emotions (23), Barton, too, understood an effective strategy would appeal to the public’s feelings. For the cost of “not less than $500,000 or more than $650,000” (“Letter to Lammot” 3), Barton was emphatic that the return on the investment would be tangible in the company’s workforce, DuPont’s “own 45,000 people…human beings, neighbors, citizens…their friends, their relatives, their neighbors;” with the company’s dealers, “who sell that portion of [DuPont] production which goes to the public under [the DuPont] name;” and in company sales, “transactions [in which] the human factor has a way of making itself felt” (2).

Essentially, Barton suggested, much as Ross had, that the company needed to move beyond telling the story of its role in industrial and scientific advancements and instead focus on telling a story about human impact.

This deliberate transition in storytelling was spearheaded by the launch of the “Better Things for Better Living…Through Chemistry” campaign (hereafter referred to as “Better Living”). Coined by Barton and his agency, with “Through Chemistry” added by DuPont advertising executive William A. Hart (Bird 23), the phrase linked chemistry to humanitarian ideals. Unlike general advertising, “Better Living” “exemplified a higher concept of public relations that was far removed from the necessity of the company’s initial response to the Senate munitions investigation and
the in-and-out of party politics that had become manifest in a near-daily cycle of reaction and attack by 1935” (Bird 68). Beyond a “higher concept of public relations,” Ndiaye suggests the campaign “was the fruit of a thoroughgoing reflection on the structural changes of the American market (123). This dissertation positions “Better Living” not just as a “higher concept of” or “reflective” public relations effort, but the most complex and comprehensive storytelling effort in DuPont’s history.

While the bulk of DuPont’s prior stories focused on the chemical engineer or other company characters with the occasional consumer sprinkled in, stories during the “Better Living” period – which earned a place among the longest-running slogans in twentieth-century advertising, lasting through 1999 – were highly specialized, particularly surrounding the campaign’s release in 1935, and focused in a variety of print and non-print media on everyday consumers and how their lives were positively affected by DuPont. Case in point, as Marchand explains, “Not mentioned in the bulletins and news releases, but clearly part of Du Pont’s conversion to public relations, was the company’s sudden emergence as a major independent exhibitor in the great exhibitions” (220). To illustrate the depth and reach of the “Better Living” campaign, the remainder of this chapter will highlight its use in a variety of these performed stories at selected points over the lifetime of the campaign.

“Better Living” Facilitates Better Storytelling

The years immediately following the launch of “Better Living” saw extensive organized storytelling activity by DuPont. The campaign was launched with the help
of BBDO in the *Saturday Evening Post* with a series of institutional advertisements in 1935, while oral storytelling officially found its place in DuPont history with the *Cavalcade of America* broadcast radio program (hereafter referred to as *Cavalcade*), which began shortly thereafter on October 9. In these ways, as Forman suggests may be said of such refrains, the “Better Living” slogan “[framed] corporate stories, serving as an umbrella that includes under it stories and specific brand attributes and behaviors that the stories illustrate” (91). DuPont carefully crafted its print advertisements to coordinate with the radio anthology drama. The *Saturday Evening Post* advertising tear sheets featured stories and characters similar to those everyday and entrepreneurial Americans who were featured on *Cavalcade*—a young couple on their first date; a whittling sea captain; and a brother and sister fighting for bathroom time. Each advertisement also reinforced the idea of “Better Living” and contributions of DuPont research to human ideals by telling a story about the benefit chemistry provided the characters—a Duco painted car, rayon dress, and movie film for the young couple; a Remington-DuPont knife used by the whittler for his craft along with Cellophane-wrapped candy for the “young lads” who would watch him work; and

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22 The “Better Living” campaign wasn’t focused just on telling stories to the public. In 1946, it became the first employee magazine distributed company-wide, with the intent “to show how the 74,000 Du Pont people live—their homes, jobs and recreations—and to give information about the company’s policies and operations” (Brayman, “Memorandum”) and in the late 1960s became an exemplar of corporate employee magazines (Depperman 6).
aromatic soap and an “Acele” shower curtain for the sibling shower rivalry (see Figure 21). Finally, beneath the “Better Living” slogan and DuPont oval, a footnote in each advertisement encouraged readers to tune in to listen to Cavalcade every Wednesday evening. It is important to note that while DuPont’s new stories revealed a new human element, they remained grounded in the company’s original super story of industrial excellence made possible through science.

In the “Better Living” storytelling framework, Cavalcade became a vehicle for DuPont to “advertise its non-explosive products as well as to celebrate ingenuity and patriotism” (Kinnane 131). As it had in part with its avoidance response to “merchants of death” accusations, Marchand suggests DuPont through omission used narratives in Cavalcade to “erase its old image as a munitions company” and instead “[present] a classless, largely conflict-free view of how Americans had achieved progress by exercising the conventional virtues and carrying out scientific research” (221).23 Similarly, in the words of then Union College president Dixon Ryan Fox, the “spoken dramas…revealed the spirit of America as it had issued from American hearts and minds during the past three hundred years” and enabled listeners to hear about “the authentic life of America, vastly more stirring and persuasive because it is true” (“Cavalcade” 16). From DuPont’s perspective, its sponsorship of the program was

23 See William L. Bird, Jr.’s “Better Living”: Advertising, Media, and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership, 1935-1955 for an extensive analysis on the Cavalcade of America, particularly its role in shaping broadcast anthology drama and “merchandising stars and stories” (8).
Figure 21  “It started one Saturday night,” “…and allus spit to 100’ard,” and “Just try to hurry your sister.” These advertisements in support of “Better Living” appeared in the Saturday Evening Post in 1935. Courtesy HML, HID’s dpads_1803_00237, dpads_1803_00238, and dpads_1803_00240, respectively.
intended “to fulfill the demands for radio entertainment of high calibre [sic], yet vivid and thrilling without being over-sensationalized” while “short announcements… stress[ed] the application of chemistry to human needs showing how the chemist’s art has contributed to the comfort and happiness of people in all walks of life, without extolling the merits of specific products” (“Information for the Editor”). The following excerpts from various episodes of Cavalcade evidence both DuPont’s strategic emphasis on “Better Living” as well as its use of oral storytelling to engage audiences in non-DuPont innovation stories, but nonetheless implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) suggest the importance of scientific innovation to everyday life.24

Though the half-hour Cavalcade dramas were not about DuPont per se, each episode began with some sort of reference to the company. In the introductory episode, aptly titled “No Turning Back,” the narrator began:

> It is the hope of DuPont that these human dramas will help perpetuate the finest traditions of American life, because these same traditions of service, courage, and hope have always played a vital part in the progress of DuPont. And today, the research chemists of DuPont laboratories are carrying on in the same spirit, discovering and creating useful products, so that the American people may have “Better Things for Better Living.” (00:46-01:13).

The focus on “human dramas” made the DuPont stories current, while the themes of research and discovery remain true to the company’s super story, adding an element of

24 See Martin Grams, Jr.’s The History of the Cavalcade of America (Morris Publishing, 1998) for a comprehensive history of the radio and television programs, including complete broadcast logs, times, and awards.
authenticity. A later episode called “Enterprise” transported listeners back to 1805 and emphasized DuPont’s historical roots in relation to the country’s roots, noting, “the Cavalcade of America portrayed from week to week on this DuPont radio program is something that DuPont has seen, known, been a part of. And today, as in generations past, Du Pont chemists are contributing to America’s march of progress by making good their watchword, “Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry.” (00:31-00:52). This episode featured two stories of enterprise to show “however doubtful of business or scientific venture there’s always been daring souls willing to attempt it, and this has often led to astonishing progress in a short span of time” (04:17-04:28). The stories traced those of Frederick Tudor, whose persistence and inventiveness brought ice for the first time to warmer climates as far as India; and that of the China Clipper, a then present-day story of the 1935 Pan American airplane that flew from the United States to China in less than one week for the first time. In closing, the narrator emphasized the impact of Tudor’s enterprise, and the change that ice, and later refrigeration, would have on living conditions, the packing industry and more – and not so subtly linked the technology behind the enterprising to various DuPont refrigerant materials.

This understated connection was common practice, for the radio program to emphasize the “Better Living” concept by pointing out its role in creating products “that serve basic human needs…helping to make life safer and more complete for every member of [a] family” (“Three Minutes” 16). In retelling such historical dramas, DuPont went so far as to hire an historian, a novelist, and a biographer to research and
write material (Kinnane 131). In addition, academicians like Fox along with Harvard University professor Arthur M. Schlesinger, were enlisted to ensure the program remained “faithful to the facts” (“Cavalcade” 16). Fox acknowledged a few years after Cavalcade’s start that sometimes characters were invented, but insisted the writers “tried to insure that it was the real voice of America, or some part of America, that was heard in each speech” (“Cavalcade” 16). Per Forman’s storytelling framework, this focus on accuracy had the potential to add to the credibility of the Cavalcade narratives. The company’s use of respected scholars, as well as famous scriptwriters including Arthur Miller and Stephen Vincent Benet, added to the high standards and integrity of the program from the company perspective. However, “radio ratings did not indicate any vast popularity” (Marchand 222) among audiences. It seemed the company thought it was speaking to the masses, but it took a few years before DuPont refined its approach:

…by the time of the 1939-40 World’s Fair Du Pont had come remarkably far in recognizing the need to speak the people’s language. It had incorporated crowd-pleasing forms of entertainment into its now-elaborate fair exhibits and had pioneered the successful use of nonconcert radio for enhancing its corporate image. Polls indicated that the company had improved its standing with the public (Marchand 222).

One innovation in particular offers deep insight into DuPont’s challenges and successes with connecting to people’s minds and hearts – and not just talking at them – using stories of “Better Living:” nylon.
As DuPont was emphasizing its new motto, a team of organic chemists under the direction of Wallace H. Carothers, part of the company’s first fundamental research program headed by Charles M. Stine, had already been busy at work on creating what would become nylon. Ndiaye, as well as historians Hounshell and Smith, have examined the invention of nylon from a research and development perspective; the closest analysis of the marketing of nylon comes from a cultural history on plastics by Jeffrey L. Meikle. But there is institutional storytelling surrounding nylon particularly in relation to the company’s exhibits at the World’s Fairs, despite the fact that it was just one product in DuPont’s mass of innovations. It thus deserves some attention given that “the company considered nylon from the very beginning to be cause for celebration as its most extraordinary technical achievement” (Kinnane 90); Barton, too, credited much of DuPont’s rise to nylon and not necessarily “Better Living” alone (Kinnane 130). In many ways, the narratives relating to nylon provide a springboard for examining DuPont’s performed storytelling through much of the twentieth century.25

25 Though this chapter discusses DuPont’s storytelling efforts around nylon in the context of consumer perception, it is also important to note the impact the invention of nylon had on the company’s culture and expansion of research and development. Ndiaye notes “the invention of nylon, and almost simultaneously that of the synthetic rubber neoprene, was a huge achievement for a company whose research activities were not comparable to those of IG Farben in Germany” and that overexcitement by leadership led to misguided growth “predicated on radically new products and massive investments in pure chemical research, all of them legitimated by a founding story, the exemplum of nylon” (95).
The nylon story actually begins well before the substance was ready for public introduction. Its production took years of research and development, including the construction of a new plant for its manufacture.\textsuperscript{26} The ongoing DuPont theme of scientific integrity and innovation is highly relevant to the production of nylon. DuPont Corporate Communications employee Justin Carisio notes that while product purity and raw material refinement were things E. I. knew how to do a century earlier when it came to gunpowder, similar principles applied to nylon: “When Carothers invented nylon 120 years later, he insisted on absolute purity in all the materials used in their work. Some of the chemists called his lab ‘Purity Hall.’ In that way, the story of nylon’s discovery echoed themes that had already become part of the company’s tradition” (Second).

Naming of the substance was also somewhat of an issue. The substance was initially called Rayon 66 and Fiber 66, before the company convened a committee, who drafted 395 name suggestions (Hounshell and Smith 269) before ultimately christening it nylon.\textsuperscript{27} Though DuPont ultimately decided against trademarking the name, instead leaving it free for public use, the issue of patents related to nylon meant the company was left with little choice but to begin publicity. As Hounshell and Smith explain, in the absence of a formal announcement from the company and with the

\textsuperscript{26} See chapter on “The Development of Neoprene and Nylon” in Hounshell and Smith for a detailed R&D history.

