JOHN R. OISHEI
Buffalo Businessman and Benefactor
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Introduction

John R. Oishei was a successful 20th Century industrialist and a philanthropist whose positive influence on the Buffalo, New York community remains strong in the 21st Century.

Founder of Trico Products Corporation, he devoted his career to developing, improving and manufacturing the windshield wiper. Before that, he was part of the theater world, managing theaters, writing plays, and working with legendary actors and impresarios of the early 1900s.

Oishei's dedication to Trico was unsurpassed. A typical business day was 13 hours. He worked holidays and did not take vacations. Oishei's employees were considered by him as family, and his top executives became trusted friends.

He loved living in Buffalo, taking as much pleasure in discussing Italian opera with a neighborhood cobbler as playing golf at a country club. Editors at the Buffalo Courier-Express often heard from him about what he thought was newsworthy. He found comfort in the cool shelter of St. Louis Church, where he attended Mass every Sunday at noon. Oishei believed that making charitable gifts was a privilege and a responsibility, and he preferred to do so anonymously. His lifelong commitment to charitable giving is continued through the John R. Oishei Foundation, whose beginnings he created and funded, and whose future he secured.

A provision in Oishei's will ensures that the Foundation will be able to assist Buffalo's not-for-profit educational, medical, and cultural organizations into perpetuity.

The pages that follow highlight Oishei's family and personal life, business achievements, and the enduring legacy of his generosity.
Born in Buffalo in 1886, John R. Oishei's earliest paternal family history is traced to Ireland. Some of his ancestors left Ireland in the 1700s to work as mercenaries in what is now Austria, under the family name of Hoschek. Taking up arms for the cause of King Wilhelm in several wars, the family later left to start life anew in other European countries and adopted the name Oishei.

John R. Oishei's grandfather, Giuseppe (Joseph) Oishei, arrived in the United States in 1859 from Lombardy, Italy, where he lived. Stories passed down through family members have him entering in New Orleans, making his way along the Mississippi River to Memphis, Tennessee, and finally settling in Buffalo. By 1868, he owned a saloon on Buffalo's Prime Street, and two years later, he was operating a saloon and a restaurant in adjacent buildings on Ohio Street.

Joseph married Adelheide Von Wildt and they had three children — Charles, who would become John R. Oishei's father, Aurelia and Amelia. Joseph owned the Golden Gate Hotel at 160 Exchange Street at the time of his death in 1878. As the eldest child at age 19, Charles assumed responsibility for supporting the family.

Charles lived at 262 Franklin Street and held various jobs through the 1880s, including telephone operator, grocer, and doorman for the Buffalo Police Department's Seventh Precinct, before he graduated from Buffalo Law School in 1890.

Charles married Julia Roffo, an 1880 graduate of Miss Nardin's Academy. Her father was John Roffo, who was born in Genoa, Italy. He is believed to be the first Italian to settle in Buffalo. Since his arrival in 1845, Rofio had become prominent through his involvement in the peanut trade in Buffalo and Canada; and his ownership of real estate, wine and grocery businesses, and a ship chandlery operation.

After the birth of John R. Oishei, his parents moved to 306 Maryland Street, in the heart of a growing community of newcomers from Italy. In that environment he developed strong family values and a reverence for his Roman Catholic faith.

Seven more children were born to Charles and Julia — Stella, Camilla, Bertha, Charles, Bernard, Florence and William. When Julia died at age 40 in 1904, John found himself in a situation similar to one his father faced as a teenager. As his father had done before him, John turned his attention to helping raise younger siblings. Two step-sisters, Muriel and Harriet, and a step-brother,
Willis, joined the Oishei household after Charles married his second wife, Leonora.

John attended Central High School, but quit to assist his father with the business aspects of his law practice. He never graduated from high school, yet became one of the most successful men in the city of Buffalo. A part-time job as an usher at the Star Theatre, at the corner of Pearl and West Mohawk Streets, opened young John's eyes to the world of entertainment that he would come to love all his life.
Chapter 2

THEATER DAYS
Opening its doors in 1888, the Star Theatre became one of the leading Buffalo playhouses of the time. When an opening arose in the theater's box office, Oishei was promoted from usher to assistant treasurer. Two years later he was named the theater's accountant and treasurer. John D. Wells, writing some years later in the *Town Tidings* magazine, claimed that “even then Oishei was amazingly conscious of the importance of contacts with people, an asset that doubtless served him well in his subsequent dealings with the country's big business generals.”

