

Sound Ideas [Acoustical Consulting at BBN and Acentech]

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CONTENTS

Preface
Introduction

Section I. Beginnings

Chapter 1/ Too Much Work to Do Alone
Chapter 2/ The Jet Age

Section II. Growing and Branching Out

Chapter 3/ Concert Halls
Chapter 4/ Other BBN Activities
Chapter 5/ Branch Offices--The Logical Expansion of BBN's Consulting Activities

Section III. BBN in the 1950s

Chapter 6/ Aircraft Noise, Vibration Damping, and Underwater Acoustics
Chapter 7/ Architectural Acoustics
Chapter 8/ Versatility and Flexibility

Section IV. Transitions

Chapter 9/ The Late 1950s: Changing Times
Chapter 10/ Gas Turbine Noise, Induced Draft Fans, Mechanical Equipment Noise
Chapter 11/ The 1960s
Chapter 12/ Education Programs

Section V. Continuities

Chapter 13/ Continuing Acoustics Activities
Chapter 14/ Non-acoustics Consulting Services: Industrial Hygiene, Asbestos, and Air Quality
Chapter 15/ The 1970s and Beyond

Section VI. Offshoots

Chapter 16/ Cavanaugh Tocci Associates Inc.,

Sudbury, Massachusetts

Chapter 17/ Hoover & Keith, Inc. (HKI) Houston, Texas

Chapter 18/ Harris Miller Miller Hanson Inc. (HMMH) Burlington, Massachusetts

Chapter 19/ A.S. Harris, Inc., Manchester, Massachusetts

Section VII. The Formation of Acentech

Chapter 20/ Becoming Employee Owned

Chapter 21/ Acentech Branch Offices

Chapter 22/ Perspectives on Acentech from Some Former BBNers

Appendices

Appendix A/ Noteworthy Contributions, Events, Milestones, and Accomplishments

Appendix B/ Honors, Awards, and Professional Society Positions

Appendix C/ Early Staff

Appendix D/ Early BBN Reports

Appendix E/ Boy Boy Nancy

Appendix F/ BBN Report

Appendix G/ Teaching, Textbooks, Manuals, and Design Guides

Appendix H/ Offshoots: Spawning of Other Firms

Appendix I/ Brief Organizational History of BBN Consulting Offices

Appendix J/ BBN Activities 1961 and 1980

Appendix K/ Advice on the Art of Consulting

Appendix L/ Some Award-Winning Projects

Index

Preface

In writing this book about the early days of Bolt Beranek and Newman Inc. (BBN), its growth and development, and the eventual rise of Acentech Incorporated, I have depended on the recollections of many people, from BBN founder Leo Beranek to some of the most recent employees of Acentech Incorporated. Through my interviews with them, they have helped me to understand the history of a unique American company, a pioneer in the field of acoustical consulting. They have recalled for me the special feeling of the place--its intellectual fervor, its spirit of generosity and sharing of ideas, its lack of hierarchy, and the excitement of its employees about new discoveries in their fields. Because I could not interview everyone, I have considered the people I spoke to as representative of various activities and periods at BBN and Acentech.

I began to think of the book less as a formal history than as a group memoir--a collection of personal reminiscences, with some overlaps, repetitions, and occasional disagreements--of the people who had taken such pleasure in working in the relaxed, nurturing, stimulating environment of BBN. The

environment seemed ideally suited for encouraging the growth of a new industry of acoustical consulting, spawning generations of distinguished practitioners and many spin-off companies to carry on the work originally begun at BBN. It is a remarkable story.

I am grateful to everyone I interviewed, and I am especially indebted to Bob Hoover, Laymon Miller, and Eric Ungar, who provided me with extensive written materials of their own to draw from, and to Leo Beranek, who was generous in spending time with me and who directed me to his interview with Janet Abbate (IEEE Oral History Center, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ) for biographical information. Finally, Eric Wood, whose idea this book was, has been endlessly helpful, encouraging, and supportive to me throughout the project. This book would never have existed without him.

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