\textsuperscript{27} See pages 268-69 in Hounshell and Smith, and pages 137-39 in Meikle, for more extensive details on how the name “nylon” came to be.
patent process a public one, “the press would continue to make all kinds of guesses about the prospects for and properties of the new material” – in other words, if DuPont did not tell its story, someone else would. The only issue was, no actual product existed:

At the time, Du Pont was still over a year and a half away from having anything to sell. Company officials worried about the impact of a public disclosure on Du Pont’s ability to obtain more patents. When nylon became widely known, others might do some work and apply for patents on process and product modifications, or on new uses. This concern about protecting its proprietary position had an impact on the way in which Du Pont chose to announce its product (269).

Technically, the first announcement of nylon came via two scientific papers delivered by Carothers and Julian W. Hill at a 1931 American Chemical Society convention in Buffalo, New York. While the news didn’t garner any special note that day, the following morning the New York Times “carried a full column on the significance of the discovery,” while another paper “discussed the possibility of women’s dresses of the new fibrous material” (“Memorandum Nylon” 1). Seven years later the Times included an editorial on “elastic rayon” and less than one month after that, DuPont announced Seaford, Delaware, would become the site for a new production plant (2). What attracted the majority of publicity was about one week later when Stine shared the news with a broader, more public audience on October 27, 1938 at the New York Herald Tribune’s eighth annual Forum on Current Problems “in a session entitled “We Enter the World of Tomorrow,” which was keyed to the theme of the [1939-40 World’s Fair], the World of Tomorrow” (Hounshell and Smith 270). The scientific
nature of Stine’s announcement had a significant impact on how early public responses to nylon unfolded. A seemingly small comment in his speech relating the strength of nylons to that of steel left an indelible – and inaccurate – impression on people’s initial perception of the product. According to Hounshell and Smith,

The next day’s New York Times ran two articles on nylon, on pages 24 and 34. The Times did not put the story on the front page as it had done earlier with neoprene. The first article was entitled, “New Hosiery Strong as Steel,” and the second one in the business section began, “Coal, air and water were revealed today…. The idea that supposedly indestructible stockings could be made from these ingredients seemed to many a modern miracle. The phrase “coal, air, and water” became associated with nylon and the transforming magic of science. It was the new alchemy. (271)

Somewhat contrary to Hounshell and Smith’s finding, in a January 1959 memorandum on “20 Years of Nylon” DuPont’s Public Relations Department suggested the news “was received with both optimism and alarm” (2). Yes, there was fascination in the science and nylon’s founding was sticking to the “Better Living” ideals, but problems arose from the suggestion that nylon was superior to silk – or “in other words, better than nature” (Ndaiye 91), and thus was also accompanied by skepticism, particularly by cotton farmers and Japanese silk producers (“Memorandum Nylon” 2). More specifically, Meikle and Ndiaye each suggest DuPont faced challenges in translating the chemistry behind nylons into layman’s terms. Meikle notes, “When Du Pont began introducing nylon in the form of women’s stockings…its scientifically oriented promotion provoked misunderstanding, even active distrust” (128), and “Du Pont had no clear idea of the need to remove ambiguous laboratory associations…to the lives of
everyday people” (133). Advertising the science behind paints and introducing the character of the chemical engineer were effective storytelling strategies in the 1920s, but when it came to nylon, though “Better Living” was fully operational, Meikle suggests “the marketing side of the company’s program lacked the military precision of the chemical side” (133); it was troublesome, for example, that the fiber was described as strong as steel and made from coal, yet remained destructible. According to Ndiaye, “the firm therefore promptly changed its campaign and, instead of stressing the mysteries of polyamide chemistry, which seemed to be frightening ordinary people, extolled the practical and aesthetic qualities of nylon stockings” (91). To achieve a better understanding, and to offer its own narrative in response to the myriad stories that appeared in the press, DuPont took full advantage of its Cavalcade program. For example, a “representative housewife” was featured in a question and answer session about nylon with a chemist, who explained “‘any hosiery made by standard methods of knitting will run when a thread is broken’—though nylon’s ‘extra strength and elasticity’ made it ‘less likely to develop runs’” (Meikle 146n57, emphasis original).

28 Meikle cites a Washington News story, also picked up by Science News Letter (a publication circulated in public schools) as contributing to consumer fear as well. The story “exploit[ed] a bizarre bit of information” by “basing its observation on an interpretation of the patent [for nylon that], ‘one of the ways to prepare the new synthetic silk fiber might be to make it out of human corpses’ by using cadaverine, a foul-smelling chemical substance formed during putrefaction ‘after burial’” – or alternatively, “‘out of sticky black tar, formed as coal is heated’” (140). He suggests DuPont’s emphasis on coal, air and water was essentially “a mantra contrived to ward off cadaverine’s macabre influence” (141).
Science and Stockings Come to Life

Beyond print and radio, DuPont also turned to performance spaces to address confusion and attempt to regain control over the “Better Living” and nylon narratives, as well as to advance the company’s super story. Photographs and ephemera from the World’s Fairs and other exhibits and expositions show the extensive lengths of performed storytelling by DuPont and offer insight into how the company interfaced with the public, both in terms of stories surrounding nylon and in refining its super story. This shift to performance spaces was one that was occurring across industrial businesses of the time. According to Marchand, the 1933-34 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago was one of the earlier public exhibits that reflected significant advancement in “the techniques and psychology of corporate display” (278). Advertising agencies had begun to play a more significant role in company productions for the exhibits, providing feedback on the types of experiences and interactions audiences were growing to expect, the main elements of which were said to be animation, participation, and simplicity (280). Historically, DuPont had used “lectures and moving displays to tell a serious story about its development of varied products from agricultural raw materials,” but audience feedback suggested people were most interested in movement, “something that [could] be understood at a glance” (280).

In an attempt to meet these new needs, DuPont enlisted the help of New York City designer Walter Dorwin Teague in exhibiting at the 1936 Texas Centennial in Dallas (“Eyes on Texas” 12). In a proposal to the company, Teague said he believed
he helped the company find success through his “conception of simplifying and organizing the chemical research activities…into a manageable scheme of presentation…with complete elimination of technical details not familiar to the public, with the whole complex process reduced to a few dramatic steps” (2). The exhibit moved beyond what DuPont had done in the past, and featured additions like a “moving band of light…and…indirect lighting units arranged to illumine a number of special exhibits” while “mechanical devices and spectacular demonstrations used to tell the story” promised a “fascinating experience for laymen” (“Eyes on Texas” 12; see also Figures 22 and 23). Though Teague agreed the story told through the Dallas exhibit was fascinating, he reported it “had the disadvantage of being located within a general exhibit building” (2). DuPont lecturer Wilburn McKee also confirmed the exhibit did not fully meet the audience’s desire for a more modern approach noting, “many visitors took the attitude, ‘Oh, well, this is chemistry and I don’t understand it.’ People were impressed by the ‘magic of chemistry’…but they confessed that it was ‘hard for the ordinary person to understand’” (Marchand 280). DuPont took this feedback seriously, and applied it tenfold to the exhibit that appeared at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco and the New York World’s Fair in 1939 and 1940.

Around 1937, Teague submitted a formal proposal to assist DuPont in planning its exhibit for the Expo and the World’s Fair. His pitch evidenced that although “Better Living” had been in use for a few years, its transition from print to performance was deficient. Much in the way that Barton had appealed to DuPont a
Figure 22  A model reproduction of the DuPont exhibit at the Texas Centennial in 1936, excerpted from a DPM article ("Eyes on Texas" 12). Courtesy HML, HID 1936_30_06.
Figure 23  A photo of the actual DuPont exhibit at the Texas Centennial in 1936 (Teague 11). Courtesy HML, HID 77242_1.
few years earlier, Teague emphasized the company’s image in the eyes of the public was not yet recovered, opening his note with “DU PONT is a name known through the world” but added “To 999 out of every 1,000 individuals DU PONT is synonymous with explosives.” He suggested that the company was “so engrossed in its marvelous technological developments that it… had relatively little opportunity to acquaint ‘the man in the street’ with its startling contributions to human progress and welfare through chemistry” (1, emphasis original). DuPont may have been skilled in telling its story through print, and was making advances in new media such as radio, Teague pointed out, but “taking the public behind the scenes of their activities” should be the company’s next step. Wrote Teague in his proposal, “What an opportunity…for tearing aside the veil of public ignorance and misunderstanding and disclosing DU PONT in its real character as a builder of human progress!” (2, emphasis original).

Though Teague had already worked with DuPont in Dallas, given the prediction that the San Francisco and New York World’s Fair was expected to draw fifty million visitors a year and “surpass all precedent as an opportunity for mass appeal,” he submitted a portfolio of past work in industrial design to support his case. In pointing out the work he had done for such corporations as The Ford Motor Company and Eastman Kodak, Teague also suggested a “long-range and comprehensive program” beyond the World’s Fair exhibit to include coordinated product design, packaging, displays in public office spaces, plants, and vehicles (8). Teague ultimately won the account and began planning in the middle of that year (Marchand 292).
When the Golden Gate International Exposition opened in San Francisco on
February 18, 1939, DuPont was ready with its “Wonder World of Chemistry.” The
exhibit covered 6,000 square feet, and unlike its subpar location in Dallas, “occupie[d]
a commanding position at the entrance of the Homes and Gardens Building”
(“preview of Wonder” 8). In construction, the exhibit was built similarly to the one in
Dallas, and Marchand notes a “consequence of the large financial investments
in…corporate displays was the impulse to recycle these exhibits in some way” (283).
The exhibit was changed, however, in that it was more robust in terms of
demonstration and activity; Dutton, for instance, called “the story of industrial change
told by this exhibit…one of the most significant at the Exposition” (“Golden Gate” 2).
The exhibit featured such innovations as a machine that simulated the manufacture of
cellophane in one display; a lecturer who demonstrated the durability of “Dulux”
using dry ice; a colorless fabric dipped in a dye bath, which illustrated “cross-dyeing;”
and more (“preview of Wonder;” see also Figure 24).

In a preview before the “Wonder World of Chemistry” opened a few months
later at the New York World’s Fair, president Lammot du Pont spoke before company
officials and their guests. He suggested DuPont’s 100-foot “Tower of Research” at the
entrance to the exhibit (see Figure 25) was meant to be “a physical expression of that
indomitable spirit of research and accomplishment which motivates the minds and
hearts of the men and women…working to push forward the frontiers of scientific
knowledge” (“Chemical Research” 1). He also emphasized, echoing Teague’s
proposal, that the fair represented “a public recognition not alone of the public’s right
Figure 24  “Lucite demonstration at Golden Gate Exposition.” Courtesy HML, HID 1972341_0062.
Figure 25  DuPont’s 100-foot “Tower of Research” at the 1939 New York World’s Fair as seen on the June 1939 cover of the *DPM*. Courtesy HML, HID 1939_33_06.
to see the inner workings of modern business, but of the obligations that business has to the public,” which included production of high quality goods, creation of jobs, a return to investors, and “to be good citizens” (1). Lammot’s public acknowledgement of these obligations fit neatly into the “Better Living” framework as DuPont tried to contextualize the contributions of chemistry to human needs.

Another “physical expression” at the Fair was that of chemistry as a character itself, which came to life in a mural by artist John W. McCoy II. Bearing the same name as DuPont’s now-recognizable slogan, *Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry* greeted visitors at the entrance of the DuPont Pavilion at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. At left, the mural depicted the labor and toil of early American life against a rudimentary landscape, while at right, it featured a nuclear family enjoying life’s luxuries against a strong and industrial backdrop. At center was “Chemistry,” depicted as an allegorical figure framed by a sunburst, holding a raised beaker in one hand and a book in the other (see Figure 26). The mural is “a critical way in which the company saw itself, and shows in graphic form how the company was telling its story” (Carisio, Second).29 Through the juxtaposition of life pre- and post-chemistry, the

29 After the World’s Fair ended, the mural was moved to the lobby of the DuPont-owned Nemours building in Wilmington, Delaware (Carisio, Second). In 1999, as Hagley Director Glenn Porter explained in the museum’s annual report, through the initiative of DuPont employee Justin Carisio, the mural was moved to its current location at the Hagley Museum and Library. Porter noted at the time of acquiring the mural that it “captured perfectly DuPont’s self-conception as a corporation at the heart of the emerging good life in America, while simultaneously trumpeting one of advertising genius Bruce Barton’s best-known slogans” (Hagley 7).
Figure 26  *Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry* mural by artist John W. McCoy II, created for the DuPont Pavilion at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. Today, it resides at Hagley Museum and Library. Courtesy DuPont website (“1939 Better Things”).
mural expresses the centrality of science to the advancement of society, and perpetuates DuPont’s super story of invention, performance, and innovation through science.