Calling him “one of the younger local institutions,” Wells wrote that Oishei had an intelligence about selling tickets bordering on an art. Oishei showed a propensity for hard work and a shrewd knowledge of the business. These qualities served him well as he made contacts with theater owners and operators across the nation.

Live theater was competitive and each establishment jockeyed to bring in the greatest talents of the day. Oishei's contacts and intuition allowed him to navigate the rapidly changing industry in the early 20th century. Fierce competition between the Lyric Theater interests, run by John Laughlin, and a “theatre trust,” run by the Erlangers, resulted in a series of lawsuits and disagreements. At about the same time, the three Shubert brothers from New York entered the fray. Lee, Sam and Jacob, breezy, brash young men, had received their introduction into show business as ushers in a Syracuse theater before barging onto New York's Broadway.

The local rulers of the theatrical business, however, were Mark Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, whose trust was a syndicate that owned 30 theatres and soon controlled operations of more than 500. Klaw and Erlanger controlled operations, actors’ salaries and bookings. Competitive bookings pitted the independents against the trust, with both featuring similar plays and vying for the same audience.

For a decade, Laughlin had tangled with Klaw and Erlanger, since independent operators fought against the standardization of theaters. Finally, in 1907, the United States Booking Service was formed, combining Klaw and Erlanger Vaudeville with the Shubert interests. They operated the Teck, showing vaudeville and coordinating it with their other national houses. They also controlled the Star Theatre. Oishei managed to stay on the good side of the Shuberts during this acrimonious period, leaving the city of Buffalo for a time to manage one of their theaters in New Orleans.
By 1908, the Teck was leased to the Shuberts alone, their name went over the door, and Oishëi took over as manager. Once the Shuberts bought the Teck, it never had a losing season. It became the flagship of their road fleet.

The Shuberts sent their best productions to the Shubert Teck and frequently opened new plays there prior to New York runs. The Buffalo Courier reported on performances by Al Jolson, Ellen Terry, Katherine Cornell, John and Ethel Barrymore and many others. The newspaper noted, “Al Jolson came on the stage as an unknown and was such a hit that he had to repeat his act over and over.”

Jack and Lee Shubert had great trust in the young John Oishëi and unbounded confidence in his judgment. Oishëi frequently received messages commanding him to New York by the next train to give his opinion on scripts and rehearsals.

**Live Theater's Glory Day**

During the season of 1907-08, Buffalo theaters received three million paid admissions at a time when the population of the city was 376,000. In one evening, theatergoers could attend a play at the Teck, the Academy, the Garden, the Lafayette, the Lyceum or the Star. Julia Marlowe, Maurice Barrymore, Maude Adams, George M. Cohan and Jane Cowl all appeared in Buffalo. Theater impresarios such as Florenz Ziegfeld and David Belasco became Oishëi's friends. This was a heady and glamorous world for a young man.
Oishei's theater, the Teck, was built by Jacob Schoellkopf, an industrialist best known for harnessing power from Niagara Falls to produce hydroelectricity. Schoellkopf was a music lover who wanted to build a venue to bring to Buffalo annual conventions of the Liedertafel, a German American singing society. He named the theater, a reproduction of a German opera house, after his birthplace in Kirchheim on Teck, Germany. Pavlova and Nijinsky danced on the Teck stage. When Julia Marlowe played Ophelia to E. H. Sothern's Hamlet in 1907, the Teck was flourishing, but by the time Rosalind Russell appeared there in 1935, the Teck's business had begun to wane.

During the period of consolidation and reorganization, Dr. Peter Cornell, father of actress Katherine Cornell, bought an interest in the Star and also leased the Teck Theatre. That investment brought Oishei and Cornell together, along with Michael Shea, John Laughlin and the Meech brothers, in overseeing numerous theaters and shows.

John R. Oishei remarked that the Teck was known on the circuit as "The Stadium" because it had such a large space to fill with paying guests. It was a challenge but Oishei managed to pack the place night after night. He and Cornell became close friends. Dr. Cornell knew a good operator when he saw one. He told Oishei that if he ever went into business, Cornell wanted to join him. He would later invest $10,000 in Oishei's Tri-Continental Corporation (Trico).