As for nylon, the substance in many ways took center stage at the World’s Fairs. Women’s stockings made from nylon were displayed for the very first time (Dutton, “Golden Gate” 2). Models bared their legs, clad in nylon stockings to stir up interest (see Figure 27), while at the New York World’s Fair, “the first “complete costume of nylon, including a lace evening gown, stockings, satin slippers, undergarments” was modeled (“Memorandum Nylon” 3). A photograph from the Golden Gate Exposition became one of the more iconic representations of the story told – that of the “Lady in a Test Tube” – meant to show how chemistry’s contributions resulted in such everyday items as clothing and stockings (see Figure 28). Supplementing these live displays featuring nylon, DuPont continued its traditional advertising. For example, a full-page advertisement appeared in the DuPont Magazine in 1940 featuring another “Test-Tube Lady,” a modern day “Princess Plastics” whose entire wardrobe and accessories represented the many ways DuPont plastics were used in everyday life (17). According to Kinnane, some of the intent of the print ad was “to show that there was nothing to fear from science” (138), part of a subtle but ongoing public relations response to the aforementioned alarm surrounding
Figure 27  “‘Miss Chemistry’ models nylon stockings at the New York World’s Fair.” Courtesy HML, HID 1984259_121412_013.
Figure 28  “Demonstrations at Golden Gate Exposition.” Live actors showed the many uses of nylon represented by a woman in a test tube. Courtesy HML, HID 1972341_0076.
the complex chemistry that went into producing nylon. These performed and printed stories about nylon appeared to have worked in addressing concern and skepticism. As Meikle notes, “Reconciliation of consumers and chemists appeared certain” at the close of the World’s Fair, and “few visitors doubted nylon’s material quality or questioned its safety. They had learned to appreciate nylon, even to consider it a necessity” (147). Indeed, much as DuPont had created a trapshooting market where one had barely existed half a century earlier, it created a market for nylon as America entered the Forties.

The fact that there was a market for nylon so immediately was impressive, given that nylon stockings, the first textile to be produced from the substance, were not available for purchase at the start of the World’s Fair. Instead, nylon stockings were first sold to DuPont employees on February 20, 1939 (“Memorandum Nylon” 2). The first public sale occurred in Wilmington, Delaware, later that year on October 24, under the restrictions that customers had to be from the area and could purchase only three pairs (2). When DuPont was finally prepared to sell nylon hosiery nationwide almost a year later, the public was more than eager to buy. A two-part feature, “Nylon tells a story…” in the *DuPont Magazine* described the palpability of the public’s anticipation of the product: “The fact still remains that when an unknown but not unheralded yarn burst upon the world on May 15, 1940, and gave the historically-

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30 Issues of *DuPont Magazine* were also distributed to visitors at the New York World’s Fair during June 1939 to help educate audiences about the company’s activities (*World’s Fair* 14).
minded an ‘N-day’ to mark upon their calendars, the stampede at hosiery counters throughout the nation demonstrated the American public’s interest and willingness to give chemistry’s new creation a fair trial” (17). Consumer enjoyment of the hosiery was short-lived, though, before DuPont was drawn once again into serving wartime needs.

On February 11, 1942, DuPont announced all nylon production would be directed to serve military needs, and stocking availability was relegated to only those knitters that had leftover inventory (“Memorandum Nylon” 3). The company used the modern marvel instead to create military parachutes, tents, lightweight combat clothing and more. The nylon shortage for civilian use resulted in a few specific outcomes for DuPont, some positive and some negative. On the one hand, nylon’s implementation for wartime use helped prove patriotism for the company; women who had been fortunate enough to obtain stockings before the shortage donated their nylon to contribute to the war effort. Meikle explains, “Nylon had aroused such strong interest during its brief period of civilian availability that it became a symbol for sacrifices and subterfuges of life on the home front. Collection drives targeted cast-off stockings to be melted down and reextruded [sic] as parachute yarn” (148). Nylon’s shortage also played on “consumer desire” which “had sharpened enormously during 40 months of deprivation” (Nylon 14) and resulted in “Nylon Riots,” so-called by
journalists, when it returned to the market in 1945. One performed DuPont advertisement in particular – a 35-foot high, two-ton leg modeled after actress Marie Wilson’s – was used in Los Angeles to advertise nylons, and was a fitting representation of the oversized market reaction to the product (see Figure 29).

Despite these positive outcomes, though, DuPont once again faced public skepticism when it came to nylon. Having overcome the concerns surrounding the fiber’s chemical makeup of coal, air, and water, the company in the post-war years was later confronted with accusations of poor material quality, as well as of intentionally withholding nylon to increase hosiery sales and of creating a monopoly. The charges about poor quality ultimately led to DuPont’s decision to not trademark the name nylon – a move the company had first made a few years earlier with neoprene. This is an important side note to DuPont’s organizational storytelling. Originally, DuPont had “trademarked its new synthetic rubber as DuPrene, but found it could not safeguard the integrity of the product name. DuPrene was an unprocessed material, and unreliable manufacturers who produced poor goods threatened to give the product and DuPont a bad reputation” (“1999 miracles”). According to the company today, the experience of the 1930s and into the post-World War II years gave company executives “curious insight: sometimes, in order to protect the company name it was important not to trademark a product.” Case in point, after the issues with

31 See Meikle pages 147-149 for stories about “nylon-colored leg makeup” and rinses, sales of nylon on the black market, and the subsequent rush by women across the nation to purchase nylons after the war had ended.
Figure 29  “Giant but Shapely Leg, 35 feet high and weighing two tons, advertised nylons to millions in Los Angeles area” (Nylon 15). Actress Marie Wilson, whose leg served as the model for the display, sits atop a construction lift at the exhibit. Courtesy HML, HID 1984259_121412_004.
DuPrene, “DuPont abandoned the trademark in 1936 and applied the generic name ‘neoprene’ to distinguish it as an original ingredient, not a finished product” (“1999 miracles”). The company followed the same practice when it came to nylon. The decision to trademark or not to trademark remained an important one for the company:

The economic boom after World War II unleashed a new wave of consumer buying and corresponding concern over branding and trademarks. Increasing competition in the chemical industry, particularly in the production of synthetic fibers, made trademarking a crucial means of establishing a product’s identity while ensuring legal protection and winning the loyalty of consumers. (“1999 miracles”)

So while some fibers held generic names, DuPont did (and continues to) protect many product names with trademarks, but only in instances where it felt it had a secure reputation in the marketplace. This is true of the fibers market; after not trademarking nylon, DuPont elected to trademark names like Orlon, Dacron, and eventually, Lycra, as the importance of marketing around a brand name evolved.

As for claims of rigging sales and staking a monopoly, the company responded with a significant campaign on “bigness.” Then company president Crawford H. Greenewalt discussed the role of DuPont in American business in a 1949 interview with U.S. News and World Report, “Is Big Business Useful?” When asked whether DuPont’s business was “noncompetitive by virtue of [its] patent monopolies,” Greenewalt used nylon as an example to explain that all business is competitive. “We are the sole manufacturers of nylon by virtue of the fact that we were the originators of that product and have many patents relating to its manufacture,” Greenewalt admitted,
but he pointed out that “Nylon competes with every other synthetic and natural textile fiber…If the price of nylon is too high, it will not be used, monopoly or no” (36). The following year, Greenewalt published an editorial in *Reader’s Digest*, the “pro” article of a two-piece pro and con feature on big business. On the con side, Emanuel Celler, chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, commented, “Big business, run by men like the du Ponts who care about production, has often given us good service to set off against its abuses of power” (126). In his response to Celler’s claims, Greenewalt once again called upon nylon to illustrate the importance of big business, using an example of a nylon dress to be sold to a customer for $49.95 and to which DuPont would profit just $1.92:

The difference between that and the retail price represents the contribution added by many smaller businesses—the company that makes the yarn, the company that weaves it into cloth, the company that dyes it and finishes it, the dress manufacturer, and finally the retail store. And the consumer gets the lion’s share of the benefit, since these dresses can be washed, hung out to dry and worn without pressing a few hours later…

Du Pont could never have put nylon over without the assistance of small business. Small business could never have made the investment necessary to produce nylon (129).

Once again, though DuPont manufactured hundreds of products, nylon was brought to the fore to represent the interests of the company. The issue of DuPont’s size continued for some time; in a special memo to general managers seven years after Greenewalt, director of the company’s Public Relations Department, Harold Brayman, declared a threat facing DuPont and “all companies of like stature, [was] that of public
reaction to bigness…with implications of ‘monopoly’, ‘control’, ‘economic influence’, ‘conformity’, [sic] and power over people” ("Memorandum General” 1). The obvious attacks, stated an attachment to the memo, were political and thematic, while the “not-so-obvious dangers” of propaganda against bigness included television, novels, and plays: “Fiction is the most powerful of all propaganda, for it shortcuts reason and goes straight to the emotions” warned Brayman ("Memorandum General” 5). In response to public reaction against bigness, DuPont set to work distributing press releases about its “dependence on small business…for a wide variety of chemicals, supplies, and basic materials and services needed to manufacture the company’s products” (“News Release: Emphasizing” 1). Connecting the company to small-town America was a tactic the company approached in new media, as discussed later.

One final aspect of nylon that represents a broader company approach to storytelling is the nylon super story itself. We can learn even more about how DuPont endeavored to create a coherent story to support its brand and reputation in the marketplace through a deeper exploration of the nylon story. Carothers, though he was the chemist who technically invented the substance, suffered from depression, ultimately committed suicide, and did not live to see nylon’s impact on society. Ndiaye suggests Carothers’ death “brought a memorable dimension to the story and further added to the legendary character of the synthetic fiber” (90). Furthermore, DuPont produced photographs to show the invention of nylon (see Figures 30 and 31), but in fact those photos were re-creations. As Ndiaye points out,
Figure 30  “Nylon 66 polymer produced in laboratory.” Nylon 66 was synthesized and commercialized in 1935, but the photo reproduction was not created until the 1940s. Courtesy HML, HID 1972341_1156.
Figure 31  “The Nylon Rope Trick demonstrated by Dr. Paul W. Morgan.” Photo reproductions like this one helped to mythologize the production of nylon. Courtesy HML, HID 1972341_1197.
in 1946, while preparing a brochure, DuPont’s Public Relations Department actually asked the chemists who had invented nylon twelve years earlier to reproduce their experiments in the presence of a photographer, so that they could be preserved on film” as a way of situating “the epic of nylon…in history and legend, to freeze an official account that presented it as a blessing of modernity (90).

As such, the invention of nylon was assigned a sort of “mythological representation” (Ndiaye 247n73). The hazard in this tidy presentation of the method of invention, though, is that a lock-step timeline is forced on organizational events that actually happened unsystematically and in some ways, unexpectedly. In the words of Ndiaye:

Madeleine Akrich, Michel Callon, and Bruno Latour, have pointed out that the stories of innovation that are told after the fact impose order on what at the time was sheer instability, a jumble of decisions and uncertainties concerning the very nature of the final product. The official history of nylon, intent on presenting an edifying and prescriptible model of research and development, depicts an overly harmonious progression of scientific and technical steps. In doing so, it fails to show those of its aspects that are too tangled to fit into any model. This is too bad, for the hesitations, doubts, and compromises involved in a research project are often the reasons for its success, rather than shameful obstacles that must be hidden from view. (95)

In fact, this might be said of DuPont storytelling generally. The deliberate sequencing and presentation of events, as though other inventions and company activities occurred with neatly arranged beginnings, middles, and ends, also becomes more evident in company narratives over time.

Suffice it to say, nylon is just one item in the DuPont arsenal of products and substances. However, the narratives surrounding it – the initial creation story; the challenges in explaining its chemical composition to the layperson; response to its
initial launch and coverage by the press; its feature in fairs and exhibits to show the everyday life improvements it was behind; its ability to create markets that had not previously existed; its role in drawing DuPont back into wartime production; its exemplum in defending DuPont’s bigness; and the construction and reconstruction of the stories about it – stand as a robust representation of DuPont’s “Better Living” narratives as well as the ongoing refinement of the company super story.

Advertising on Autopilot

“Better Living” ultimately served as the company’s storytelling framework, for nylon and all the other innovations DuPont produced, for a record sixty-four years before being phased out as part of a shift in corporate strategy – another storytelling inflection point – at the turn of the twenty first century. Within twenty years after its initial announcement, nylon had “hundreds of new uses,” from passenger tires and cord to the outer shell of a space garment (“Memorandum Nylon” 4). The Cavalcade of America radio program ran through 1953, overlapping slightly with the launch of a newly adapted television show by the same name that ran through 1957. According to Bird, this “shift from the rhetorical to the dramatic occurred as America’s largest industrial corporations entered the entertainment business…The dramatization of the personal meaning of corporate enterprise, like commercial radio, propelled to new heights a popular culture of sponsored films…” (121). DuPont took industrial films to Hollywood levels with productions like “Soldiers of the Soil” and “The Work Goes On” as it endeavored to connect with the everyday American and show its patriotism.
Antitrust battles continued to plague DuPont through the 1940s, and the end of World War II triggered not only resumption of the prosecution of the pending suits, but also new charges against DuPont over paints, cellophane, wood finishes, brake fluid and its General Motors stock” (Kinnane 156). However, all of the company’s efforts in traditional print advertising as well as the new media of radio, television, and motion pictures proved effective. Unlike the Psychological Corporation surveys that found less than favorable ratings in 1939, in 1958 “79 percent of those tested thought well of Du Pont Company; less than 3 percent were unfavorable” (Zilg 388). It seemed the “Better Living” framework was working on autopilot.

With the diversification and globalization of the firm over the next few decades, countless stories continued to be told under the “Better Living” umbrella. Though focused largely on political activities, wartime production, and the story of nylon, this chapter has revealed DuPont’s first coordinated and strategic efforts at storytelling, and the challenges and successes of creating and distributing narratives in a large organization. Although the company told various and numerous stories, those stories maintained as their cornerstone the company’s one-hundred-year-old reputation, as well as experience in scientific and innovative approaches. Internal

32 See Marchand, pp. 324-329, for deployment of “common folk” characters and DuPont’s use of film.

33 DuPont was presented with six antitrust indictments before the end of the 1940s (Hounshell and Smith 597).
correspondence affords a unique understanding from within DuPont to protect its reputation as well as efforts to try to control its story, while external media provide a context for public perception and understanding. This chapter shows that despite the complications that can arise from retroactive storytelling (as with nylon), imposing an order on historical company events can effectively persuade audiences and more readily communicate a complex story in a compelling way. This imposition of order on events in fact becomes standard practice for the company in telling its super story, as we can see when DuPont reorganized and eliminated its venerable slogan in favor of a new tagline upon its next strategic inflection point.
Chapter 5

MIRACLES AND MERGERS: DUPONT STORIES IN MODERN MEDIA

“After serious soul-searching, it is [the] tradition of scientific excellence and the leaps that result that the company has concluded is at its core. And this will be the motivation as DuPonters gear up for a new century of growth. In fact, the words The miracles of science™ will be seen more and more frequently on DuPont corporate communications as a compelling description of the essence of DuPont.”

— “Charting the Course for a New Century,” 1999 (3)

“The miracles of science™ is more than a slogan – it’s more than a corporate ad campaign – it’s about who we are as a company and what we intend to be in the future.”

— Carol Gee, Global Brand Manager, DuPont, 1999 (“TO DO List” 4)

From inventions to investigations, World Wars to World’s Fairs, DuPont established, and has maintained, adapted, and defended, its corporate image with its stakeholders and the public for over two centuries through the use of strategic stories. While the previous chapters of this dissertation examined the company’s public relations via storytelling during some of the greatest inflection points in its history, this chapter analyzes new narratives in order to offer continued insight into the ongoing adaptation and retelling of DuPont’s super story from a modern business approach. Archival resources on DuPont’s internal communications and operations from the last twenty-five years remain inaccessible for research, but a variety of resources still offer a window into company perspectives, including the long-running

34 See Chapter 2 for additional information on access to archival materials at Hagley.
DuPont Magazine, which was published regularly through 2003; reports to shareholders; Adrian Kinnane’s book, which was commissioned by the company for its two hundredth anniversary; and correspondence with a current and long-time corporate communications employee at DuPont. In addition, open source digital media, including websites and video content, along with industry publications and press articles, provide an external – and intertextual – context for analyzing these more recent shifts in DuPont’s strategy and storytelling.

As the opening quotations of this chapter suggest, overall “scientific excellence” – not just within the bounds of one form of science – embodied the fundamental nature of DuPont’s business as it entered the twenty-first century (“Charting” 3). This shift became the company’s next inflection point: global expansion and diversification from chemical and material sciences to include biological sciences. Accordingly, this chapter begins with an examination of this important change for the company, whose previous longstanding motto emphasized better life specifically through chemistry. It traces the transition from “Better Living” to “The miracles of science™” campaign (hereafter referred to as “Miracles”), which provided a ready-made storytelling framework for DuPont’s new corporate commitments. A brief examination of the company’s use of photographic stories to highlight thematic “leaps” shows how the brand story was initially reinforced. Later in 1999, DuPont released its “TO DO List for the Planet.” This series offers an opportunity to explore how DuPont used global television advertising and print campaigns to tell a story about its goals and achievements using science to improve
basic human needs, all while reinforcing the “Miracles” message. The chapter then presents an analysis of the company’s most recent campaign, “Welcome to the Global Collaboratory,” and follows how DuPont made more significant use of new media, including websites and YouTube videos, to reach audiences worldwide and perpetuate the narratives of “Miracles.” Finally, it highlights DuPont’s latest storytelling landscape, and suggests opportunities for continued research.

“Better Living” Eventually Sees Better Days

“Better Things for Better Living…Through Chemistry” remained the overarching message under which all DuPont narratives were crafted for an unprecedented sixty-four years, leaving an indelible impact on the company’s super story and acting as an exemplar of twentieth century organizational storytelling. Enduring internal company developments and the external global and business environment, the “Better Living” refrain found efficacy in the decades following its launch in 1935, and subsequent World’s Fairs exhibits and new product innovations through the 1950s. Nylon celebrated its twentieth anniversary in the 1960s, and a series of advertisements continued to tell the story of how nylon made life better in everything from toothbrushes and clothing to tires and carpet. During this time period, the company also focused more on selling items directly to consumers. As Kinnane points out, “Brand name recognition was a key element of the company’s direct-to-consumer marketing strategy. By 1962, there were 225 products wearing the oval, including car care products, paints, sponges and combs” (180). In fact, DuPont
launched forty-one new products in this decade alone, including such well-known products as Lycra, Teflon, and Tyvek (187). Through it all, “Better Living” served as a useful backdrop for storytelling, while the DuPont oval continued to mark a sign of quality (see Figure 32).

As DuPont entered the 1970s, though, a turbulent social and political environment called for a revised approach to storytelling by the company and for the first time, directly challenged “Better Living.” As Kinnane explains, “New mores and regulations emerging from civil rights, environmental and consumer movements soon governed every aspect of business life, from personnel hiring and promotion to manufacturing, marketing and waste disposal” (193). A few incidents in particular resulted in a change to the full “Better Things for Better Living…through Chemistry” slogan. Communication scholar Richard Junger offers a condensed summary on the issues DuPont faced in the seventies:

[DuPont’s] ‘Better things for better living . . . through chemistry’ slogan was adopted by users of the drug LSD and other synthetically produced hallucinogens. The deployment of napalm and other chemical defoliants in the Vietnam War was a public relations nightmare for the entire chemical industry. Earth Day on 22 April 1970 focused additional critical attention on plastics and other nonbiodegradable substances…In 1974 the reputation of the company suffered further because of its alleged involvement in the suppression of Gerald C. Zilg’s DuPont: Behind the Nylon Curtain, a 623-page history of the company and the du Pont family… (505).

While the damages from Zilg’s charges were overturned and the case declined by the U.S. Supreme Court (Junger 505), DuPont had to take some action. It appeared that
As a chemical manufacturer, Du Pont supplies products used by nearly every branch of industry. Some 95 per cent of its 1,200 products and product lines are sold to other manufacturers for further processing. In most cases, Du Pont’s role goes unseen on the end product’s label.

How, then, is the Du Pont name so well known to so many people outside manufacturing circles? Conceived here in partial answer are the 225 products that currently serve as the company’s retail detail. This is no underground team: its members wear their colors openly and proudly at thousands of outlets—from rural garages to department stores. As Du Pont’s direct answer to the great consuming public, they’re Johnny-on-the-spot at that precise moment when a shop-}

Figure 32 “225 Ovals That Cross the Counter.” This 1962 “Better Living” advertisement shows the growing number of products – all wearing the DuPont oval – available direct to consumers (34). Courtesy HML, HID 1962_56_04.
chemistry was not all for good, at least in terms of public perception and media coverage, and for DuPont this was all too familiar territory.

In a 1985 issue of *DuPont Magazine*, though, the company reflected on the need for change from a different standpoint. In a story called “A Promise Made, Promise Kept,” the company conducted a retrospective on “Better Living” in celebration of the phrase’s fiftieth anniversary. Ironically, if not largely misguided, the article through a corporate author glibly suggested, “Half a century later, no one recalls who coined the Better Living phrase.” Reflecting less on the phrase’s origin story (which as we know stemmed largely from a corporate image crisis), the article emphasized instead the point “that DuPont has kept its promise through five decades of discovery, development and diversification into fields of need and opportunity, some of which scarcely were imagined in 1935.” Nylon and Teflon took center stage as noted accomplishments among “a stunning roster of Better Things for Better Living…through Chemistry” including mention of fibers used in carpets; paints; and plastics (“A Promise” 14). When it came to the trouble of the 1970s, though, DuPont had its own story. As it had five decades before with the infamous “merchants of death” charges that necessitated the “Better Living” slogan, the company in its presentation of historical material omitted portions of the narrative attributed by those outside the company (such as the findings of Junger and Ndiaye) and instead perpetuated its own view:

By the 1970s, two words in the widely recognized slogan had become too limiting. Chemistry was no longer the sole progenitor of Du Pont’s
Better Things for Better Living. The company’s overall orientation was shifting; its investigations striking out into areas of interest and human need where its own strengths—couple with acquired technologies—could produce significant contributions (“A Promise” 14).

This assertion by DuPont is no more or less true than Junger’s and Ndiaye’s recounting of events in the seventies and the company’s resulting need to modify the slogan and diversify the company. The key here is the ongoing battle for control of the company super story. Though the article concludes with the company’s “underlying corporate goal—to constantly renew and fulfill the 50-year-old promise of Better Things for Better Living” (“A Promise” 15), the challenges of perpetuating the same credo in a changing world were becoming evident.

Ultimately, “Better Living” marched on through the eighties and nineties, and DuPont continued to find ways to set its advertisements in the context of the company story. Its campaign around Stainmaster carpet fiber showed the ease with which one could clean a stained carpet, making life at home easier.35 According to Junger, the ads quickly “helped make Stainmaster a consumer success and DuPont the largest maker of carpet fiber in the country” (505). Print ads in the nineties, too, showed how DuPont still made life better for people. An advertisement appearing in New York Times Business World Magazine told “the human story of new plastics” through a photograph of a Vietnam veteran wearing plastic leg prostheses and playing basketball (Bird 212), effectively showing its brand story being lived. But as the eighties had

35 See Junger, p. 505, for a detailed description of the television advertisement.
shown, once again, internal and external forces were coming together that resulted in the company electing to retire its long-term tagline and try something new.

Perhaps the greatest cause for phasing out “Better Living” was the increased diversification and restructuring of the company. Signals for change were amplified in the 1980s. In 1981, DuPont purchased oil company Conoco, Inc., partly to acquire “a secure source of petroleum feedstocks needed for many of its fiber and plastics operations” (Kinnane 215) and “in part to obtain relief from the on-again, off-again production restraints and price uncertainties of OPEC-controlled oil supplies” (217). This action drew public criticism, with analysts questioning how Conoco fit into DuPont’s corporate strategy. One analyst suggested, “As a result of this acquisition, Du Pont can forget about its image as a specialized company diversifying downstream into high technology. It will become just a big commodities giant,” while another questioned, “I don’t see how Du Pont can afford to change its character” (Feder).