The Young Playwright

During Oishei's days in theater management, he penned many plays of his own, writing nearly every evening. He had many ideas for scripts and some of them, handwritten, scratched in pencil on the back of noon stock lists, survive today. One of his comedies is entitled The Rogers Brothers in Germany. The plot revolves around Otto Storm, the son of a wealthy Chicago meatpacker, who hires two brothers to search for a title of nobility to add to his name. After some humorous adventures in Germany, Storm ends up with the girl and the title. Characters named Fritz Dunderwater and Heinz Blitzning add to the comic tone.

Oishei collaborated on more serious plays with playwrights Jeffrey Le Brant and Lionel Probert. Copyrighted in 1915, Oishei and Le Brant's The Scarlet Service involves international spies, murder, and a love affair. Another of Oishei's efforts, copyrighted in 1910, The
Tail of the Trail, examines a love triangle set in the American West. Oishei also wrote a five-act drama, The Strange Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, that takes the Daniel Defoe story as a guide and adapts it for dramatic effect. Oishei continued to read and write plays all of his life.

After Oishei's success in theater management, he cooperated with Stephenson H. Evans, Bert Fenton, Dr. John Fairbairn and William P. Haines to build two theaters. The Marlowe, named for the great actress Julia Marlowe, was on Virginia Street at West Avenue, and The Terry, named for another great actress, Ellen Terry, was on Grant Street at Potomac Avenue. Although these ventures were successful, Oishei increasingly believed that his future lay in business rather than the theatrical world.

Oishei anticipated that moving pictures would supersede live theater and he recognized that talking pictures were being developed. Theaters were becoming palaces, such as Shea's Buffalo, built in 1926. The Star was razed in 1924. When he noticed throngs of people paying a modest sum to see the outstanding plays staged more elaborately on the moving picture screen, he knew that the legitimate theater would decline in consequence.

Oishei always appreciated his experiences in the theater, but his destiny lay elsewhere. He once commented that, "the early years of association with the management in the theater brought me into contact with many important personages in the theater world as well as in the local environment. This opportunity of meeting and knowing business and professional leaders in the community became important in later life." Oishei's contacts launched him as a businessman in Buffalo and led to his acceptance in private clubs and social organizations.

Show Bills and Billboards

His contact with Dr. Peter Cornell led Oishei to invest in the Whitmier-Ferris Company, an outdoor advertising company founded in 1872 and located on Maryland Street near West Avenue, not far from Oishei's childhood home. Ten original investors, including John Oishei, Michael Shea and Cornell, bought into the company that pasted show bills onto the sides of buildings and fences. Whitmier created and sold the paste used to hang the promotional bills all over town in advance of theatrical events.

As a young theater manager, Oishei saw value in the business. Over the years, the business evolved from show bills to
billboards. The company embraced the idea of color billboards and the employees hand-colored the sections for certain accounts. They cut the ads into 10 or 12 sections and then pasted them up. George Peterson, an employee who began working at Whitmier-Ferris in the 1950s, recalls that when Oishei became the final sole owner, the Oishei family allowed Peterson to run the operation, while they collected the dividends.

Whitmier-Ferris was a completely independent operation from subsequent holdings of Oishei. It handled accounts in Detroit, New York, and Chicago, as well as Buffalo breweries, automotive concerns, and liquor companies. Trico later became a client, too, but not as a large advertiser. Eventually, the company was purchased by Penn Advertising and subsequently was sold to Lamar Advertising.

Marriage and Family

It was during his theater days that Oishei met Estelle Low, married her and began a family. Estelle arrived in Buffalo from Pittsburgh in 1902 at age 18. Her father was an engineer brought in to do the breakwall in the Buffalo harbor. The daughter of Emile Low and Estelle Reed Low, Estelle was born in Zelionople, Pennsylvania. Oishei and Low married on April 21, 1908. Their son R. John was born in 1910, son Julian was born in 1913, and daughter Patricia in 1916. The family lived on Lancaster Avenue near Delaware Avenue, a prominent residential area that housed many young families of the time.

After 30 years of marriage, Estelle died unexpectedly of a heart attack on August 11, 1938. Her obituary notes her service with the American Red Cross and the Women's Motor Corps, but gives few other details of her life. Her estate, valued at $29,199, passed on to her husband and children. Oishei never remarried. His children had reached maturity by then, so he devoted his life to his business.