Edward Jefferson, who took over for Shapiro as chairman in 1980, and his successor Richard E. Heckert, defended the Conoco purchase, suggesting the company had to move in new directions, away from its old identity as simply a chemical company… Citing diminished growth in the chemical industry during the 1970s, Jefferson claimed that ‘DuPont no longer fits the traditional chemical industry definition. Our company is based on discovery.’ ‘Discover’ had a nice rhetorical ring. It was positive, upbeat and consistent with DuPont’s rich research history. But in the 1980s, a decade of corporate raiders, junk bonds, leveraged buyouts and hostile takeovers, it applied as much to DuPont’s evolving identity as to the discovery of knowledge…

Increasingly, DuPont shifted its R&D efforts away from oil-dependent products and into dramatically different fields. These included
electronics and a diverse group of ‘life sciences’ such as molecular biology, virology, pharmaceuticals and agriculture (Kinnane 218).

Related to this shift into different fields, the Conoco purchase prompted the company in 1981 to alter the “Better Living” slogan by removing the “Through Chemistry” portion of the phrase. Carisio’s perspective from inside the company reveals,

with the Conoco purchase, half the company was in the energy business. So to have a phrase that specified ‘through chemistry’ didn’t take into account how all the new Conoco employees saw themselves as part of DuPont, nor did it capture the spirit of the new organization (Carisio, Second).

In 1989, Edgar S. Woolard Jr. succeeded Heckert as chief executive officer and over the course of his leadership “changed dramatically the way [DuPont] did business,” but it was Woolard’s successor, John A. “Jack” Krol who took over in 1995 and brought the company into “a new and important phase of its transition from a 20th century chemical company to a 21st century global science company” (Kinnane 241, emphasis original). The change was fully realized under Charles O. “Chad” Holliday Jr., who became DuPont’s chief executive officer in February 1998, and later chairman in 1999. As Kinnane points out, “Holliday moved quickly to enhance DuPont’s global market strengths” (242). The majority of those moves came between

36 In a discrepancy with company record, Ndaiye suggests the company briefly suspended the slogan and in 1972, permanently removed “…through Chemistry” (123).
1998 and 1999 in the form of sales of a variety of the company’s assets that no longer suited its corporate strategy, and acquisition of others that did. Businesses sold included DuPont’s “global hydrogen peroxide business, printing and publishing businesses, and remaining 50 percent interest in Consol,” an energy company with interests in coal that had been acquired by DuPont as part of the Conoco deal (242). DuPont was also “liberated for new ventures” when in October 1998, it “parted with 30 percent of Conoco in the largest independent public stock offering in U.S. history” (245). Acquisitions included the purchase of Pioneer Hi-Bred International in early 1999, and later “an alliance with General Foods to develop and improve soy foods” (250).

Somewhat less concerning than the diversification of the business, but nonetheless impacting the need for change, was the public’s perception and confusion surrounding other company taglines. For example, according to an industry report, “the public confused ‘Better things for better living’ with General Electric Co.’s ‘We bring good things to life’” (Callahan, “Marketing” 1). Taking both its corporate strategy and perception of the public into account, as DuPont had done sixty-four years earlier, it turned once again to outside expertise in the quest to capture the essence of its corporate image in a succinct tagline.
The first time DuPont used an external agency to distill its corporate goals into a single phrase, it did so to address an inflection point – its transition from gunpowder and explosives maker into chemical innovator – but the move was also largely in response to an image crisis resulting from alleged post-war profiteering and the need to repair its reputation. The company did not strategically seek out assistance; instead, advertising consultants sought out the company, and it was the persistence of Bruce Barton that ultimately won his agency the account. This time around, however, the company faced more of an identity crisis than anything else. People may have known by then that “DuPont’s red oval was a familiar landmark on America’s progress toward a better future” (Kinnane 168), but what exactly was better about that future was no longer clear. The “Better Living” framework, even with the removal of the “through Chemistry” part of the phrase over a decade earlier, no longer sufficiently defined who DuPont was as a company, nor the full range of its contributions to society. Through rapid global expansion and diversification, the company had once again reached an inflection point and needed a better way to articulate its identity.

Executive views on the value of organized publicity had advanced significantly since DuPont’s first formal foray into marketing, and much unlike Lammot du Pont, who years before had opposed institutional advertising, Holliday was keenly aware of the need to tell a better story through the company’s communications with stakeholders. DuPont did have its own corporate communications department at the time, and leadership from that unit, along with Global Public Affairs, coordinated with
Holliday to turn once again to outside help, but now on its own terms. The company put out a bid to a number of advertising agencies and Holliday explained “the company’s need to reinvent itself one more time” (Callahan, “Marketing” 1). This time, it was New York agency McCann-Erickson Worldwide that ultimately came away with the account.

The agency’s job was “to summarize—ideally in four words or fewer—DuPont’s new direction and how its chemical and biological disciplines would work together to meet life’s needs.” For Nat Puccio, an executive vice president at McCann-Erickson, “The challenge was to make that mouthful into a coherent identity for where DuPont was going.” In their mission to distill DuPont’s complex message into something that would resonate with the layperson, the agency used company research along with video interviews with DuPont employees to create a proposal. Ultimately, it was an associate creative director by the name of Jonathan Cranin who suggested “The miracles of science” shortly before McCann-Erickson was due to report back to DuPont along with the other agencies (Callahan, “Marketing” 2). While the DuPont executives and employees present for the pitch liked what they heard, the decision to institute the new slogan remained subject to another round of review.

In an effort to make the final decision on a new tagline more objective, DuPont enlisted Opinion Research Corporation of New Jersey to conduct employee and customer focus groups around the world, the results of which author Sean Callahan says, “tell the story: ‘It did a good job of tying together all of DuPont’s businesses and has a tagline that can last forever,’ one North American employee said. ‘It’s absolutely
related to DuPont, because we operate miracles through research,’ a South American employee said” (Callahan, “Marketing” 2). This incorporation of employee input is an important element in the story creation process. As professional writing scholar Graham Smart suggests, “the discourse of insiders can offer a unique window onto the indigenous work-world that they communally construct and co-inhabit” (24). As Forman notes, too, stories must “support the organization’s strategy, culture, and brand” and “should take into account the voices of significant others, such as employees, customers, and communities” (24). By involving voices outside of the circle of executive leadership, DuPont was effectively making an effort to ensure the slogan, and thereby the subsequent stories to be told in its context, was not only something that genuinely represented its products but also its people. About one month later, DuPont formalized the partnership with McCann-Erickson.

On April 28, DuPont released its “Miracles” campaign with a 12-page advertising supplement in The Wall Street Journal. The launch appeared in print publications worldwide, including The Asian Wall Street Journal and Financial Times (Callahan, “Marketing” 1), in the UK in the Daily Telegraph, Times, Sunday Times, and Sunday Telegraph with Pan European ads on CNN (“DuPont launches”), and in Ebony magazine, to name just a few. Along with the launch came DuPont’s initial brand story within the framework. As it turns out, during the brainstorming process for the “Miracles” tagline, McCann-Erickson

began building a proposed ad campaign alluding to Neil Armstrong’s first words from the moon: ‘One small step for man, one giant leap for
mankind.’ The campaign, which featured the line, ‘We didn’t get where we wanted to go by taking baby steps,’ would present the scientists at DuPont’s labs as people making dramatic leaps forward (Callahan, “Marketing” 2).

The proposal ultimately stuck with the “Miracles” tagline and was portrayed photographically and textually in the launch (see Figure 33).

DuPont said of the campaign release that it was “creating a fresh corporate image” through “the theme of ‘leaps’ to generate excitement about the company’s future” (“Charting” 3). The initial series began with an image detail of a step on the moon, accompanied by those original words from the McCann-Erickson proposal (see Figure 33). On the following two-page spread, an airborne individual against the backdrop of a bright sky leaps above the words, “We got there by taking Leaps” while in smaller print the facing page reads, “It’s what DuPont has always done. Taking leaps that change everything” (“Leaps” 2, emphasis original; see also Figure 34). Each page that followed featured a full-page photograph that told a story, with just enough text to highlight DuPont’s role in the “miracle” behind that story through “leaps” of “courage;” “imagination;” “faith;” and “into the future.” For example, photographs representing “Leaps of courage” showed a firefighter and an arctic explorer in action in their respective environments, able to carry out their work because of DuPont “Nomex for heat and flame-resistant clothing” and “Thermolite insulation for survival in sub-zero temperatures” (“Leaps” 4). The final page of the advertisement tied back to the front page, with an image of footsteps fading into the unknown on the surface of the moon, with a near full page of text:
Figure 33  The first page of the new series in the “Miracles” launch maintained the original concept from the McCann-Erickson proposal. Courtesy HML, Acc. 2003.256.1-20.
Figure 34  “We got there by taking Leaps.” A bold photograph represents the thematic “leaps” by DuPont to reinforce the new “Miracles” tagline. Courtesy HML, Acc. 2003.256.1-.20.
Taking the leaps that make miracles happen.
In every field from fashion to pharmaceuticals
to agriculture to aerospace.
For DuPont, it’s business as usual.
Today the company is leaping to a whole new world—
where buildings and bridges are made with a silk
that’s stronger than steel. Where electronic newspapers
are so thin and flexible, they can go anywhere.
where clothes are made from fabrics that “know” to
warm you when you’re cold, and cool you when you’re hot.
We’ll get there the same way
we always have.
The people of DuPont.
With the imagination to envision the impossible,
the determination to find the way,
and the conscience to find
the right way (“Leaps” 12).

Through this final copy, DuPont asserted its previous contributions (“business as
usual”) and made a brand promise for where it would deliver future contributions
(“buildings and bridges…electronic newspapers…clothes”). Holliday echoed both the
historical contributions of the company and its potential outlook, saying, “Over two
centuries, we have delivered big miracles and little miracles…Going forward, our
common focus will be to leverage our collective scientific knowledge and
competencies to innovate, originate and realize many more miracles” (“Charting” 3).
Much like the storytelling case of Chevron that Forman explores, DuPont’s series
“illustrates how such stories make the corporate brand concrete and credible; how they
rely on accurate data while appealing to the heart; how they may evoke the values of
the broader culture, appealing to what is admired in the human spirit…” (91). DuPont
presented modern “miracles” that it already contributed to society as a means for
establishing credibility in its promise to deliver future miracles, while once again maintaining its cornerstone of scientific innovation.

Various iterations of the brand promise around the new “Miracles” campaign appeared in different publications. In DuPont’s own periodical, the *DuPont Magazine*, a back cover of the magazine featured all of the “leaps” from *The Wall Street Journal* insert condensed into one page (see Figure 35). In addition, as noted earlier, DuPont took advertising space in various publications like *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, the UK’s *Daily Telegraph*, and *Ebony* magazine to reach specific audiences. A repository through Google Books affords digital access to *Ebony*, and thus an opportunity to explore how the company tailored its story to different stakeholders. The October 1999 issue featured a series of advertisements similar to *The Wall Street Journal* insert designed for specific appeal to *Ebony*’s readers (see Figure 36). Some of the thematic leaps and nature of the images remained (e.g., the firefighter and “Leaps of courage”), while some were newly tailored for *Ebony* and addressed other “Miracles,” like “Leaps of Compassion” (akin to “Leaps of faith” in “breakthrough medicines” in the previous insert (“Leaps 6”)). All, however, continued to emphasize the notion that DuPont’s historical delivery of science “miracles” served as a promising record for its future innovations (“World is Full” 31).