A favorite leisure activity was playing golf at the Country Club of Buffalo. He enjoyed talking business with his top employees at a little restaurant called Hartmann's on West Ferry Street, or at the Buffalo Club, where he was elected president in 1948. He participated in an elite group within the Buffalo Club designated the "Society of the Buffalo." He was also a member of the Saturn Club.

John R. Oishei had a colorful and engaging personality. He was a man who liked to have things his own way, not in
a pushy manner, but in a matter-of-fact way. He cherished his independence.

Later in his life, he enjoyed the company of his good friend Peter Allen, who lived at the Buffalo Club. Golfing together and often dining out, Allen, an insurance agent, later would serve on the boards of Oishfi's Foundation and Trico Products Corporation, write and serve as trustee for many of Oishfi's life insurance policies, and prove a loyal confidant.
Who invented the windshield wiper?
Some claim that Trico invented and was the first company to manufacture the wiper. Others, such as John Day, author of *The Bosch Book of the Motorcar: Its Evolution and Engineering*, claim that the lineage of the wiper begins before the car itself, in the early forms of locomotion. A number of people take credit for developing the early prototype.

Day assigns the most important roles in the wiper tale to J. H. Apjohn, Ormond Edgar Wall and William M. Folberth. In 1903, Apjohn devised a hand-cranked wiper system to drive two brushes up and down a glass windshield. The same year Alabama native Mary Anderson invented another hand-operated wiper for which she obtained a patent in 1905. But there is no doubt that Trico was a significant contributor to the early development and the eventual improvement of the windshield wiper.

Until 1917, drivers had to use one hand to manipulate the wipers and the other to steer and shift.

Later, as Day writes, “Pivoting in the top of the frame became the popular method of mounting hand-operated wipers. They soon changed their brushes into rubber strips that acted as squeegees over the flat glass.” Hawaiian dentist Wall apparently and correctly thought the hand-cranked system was dangerous, and in 1917 installed the first electric motor in the middle of the windshield to oscillate a long center-pivoted rubber wiper blade. In doing this he set the pattern of crank drive for the future and also established that the multiblade wiper would clear the passenger’s side.

Eventually the “electric” wiper system evolved into the “suction” system, developed in 1920 by Cleveland mechanic Folberth. He designed a vacuum-powered wiper that was run by suction from the engine’s intake manifold. The timing of the mechanism was problematic, however, as the wipers would speed up and slow down with the speed of the car. Primitive electrical systems of the day, utilizing a six-volt battery system, made electrically driven systems both expensive and unreliable.

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**A Life-Changing Accident**

John R. Oishei’s role in the development of the wiper came as a result of an accident in 1916. It was an event that would alter his life forever. Oishei was driving along Delaware Avenue near Virginia Street, in a rainstorm, when his
car struck a man on a bicycle. The man was not seriously injured, but Oishei later described the mishap as a "harrowing experience that imprinted on my mind the definite need for maintaining vision while driving in the rain."

Oishei had been driving a National Roadster that had two bucket seats. A valve arrangement on the manifold allowed the driver to increase the speed by six miles per hour. The windshield was a pyralin curtain. In the days following the accident, Oishei began to think about an improved method of keeping the windshield clear. His first step was to cut a circular hole in the auto's pyralin curtain. The vehicle's snug-fitting top and side curtains provided sufficient air pressure to prevent rain or snow from entering the circular opening. Oishei liked to say that his first practical application of the basic law of pressures and vacuums would form the foundation of his business. That business would grow to become, at one point, Buffalo's largest private employer.

Soon afterwards, Oishei saw in a store window a small card picturing a hand-operated squeegee for wiping windshields. Glass windshields were then made in two sections, with a slit between the upper and lower parts. The handle of the squeegee slid manually into the horizontal space and the driver pushed it from side to side. It was normally carried in the car's toolbox for mounting in case of rain.

Its inventor, John W. Jepson, a retired electrical engineer formerly associated with the Gould Coupler Works, produced this primitive sort of windshield wiper and delivered it in market baskets locally. Oishei contacted Jepson, who agreed to the organization of a sales company for his device, dubbed the "Rain Rubber."

To do so, Oishei formed a partnership with Dr. Peter Cornell, his old friend from his theater days, and William P. Haines, a founder of the insurance firm Laverack and Haines. Oishei once commented that he'd always had a hunch that his business opportunity would be in getting into "some line where I'd be dealing with raw materials and an assured source of supply."