DuPont continued its emphasis on the “leaps” theme under the “Miracles” umbrella in the December issue of *Ebony* with a feature, “DuPont Presents 100 Years of Blacks in Science” (84). In particular, a timeline “Celebrating 100 Years of African American Excellence in Science” positioned the company’s achievements side-by-side
“Taking the leaps that make miracles happen.” Another version of copy relating to the theme of “leaps” in the “Miracles” brand story, excerpted from a DPM back cover. Courtesy HML, HID 1999_93_02.
Figure 36 A variation of DuPont’s thematic “leaps” to reinforce the “Miracles” campaign appeared in *Ebony* magazine (“World is Full” 24).
with those of African Americans, noting “Throughout history, African-Americans have made great leaps in science…At DuPont we’re always dreaming and taking leaps, and as we approach our 200th anniversary, DuPont salutes the men and women who dare to dream, have the imagination to envision the impossible, and the determination to find the way” (87). Though the “Miracles” phrase was not formally implemented as a slogan until 1999, it was used throughout the timeline to unify DuPont achievements beginning with the company’s earliest timeline entries, calling its original gunpowder and explosives products “one of ‘The miracles of sciences™’ in the early 1800s” (86). The 1999 entry also used the theme, noting, “DuPont is leaping to the future with: 3GT – a method that uses any carbohydrate source…to make a new type of polyester with superior characteristics; holographic materials…pharmaceutical breakthroughs; coatings technology leadership; and alternative energy sources.” The final timeline entry, “and beyond…,” suggested “African-American men and women at DuPont will continue to drive research for new products for the next millennium—taking the leaps that make miracles happen” (87). More than a repetitive theme, these additional instances of DuPont’s emphasis on “leaps” to achieve “Miracles” continued to provide real examples of DuPont’s contributions to human welfare through the advances of science. As Forman suggests, “a brand tagline…needs to be anchored in reality” (111); DuPont offered true instances of high-performing materials through this campaign. At the same time, the imagery appealed to human emotion, another sign of a fluent story. Each photograph effectively illustrated the connection between mind and heart. The tagline also represents not just
who DuPont is as a company, but meets Forman’s criteria that it should be “succinct shorthand for what a company…aspires to become” (112). Again, this is just one example of the extension of DuPont’s campaign tailored to a specific audience.

In all, DuPont was able to realize success as it transitioned from “Better Living” to “Miracles.” As Callahan notes, the watchword “received a warm reception” and “the immediate reaction was positive: DuPont’s share price closed at $73.50…after closing the previous day at $69.13” (“Marketing” 2). But the pressures of modern marketing in the context of social and environmental issues quickly put “Miracles” to the test, and forced DuPont to move from promising “leaps” to showing specific steps it was taking, not just to make scientific innovations, but to do so responsibly.

Making a List and Checking it Twice

Just six months after using thematic “leaps” to represent its shift in corporate strategy, DuPont found another theme to reinforce the overarching message of its brand story. The “TO DO List for the Planet” (hereafter cited as “To Do List”), which first appeared in October 1999, represents not just continued storytelling within an established framework for DuPont, but a formal public move by the company in recognizing its corporate social responsibility (CSR). Much as DuPont sought years before to prove its corporate “soul” and citizenship through the launch of “Better Living,” CSR serves as the modern context within which DuPont endeavored to assert its corporate image. This chapter maintains its focus on the credibility and strategy of
storytelling to manage identity, image, and reputation; incorporating some aspects of CSR, however, offers an enriched analysis of the “To Do List” and the social and environmental contexts within which DuPont grew to tell its stories.

By the time DuPont had launched “Miracles” it was operating twenty strategic business units, within which eighty businesses were manufacturing and selling everything from agricultural, construction and automotive products, to textiles, pharmaceuticals, and electronics in sixty-five countries around the world; the company also employed 94,000 people globally (E. I. DuPont, “Form 10K 1999” 3). Notwithstanding the sheer size and diversity of brick and mortar operations, the impact of producing such innovations meant an undeniable environmental footprint for the company. Compounded with the pollutant nature of the byproducts of manufacture, and the company was not only a target for social and ecological criticism but ultimately subject to a variety of legal and environmental proceedings.37 Andrew Dearing, former program director for the World Business Council for Sustainable

37 Given the expanse and diversity of its business, the number and nature of legal and environmental proceedings involving DuPont are many. For example, at the end of 2001, DuPont faced: several hundred lawsuits regarding claims of crop damage and runoff issues from use of its Benlate 50 DF fungicide; settlement with the Department of Justice and Environmental Protection Agency in response to a hydrogen fluoride/tar mixture release of nearly six tons in Louisville, Kentucky; and a natural resource damage assessment of a river and canal system in Indiana due to discharge of industrial wastewater into the waterways (E. I. DuPont, “Form 10K 2001” 10). See “Legal Proceedings” sections of the company’s various annual reports for additional instances.
Development, offers a useful explanation of the crux of the issue facing DuPont and other large industrial organizations:

Many people perceive innovation as technological progress related to indiscriminate economic growth, leading to depletion of the natural environment and increasing pollution. A real commitment on the part of corporations, rather than technology itself, is seen as the prerequisite for creating the conditions for sustainable growth and better quality of life. Consumers expect companies to go beyond minimum requirements and be main actors in realising these conditions…(111).

Dearing’s sentiments are echoed by Mike Longhurst, a senior vice president at McCann-Erickson, who suggests the pressures of sustainability, “the economic, social and environmental well-being of the planet,” led in the early 2000s to a conceptual shift for corporate communications (44). It was one thing for DuPont to make promises of “leaps” in scientific innovations, but how it would perform as a good corporate citizen in attaining those advances was another issue entirely.

Understanding it needed to address sustainability in a voice and image that would resonate with the public and speak to its corporate citizenship, DuPont once again enlisted McCann-Erickson to help craft its story. The firm ultimately came up with the “To Do List” with a two-fold intent. In the words of McCann-Erickson creative director Katie Peabody, the goals of the new campaign were for “people who don’t know DuPont to get a better understanding of the company’s successes and their relevance to society, as well as appreciate the scope of what the company is working on for the future. Second, we want the people of DuPont to be proud of what they’ve accomplished in 200 years” (“TO DO List” 4). Here we see DuPont once again
considering the internal impact of its storytelling by considering the employee perspective. This approach is similar to Smart’s research on corporate strategy change in a bank, which represents “a more communal version of situated change, one in which the community-of-practitioners acts collectively to improve the rhetorical effectiveness of the genre set associated with the Communications [sic] strategy” (36). Longhurst later suggested the “To Do List” was also aimed at showing sustainability could be “exciting and interesting and…not just about advertising” (44). For Holliday, it was important to address DuPont’s role specifically with regard to sustainability. In remarks to The Economic Club of Detroit that November, he noted, “This role that business plays in meeting human needs around the world has to be emphasized time and again, because we sometimes forget how much good we can do as industrial companies” (“Industry and Sustainability”). A few years later, Holliday continued to emphasize DuPont’s corporate responsibilities in public settings. For example, in a speech delivered at the TERI Delhi Sustainable Development Summit in 2003, he explained the company’s definition of sustainable growth as “creating shareholder and societal value while we reduce our environmental footprint…along the value chains in which we operate.” He also defended the company’s historical efforts on that front noting,

Sustainable growth has been [DuPont’s] stated goal since the late 1990s. But it was already a factor in how we envisioned the future of our business as early as 1989. We are no newcomers to environmental and sustainability performance issues…But the process of coming to identify our overriding corporate objective as sustainable growth was
evolutionary. And it is the natural outcome of melding two separate strains of corporate social responsibility ("Remarks").

Through leadership’s ongoing public acknowledgement of its corporate citizenship responsibilities, DuPont gradually added sustainability as part of its formal super story. The change was evident to Longhurst, who credits DuPont with having “completely embraced this new [CSR] positioning as a corporate philosophy,” and in words Forman might use, noted it is “really what companies have to do to be both credible and effective” (46). Both Dearing and Longhurst cite DuPont’s “To Do List” as evidence both of the need for firms to acknowledge their CSR, and as an example of what that should look like.

DuPont early on linked sustainability with CSR. In remarks to The Economic Club of Detroit, Holliday told the audience, “We think that sustainability is implicit in our new corporate positioning in which we say our goal is to deliver ‘The miracles of science™’ to people around the world,” adding that the “To Do List” reinforced that position (“Industry and Sustainability”). With this understanding, the company once again considered its reach and audience. No longer operating in a handful of countries, the stories this time needed to be accessible to – and relatable with – individuals around the world. To these ends, while DuPont had used television and print to tell its story in the past, the “To Do List” was the company’s first-ever global advertising campaign to appear in those media (“TO DO List” 4). Television advertisements debuted in September 1999 on “60 Minutes II,” and in China, Japan, and Germany, while the print pieces appeared in news and business publications in North and South
America, Europe, and Asia (“DuPont Launches Global”). DuPont also released the campaign in its long-running *DuPont Magazine* (see Figure 37), in which a caption about the magazine cover invited readers to look inside “for the story behind these compelling stories.” As for audience, DuPont used the frame of a list to connect with people worldwide. A list is a textual device that resonates with the masses, and so this thematic approach by DuPont evidences an effort to connect with the layperson. Beyond its reach and relevance, the list itself has agency, a key aspect in telling a story as it relates to CSR. Organizational communication scholar François Cooren’s research on corporate discourse, though it examines textual agency from the inside of a firm, offers a useful lens through which to examine DuPont’s “To Do List.” In his essay on the function of texts in organizational contexts, Cooren suggests an approach that places texts as the agents (374). Using an example of a generic checklist, Cooren notes how the text results in actions (e.g., an airline pilot’s checklist can “structure talk, enact directives, establish records” and so on (375), while a manager making rounds and writing on Post-it notes will eventually return to his office and act on those notes – phone a client, check a product price, etc. (378)). In these ways, Cooren suggests texts play an active role and offer an avenue to analyze organizational processes. Taken with Forman’s observation that “at the most basic level, stories are about concrete actions performed and about the agents who perform them” (117), the frame itself, then, of DuPont’s “To Do List” suggested the company planned to take action. Unlike the “leaps” theme, which illustrated more of a vision for DuPont’s
Figure 37  DuPont presents its “To Do List for the Planet” in a new series of stories supporting the “Miracles” campaign, shown here on a cover of the *DPM*. Courtesy HML, HID 1999_93_04.
corporate strategy, the “To Do List” outlined how it would actually get there.

For business communication scholars JoAnne Yates and Wanda Orlikowski, genres of organizational communication – such as the report, the memo, or as in DuPont’s case, a to do list – are socially embedded forms that interact between individual and institution. They suggest “a typified communicative action invoked in response to a recurrent situation…includes the history and nature of established practices, social relations, and communication media within organizations” (301). Using a request for a recommendation letter as an example, Yates and Orlikowski suggest implicit assumptions and conditions, including “the existence of employment procedures…and documentation of prior performance” (301). Applied to DuPont’s “To Do List,” the list genre acts as both a guide for what remains to be accomplished, as well as a useful mechanism for the company to acknowledge items already achieved. Marked in a handwritten typeface, the phrase “Did That” indicates innovations DuPont already contributed to society (see Figure 38). Instead of just suggesting the possibilities as the “leaps” did in the “Miracles” launch, the “To Do List” gave DuPont’s goals agency, and evidenced more of what Forman calls the company “deliver[ing] on expectations… walk[ing] the talk” (91). Holliday publicly acknowledged this approach, noting, “For some of these [to do items] we check ‘Done That’ but in others we do not have a way to meet the need but are working on it. This signals our intent to play a broader role in meeting important needs for all of the world’s population” (“Industry and Sustainability”). This view is consistent with that of Argenti and Forman, who suggest a campaign at the institutional level should “be

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Figure 38  “TO DO List for the Planet: 29. Add Lycra to Leather.” An example of a “To Do List” item that DuPont marked “Did That.” Courtesy HML, Acc. 2003.256.1-20.
both strategic, looking toward the future of the company and aligned with its mission, and consistent, aligning with the products and services the company sells” (107, emphasis original). Such is the case with the “To Do List;” some items tell a story about DuPont’s current achievements while others remained goals. This approach mirrored that of the “leaps” theme in that it addressed DuPont innovations already extant as well as those that had future potential to have a technological impact.

Finally, the “To Do List” illustrates how DuPont modified the voice of the campaign and used imagery to connect with audiences. Each item told a story via a photographic representation with brief text to explain the nature of the previous achievement or future goal. Unlike the loftier vision of the previous “leaps” theme, this presentation gave the “To Do List” a more relatable voice, while imagery appealed more to emotion. For Forman, this “balance between the organizational and the personal” is an essential component to corporate storytelling (35). And for DuPont specifically, as Forman notes for “technical products and services that are not easily understandable, stories about people enjoying the benefits of the technology humanize a company and what it sells” (35). We see the “To Do List” stories negotiating that line between innovation and impact.

Perhaps the most memorable to-do item of the campaign that achieves the balance between emotion and science is item “Twenty-One.” The to-do, “Make humans as comfortable in the Arctic as everyone else,” is visually reinforced with a polar bear cub snuggled on top of its parent, representing warmth and comfort (see Figure 39). Item Twenty-One also represents something on which DuPont is able to
Figure 39  “TO DO List for the Planet: 21. Make humans as comfortable in the Arctic as everyone else.” DuPont’s “To Do List” campaign appealed to the mind and heart, with photographs like this one reinforcing an emotional reaction to informative text. Courtesy HML, Acc. 2003.256.1-.20.
mark “Did That,” accompanied by a small sketch of a winter coat and the following statement: “with fibers so resistant to cold, they let people work, play, and relax in subzero temperatures. (As usual, nature deserves a lot of the credit – we use the “same” fiber system as polar bear fur” (“Twenty-One”). In other words, DuPont technology and science aided humans in their quest not just to survive but to thrive in habitats otherwise uninhabitable, save for native creatures. Taken in the context of DuPont’s historical super story, we gain even deeper meaning from Item Twenty-One’s ad copy. Recall for a moment one of the issues surrounding the launch of nylon; the claim that the fiber was better than silk, or as some people interpreted, better than nature, did not go over well for the company. Argenti and Forman suggest consumer feelings are powerful, and that “building emotional ties with consumers and all…constituencies becomes a crucial step to long-term success in reputation management” (101). In this more recent campaign, DuPont’s suggestion that “nature deserves a lot of the credit” took a lesson from the past, and by balancing its claim of conquering nature by simultaneously drawing attention to its corporate citizenship and care for the planet, made a strategic move toward managing its image among stakeholder opinions.

DuPont used the “To Do List” campaign – which tackled everything from agriculture to pharmaceuticals – as a mechanism for telling its CSR stories through the early 2000s. The impact on the company’s reputation was tangible. For example, in a speech at a sustainable development summit, Holliday noted that in January 2003, “the Financial Times annual CEO poll of list of ‘Companies that best manage and effect
environmental resources,’ [Dupont] placed 11th. One respondent to their survey said of DuPont, ‘for the last 30 years or so, I have heard them talk about the environment’” (“Remarks”). As the first decade of the new century wore on, though, continued concern over DuPont’s environmental footprint, coupled with growing concern in its involvement in areas like agriculture and genetically modified foods kept the company consistently under the public microscope. Simultaneously, a rapidly growing and more sophisticated digital environment provided another area in which the company needed to more formally address and expand its storytelling. One final campaign analysis offers insight into how DuPont took its CSR initiatives globally in new media.

Going Global through Collaboration

In November 2010, Ellen Kullman, the first female chief executive officer and then nineteenth leader of the company, spoke as Holliday had before her at the Detroit Economic Club. Citing a “half-century…of discovery and innovation” and calling DuPont “a market-driven science company” who’s “life blood…is science applied to the world’s problems,” Kullman called upon DuPont history to frame the company’s approach to the future – a move that had clearly become a signature of the DuPont super story. She spoke of “megatrends” that, though the next global campaign did not arrive for another half year, eventually became themes in the company’s next storytelling series. These areas, which Kullman called “strategic imperatives…[that] complement [DuPont’s] scientific strengths,” included “Increasing food production, decreasing dependence on fossil fuels, protecting lives and the environment, and
providing science-based solutions to developing markets across the globe” (“Reducing Dependence”). Publicly identifying these as focus areas signified a swing in DuPont’s storytelling pendulum from stories direct to consumers for the purpose of marketing products back to its corporate positioning as a thought leader. For Dearing, this shift is expected as a result of a firm’s acknowledgement of CSR. He notes, “The sense is that markets will increasingly be characterised by the power of vision: to think the future, imagine the future and shape the future. In other words, firms are being expected, and some are themselves expecting, to address sustainability by design” (111). The next year, the company more formally defined its vision with a new publicity effort.

To capture the essence of its refined outlook for the future, DuPont began what one manager of executive communications called “the company’s last really successful storytelling campaign” (Carisio, First). In May 2011, DuPont launched “Welcome to the Global Collaboratory” (hereafter referred to as “Collaboratory”), this time with the help of agency OgilvyOne (Maddox). The campaign stands out from some of the recently discussed modes of storytelling in the same way the company’s sponsorship of *Cavalcade of America* did in the middle of the twentieth century: though it was technically under the umbrella of the “Miracles” brand story, the “Collaboratory” served as corporate sponsorship of a greater idea for public good.38 This distinction between super story theme and singular campaign is not problematic

38 DuPont “also sponsored National Geographic’s ‘7 Billion,’ both in print and online, about the repercussions of having 7 billion people on Earth” (Callahan, “DuPont” 1).
though, because as Forman notes, “the framing power of taglines is substantial, yet they should not be the litmus test by which to select every story…in addition to generating new stories, a brand tagline can function as language that creates new understanding and motivates action” (116). The shift in DuPont’s approach to the “Collaboratory” is evident by the company’s own admission, as well as in industry reviews of the campaign.

Erich Parker, then strategic director of corporate communications at DuPont, confirmed the notion that the company was making a move toward being a thought leader when he commented, “It’s not really about branding. DuPont passionately believes in this notion of collaborative or collective problem solving. These issues are so large, they’re not going to be solved by any one person or company or any one region of the world” (McMains). The issues Parker alluded to were essentially consolidated from the “megatrends” Kullman spoke of the year before into three thematic areas: food, energy, and protection.39 In an interview, then vice president and chief marketing and sales officer Scott Coleman echoed the revised approach, which he said was to “revamp [DuPont’s] brand architecture along those three lines” as the maker of “the science behind the products” (Callahan, “DuPont” 1). All of the stories that followed the launch thus featured global scenes and people who fit into one of those categories. DuPont once again used print advertisements and photography (much

39 Protection is a broad category, meant to encompass innovations like the company’s Nomex, a flame-resistant fiber, or Kevlar, used in protective body gear.
of which was sourced through *National Geographic*) to tell stories within the three overarching areas of the “Collaboratory.” The company also ran an editorial on the television docuseries *Horizons* (McMains). But beyond print advertisements, the campaign is an even better subject for examining how DuPont transitioned into new digital media.

By Coleman’s admission, when it came to digital storytelling for the company, that historically meant “siloed websites and content creation” (Callahan, “DuPont” 1). What distinguished the “Collaboratory” from DuPont’s previous efforts was the company’s adoption of additional digital outlets, including *YouTube* as well as social and mobile platforms. According to Coleman, DuPont “built a new system to increase the efficiency of content management – to create it once and share across the website,” resulting in the need to “populate content in one place and have it appear all over the world on various platforms” (Callahan, “DuPont” 1). So the campaign did include its own website, but that served as a repository for other digital content.

Online video content is one area where DuPont expanded its reach. Part of the “Collaboratory” included documentary shorts on a *YouTube* channel, each concluding with the “Collaboratory” phrase and iconic DuPont oval. One of the associate creative directors at Ogilvy, Otto Bell, called the mini-documentaries the outlet where the agency “got to dial up the DuPont story” (McMains). As it had with the overarching “Miracles” decision, DuPont also incorporated employee input into the documentary process. According to an *AdWeek* report, Ogilvy produced thirteen shorts from one hundred and fifty submissions by DuPont employees (McMains). A succinct
description of a few of the documentaries follows: “One short illustrates how a bulletproof vest made of DuPont’s Kevlar helped save the life of a police officer in Sao Paolo, Brazil. Another short, set in Mexico, depicts a grateful peasant family moving into a new home insulated with DuPont materials after living in an open-air shanty” (McMains). Forman suggests that “Companies must focus on active engagement with all sorts of people within and outside of the organization, listening and monitoring their stories and encouraging supporters to craft and distribute them” (42). Effectively, by featuring individuals from around the world with stories that were both relatable and unique, DuPont used the shorter documentaries to do just that.

In addition, one longer two-minute video served to tell the “Collaboratory” super story. On Global Challenges, its website at the time, DuPont suggested it was “bringing the problem-solving might of science and the collective ingenuity of collaboration to the table” (“DuPont is Helping”). An embedded YouTube video literally brought the players to the table by depicting a collective coming out, showing people around the world gradually convening at empty tables to collaborate on global issues (see Figure 40). Supplementing the video, a narrator spoke to the three thematic areas of food, energy, and protection:

Working with one another is the only way we’ll be able to provide more nutritious and safer food to [an] ever-growing population. Partnering on a global scale is how we will arrive at more sustainable energy solutions for a planet that increasingly demands it. Coming together is how we will better protect the Earth and the billions who call it home. (“DuPont Global”)
Figure 40  Scenes from the “DuPont Global Collaboratory” video depict a literal coming to the table by people around the world. Photos on the left show scenes from the earlier part of the video, while photos on the right show people gathering (“DuPont Global”).
Reinforcement of the “Collaboratory” message and DuPont’s new vision followed: “DuPont is reaching out across corporations, governments, disciplines, and borders to find these answers, and we invite you to join us. Rest assured, we won’t stop searching, exploring, collaborating, until we all live healthier, better, and safer lives. Welcome to the Global Collaboratory. Welcome to DuPont” (“DuPont Global”).

The video in many ways addresses Dearing’s claim that “The messages we have about the connection between innovation and sustainable development offer a clear sense of both opportunity and obligation” (117). Through the “Collaboratory,” DuPont acknowledged the challenges facing it as a company and facing the world on a human scale, and asserted that the only way to find solutions was by working together.

Dearing also suggests that “Once the public believes (rightly or wrongly) that corporations…are the main actors able to influence the future and drive innovation and the development of technology, corporate social responsibility inevitably extends to cover these processes” (Dearing 117). DuPont through the “Collaboratory” took on that role as actor and made a public commitment to driving innovation; at the same time, the company reached out to the public with an open invitation to join the search for solutions.

*Ending with a Beginning*

Kullman concluded her 2010 speech effectively forecasting the scene in the “Collaboratory” video, and the situation DuPont would face in the future. She said:
The decades ahead are going to be a time of tremendous innovation to address human needs in a sustainable way...And no one company or country is going to do these things on its own. That’s why at DuPont we distinguish between invention and innovation – two things we know a lot about. Invention creates wonder and opportunity. Innovation creates value. Invention can be done by an individual or team. Innovation – in the 21st century – requires collaboration across companies, borders and sectors.

This is a challenge to all our industries. We at DuPont look forward to working with our friends and partners to meet pressing human needs and to grow our business sustainably now and in the future. (“Reducing Dependence”)

In fact, to return to some of the organizational change described earlier in this chapter, the path toward innovation can be traced to business partnerships, acquisitions and divestitures by the company before, during, and after Kullman’s leadership. DuPont’s biggest move in the 1990s was its independent public stock offering of Conoco in October 1998 – the largest independent offering in U.S. history (Kinnane 245) – and its subsequent investment in Pioneer Hi-Bred under Holliday’s leadership. In the words of Carisio, “Pioneer signaled to the world that this is where the company is going in the future. This is going to be a company for which agriculture and biology will be critical” (Second). When Holliday retired and Kullman stepped in, she continued the process of remaking the company, building on the base that Holliday had developed. In addition to divesting some legacy businesses, like finishes, under Kullman’s leadership in 2011 DuPont acquired Danisco, a Danish company in food and nutrition enzymes. Then in October 2013, DuPont announced it would spin off its performance chemicals business, which included some of DuPont’s better-known
materials, including Teflon (Fowler, “DuPont”). Just over one year later in December 2014, in its Form 10 filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), DuPont announced the name of that spinoff: the Chemours Company.

The decision to invoke DuPont’s storied past through the new company’s namesake remained true to DuPont story form. Though the wholly-owned subsidiary was new, the Chemours name itself “reflects a focus on the science of chemistry and the heritage of the du Pont family origins in Nemours, France” (Stynes, “DuPont”), while the company was scripted as having “a long history of innovation” and a “reputation within the chemical industry for safety, quality and reliability” (“Chemours Form” 2). In describing its competitive strengths in technology and intellectual property, the Chemours SEC filing reiterated this sentiment: “As part of our DuPont heritage, our businesses have a long history of delivering innovative and high-quality products” (3). The actual separation of Chemours occurred in July 2015, at which time Kullman suggested the spinoff enabled “DuPont’s transformation to a higher growth, higher value, global science and innovation company” (“DuPont Completes”). Taking the lead from DuPont, the Chemours website today labels the company a “200-year startup” and a “startup with a storied past,” while a timeline presents the “new company” alongside inventions and chemistry dating back to 1865 (Chemours). Carisio suggests the sum of such acquisitions and divestitures “is integral to understanding what was going on in the company, and how it was being reshaped for future opportunity and future markets” (Second).
All the while the plan for Chemours was in the works, though, DuPont was in the midst of a two-year proxy battle with investment firm Nelson Peltz and Trian Fund Management L.P. DuPont ultimately won with shareholders re-electing all of its directors in 2015, but during the battle Kullman “was forced to defend the company’s integration of scientific research into products as diverse as pesticides and solar-panel components, and to address Trian’s attacks over vestiges of its long history” (Bunge and Benoit, “DuPont Defeats”). Just a few months later and after Kullman’s sudden retirement, DuPont under the new leadership of Edward D. Breen announced its expectation to merge by late 2016 with chemical business giant Dow, signaling the first time in its 214-year history the company would lose its position as a parent company. Strategic narratives around the planned move evidence an attempt by both companies to negotiate control over public perception. For example, corporate press releases on December 11, 2015, from both DuPont and Dow, were titled “DuPont and Dow to Combine in Merger of Equals;” subsequent news media, from the Associated Press to Bloomberg to Reuters and more used identical language.40 One day later, the Delaware News Journal (a publication once owned by a du Pont family holding

40 A simple web search using the phrase “DuPont Dow merger” returns a myriad of results from global news agencies.
company for just over half a century)\textsuperscript{41} broke the headline, “DuPont merger: A ‘sad day’ in Delaware” (Mordock and Starkey), the irony of which is perhaps seen when juxtaposed with remarks in \textit{The Delaware Republican} nearly seven decades earlier: “The day the duPonds chose to make Wilmington their home – that was a lucky day for Delaware” (“The DuPonds”). Citing tax efficiencies, subject matter synergies, and a planned breakup of the new DowDuPont into three publicly traded businesses focusing each on agriculture, material science, and specialty products, the presidents of both companies publicly assured audiences the move is for the best. Yet for the thousands of people who will lose their jobs in the workforce reduction, the local businesses that will then be affected by fewer employed patrons, and the communities that will be impacted by a shift in company headquarters, the future appears more dim.

While the merger and subsequent division of the new company into three businesses has yet to formally materialize, the latest chapter in the DuPont story has effectively come to a close. But new chapters are on the horizon. This chapter has analyzed DuPont’s contemporary storytelling efforts, and presented a cursory glimpse into the interim stories that have already been put into play surrounding the merger plans. Though the new stories will not be revealed until DowDuPont is official, it is almost certain the new company will look to the past as it presents its vision for the future.

\textsuperscript{41} A digital history of The News Journal Media Group reveals the publication’s founding by a Philadelphia lawyer through its purchase by Alfred I. du Pont from 1911 to 1920. It also follows the organization’s later status as a wholly owned subsidiary of a Du Pont holding company until its sale to the Gannett Company in 1978 (“About News Journal”).
CONCLUSION

“In this new environment, businesses themselves need compelling and memorable stories at the enterprise level because people’s trust in business is quite low.”
— Janis Forman, 2013 (6)

“Advertising functions in industry’s most brilliantly lighted goldfish bowl. So advertising’s philosophy must be more socially acceptable than almost any other facet of business.”
— E. B. Weiss, 1976 (106)

“According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, at the U.S. National Library of Medicine, the average attention span of a human being has dropped from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds in 2013. This is one second less than the attention span of a goldfish. That’s right, goldfish have an attention span of 9 seconds – 1 second more than you and I.”
— Michael Brenner, 2014 (“Thanks”)

From its family founding over two centuries ago through modern day media, DuPont has created its super story of science, invention, historical performance, and innovation through narratives in the form of advertisements, institutional campaigns, public exhibits, and digital spaces during key organizational inflection points. Historical accounts created and recreated the grand narrative of DuPont’s one hundred-year-old reputation as high-quality gunpowder and explosives manufacturer, while its more recent century of storytelling endeavored to position the company beyond nylon and paint producer to a global and collaborative life sciences company. DuPont scientists, employees, and consumers became characters in the company’s quest to build, sustain, repair, and revamp its identity and reputation over the
institution’s lifetime. In the context of DuPont’s storied history, the “new environment” described by Forman in the opening quotation of this chapter is not so new after all. For 214 years, DuPont has maintained a strong corporate culture and countered an external environment that never appears to have tired of public scrutiny, from antitrust sentiment through much of its lifetime, and more recently, environmental issues. And much as the opening quotation by Weiss suggests that decades ago corporations functioned in a fish bowl, that reality also still exists today. DuPont itself acknowledges,

> Corporations now live in glass houses. New information technologies, combined with numerous disclosure and regulatory requirements, have increased the importance of a firm’s public relations. A company’s immediate progress may be slowed by the need to earn public trust, but in the long run a company will not get very far if it does not make room on board for its consumers. As former DuPont Chairman Charles McCoy once observed, “private corporations live by public permit” (“1939 Better”).

The challenge in living by public permit becomes, how does DuPont communicate with stakeholders in such a complex environment?

> While there is humor in the final opening quotation of this chapter – Brenner’s report that the attention span of goldfish outlasts that of humans (“Thanks”) – the facts are grave. Consumers are faced daily with so much information through so many channels that it is increasingly difficult for organizations to capture their attention. But what consumers do tune in to are stories. Stories, according to Brenner (an author and content marketer in industry), “that connect on a human and emotional basis”
(“Thanks”). His practitioner perspective is in harmony with recent academic scholarship on the usefulness of storytelling by organizations, which suggests “in a business environment where distractions and lack of trust dominate, stories can cut through the busyness to capture attention, engage and influence people, create meaning, exemplify values, and gain trust” (Forman 6). The idea that stories can connect individual and institution further resonates with DuPont’s current stance that throughout its history of reinvention, “each change has transformed its relationship with the public and the company has learned that its activities are often misunderstood if left unexplained. DuPont’s ongoing conversation with the public about its goals, its achievements – and its mistakes – is at the heart of its public relations” (“1939 Better”).

Through this dissertation, I positioned DuPont as a storytelling entity, and drew on approaches and frameworks from professional writing, organization studies, and corporate communication to examine how and why the company has told stories to connect with consumers and create and maintain a brand, identity, and reputation. Using an archival and intertextual approach, I advanced storytelling in business beyond advertising campaigns or general public relations to highlight the complex relationship between narratives both inside and outside the organization. In fact, this dissertation itself is illustrative of the constructive nature of storytelling. As I have endeavored to show DuPont as a storytelling organization, my own narrative has been in part dictated by historical dates and fact; in part influenced by the company’s own retelling of events; in part informed by public and external accounts; in part
constructed based on prior academic scholarship; and in part subordinated DuPont’s storytelling activity to a timeline. Hindsight affords a logical structure to examining organization stories over time. In some cases, events may have indeed resulted in a carefully designed approach to storytelling, but more often, as this dissertation shows, corporate stories grow progressively and sometimes spontaneously in response to social, political, and environmental factors external to an organization. Further, those stories are constructed in a polyvocalic manner, taking into account a variety of voices from both inside and outside the organization.

To these ends, we know in the case of DuPont that early on the company relied mainly on its good family name and connections to advance its corporate reputation. Facing initial resistance by leadership to full-scale corporate advertising, the company continued to rely on its name through the late 1800s, and only after a century in business did it come to identify a growing and diverse array of products with a brand logo. It is also clear that external events became a driving force in DuPont’s recognition of the need to attempt to control its own narrative. Through that realization, the chemical engineer story series was crafted to educate the public about the company’s changing focus toward chemistry. Yet as scholarship shows (see Czarniawska), and as DuPont experienced, organizational control over narratives is illusory. Only once an organization accepts the reality of other stories at play can it craft more complex and intentional narratives to advance corporate goals. For example, history tells us DuPont enlisted BBDO in crafting “Better Things for Better Living” to address the diversification of the business, but also to respond to circulating
“merchants of death” narratives that put the company’s reputation at risk. The six and a half decades of performed stories that followed in print, at exhibits, and on radio and television offer deep insight into how organizations might respond to external factors and reach a range of audiences through stories that use an institutional message as a framework. There is a lesson, too, in modifying a storytelling framework when an organization changes its corporate strategy. For DuPont, its critical inflection point in the form of its last change in corporate strategy to focus on the life sciences reveals why and how the company ultimately turned to a new agency to draw up “The miracles of science™” to better engage with stakeholders. In addition to these insights, we also understand each of DuPont’s storytelling efforts grew organically from the history of the organization and from then present day economic, political, and social factors. By analyzing the invention and reinventions of the DuPont master narratives in these contexts, this dissertation shows how and why an organization must find its voice and tell its own story.

The stories presented herein situate DuPont as a model for storytelling approaches to communications by twenty-first century enterprises. However, though extensive, these stories still represent only a portion of the ongoing DuPont epic. While Chapters 3 and 4 conduct a close examination of historical storytelling by DuPont, they bring to light new information and strategies for storytelling through significant analysis of the little-researched corporate magazine. Chapter 5 then offers the first analysis of more recent storytelling efforts by the company, and shows how contemporary narratives build on DuPont’s super story cornerstone of innovative
science. DuPont has arrived at yet another inflection point in its storytelling as its merger with Dow – and the subsequent planned breakup of the new enterprise into three smaller companies – approaches.

As the transitional DowDuPont, and then three new companies, the firms will face many of the same challenges DuPont has faced throughout its history, including entering new industries, managing public scrutiny, as well as potentially responding to antitrust concerns as it did a century ago. In a contemporary media landscape, though, the public relations world is more transparent than ever. If Weiss’ commentary on advertising as an illuminated fishbowl still holds true (106), DowDuPont is slated to be arguably one of the world’s largest business fishbowls. And unlike the company’s public relations efforts at previous inflection points in its history, an even more digitized public relations climate than the one during the “Collaboratory” means an additional layer of communicating is necessary.

The analyses conducted in this dissertation show how scholars might conceive of DowDuPont’s communications – and later the communications of the three new companies – as organizational storytelling, particularly in terms of how they will deploy stories that call on the past performance of both organizations in an attempt to secure and manage new identities and reputations with stakeholders. Further investigation using information available on corporate websites, in news releases, and

[42] A report by CBS News cited Dealogic that “this combination is the fifth largest of the year and among the biggest of all time” (Berr, “5 Questions”).
in archival repositories would provide additional insight into the present-day inflection points and storytelling strategies of the company. To borrow from DuPont’s sesquicentennial publication, “This is a book without an author, just as it is a story without an end” (Du Pont 1). For in reality, DuPont’s story is just beginning again.
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Appendix A

ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF DUPONT PUBLIC RELATIONS
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- Advertising Department: “Created Sept. 1921 from Advertising Division of Sales Dept.; renamed Marketing Communications Dept., Jan. 1, 1980”
- General Services Dept.: Created Jan. 1, 1954 from Office Buildings Dept.; renamed Central Systems and Services Dept., June 1, 19[__] renamed General Services Dept., Jan. 1, 1973; abolished May 1, 1985 and functions divided between Employee Relations and Marketing Communications Depts. (year illegible)

43 Selected units extracted from a memo by C. Baer on Sept. 1, 1994, which includes a complete listing of “the evolution of the structure of the Du Pont Company from 1902 to 1990 using the official departmental designations from the company’s own organization charts” which “may be treated as superseding the list given in Hounshell and Smith, which shows only the Industrial Departments to 1980 with a few errors of dates” (“Corporate Structure of E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., 1902-1990,” HML Accession 1410, Box 34, “Departments Lab” folder).
- Public Relations Dept.: Created May 1, 1938 from Publicity Dept.; renamed Public Affairs Dept., Jan. 1, 1973
- Publicity and Legislative Matters Dept.: Created Jan. 1920 from Publicity Bureau; merged into Service Dept., Sept. 1921
- Publicity Bureau: Created ca. May 1919; attached to President’s Office; placed in Publicity and Legislative Matters Dept., Jan. 1920-Sept. 1921; renamed Publicity Dept., Dec. 1935
- Publicity Dept.: Created Dec. 1935 from Publicity Bureau; renamed Public Relations Dept., May 1, 1938
- Sales Dept.: Created 1903; abolished Sept. 1921 when sales function was decentralized among each Industrial Dept.”
Appendix B

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