The company that would later be named Trico began as an employer of eight persons and originally operated out of the Sidway building at Main and Goodell Streets, across from the old Teck Theatre. The first manufacturing plant, organized in 1917, was located at 2665 Main Street.

In 1919, the Pierce-Arrow Motor Com-
pany adopted Oishii's manually operated wiper as standard equipment on its luxury automobiles. The following year, Packard, Cadillac, and Lincoln did the same. This initial success prompted Oishii to buy out Jepson's interest and reorganize the company. Oishii received a patent on Jepson's squeegee and within a year, the Rain Rubber's distribution extended nationally.

He also produced spoke tighteners for the wooden wheels of automobiles. They sold three for $1.00. An early advertising campaign in New York City utilized the charms of an attractive young woman standing in a shop window to demonstrate the product.

Oishii's early employees included Sarah and Nettie Nathan, sisters who served Oishii until their retirements. Nettie assisted Oishii as his secretary and was known for her proficiency in shorthand. When Oishii called her on the intercom, she arrived armed with a dozen sharpened pencils, ready to record his memos.

Early success at Trico was interrupted, however, when the United States entered World War I in 1917. When some automobile production was curtailed during the war, the company replaced that part of the business by manufacturing locks and hinges for ammunitions boxes.

After the war, Oishii expanded wiper distribution to Europe and Australia, as well as throughout North America, and he wanted the company name to reflect this. He selected Tri-Continental Corporation, but another company had already registered that name for incorporation. Oishii shortened the name to Tri-co, eventually dropping the hyphen and settling on Trico Products Corporation. Trico was the company's telegraph and cable-code designation, as well.

**Chalk Marks for the Future**

Oishii enjoyed telling the story that when Trico desperately needed funds (around 1919), not only for expansion but to meet its current bills, he made an application to a local bank for a $10,000 loan that he and Dr. Cornell personally guaranteed. After considering for two weeks, the bank rejected the loan. Oishii, however, was not to be put off. His friend Steve Evans, an owner of the New York Central Railroad, advised him to ask for even more money.

Oishii and Cornell went down the street to the Manufacturers and Traders Trust (M&T) to ask for a $35,000 loan. The
bank sent examiners out to confirm the manufacturing plan and view the building. Emil Emminger, an employee hired as a temporary millwright who eventually worked at Trico for 50 years, was told to draw chalk marks indicating where each machine would be situated. It all looked very promising and M&T extended the money to the new business concern. From that time forward, Oishei did much of his banking business with M&T.

In 1920, Oishei moved operations to larger quarters in the former cold storage building of the Christian Weyand Brewery at 624 Ellicott Street in downtown Buffalo. The area around the building bounded by Washington, Ellicott, Burton and Goodell Streets became the expanded headquarters of Trico during the ensuing decades. Trico purchased the Weyand Company's five-story stock house when it closed in 1920 due to the passage of the 18th Amendment. Seizing the opportunity that Prohibition created, Oishei purchased the unused warehouse for his nascent windshield wiper business. It became Plant One for Trico products.

Of Trico's beginnings, Oishei remarked, "It wasn't all clear sailing in the early days, not by a long shot. In 1921, we were pressed very definitely by our creditors. We were working hand to mouth. It looked as if we couldn't go much farther. Then we began to collect money a little faster so that by 1922 we were able to get above water and move along a little more comfortably."

Gradually Trico acquired property surrounding Plant One, buying an adjacent building on Ellicott Street that was designated as Building Two. In 1924, Oishei hired the Buffalo architectural firm of Plumer and Mann to erect a modern four-story reinforced concrete structure, a short distance to the north of the former brewery building. In 1928, the growing company erected Building Three adjacent to Building Two on Ellicott Street. At the time of their construction, Trico Buildings Two and Three represented state-of-the-art industrial architecture.

They are examples of the so-called daylight factory, which used reinforced concrete in an exposed frame system of construction. It replaced the brick-pier walls and wooden beam supported floors of 19th Century factories. Daylight factories allowed for wide open, naturally lit floor space in fireproof buildings. In 1936 and 1937, Oishei added three more buildings to the complex. Ultimately, Trico fully occupied the block.
In the 1920s, Oishei needed additional capital. He negotiated with a syndicate of New York bankers, headed by the firm Homblower & Weeks, to sell one-third of Trico's stock. Oishei took the capital, supplying the shares of stock as collateral. If the loan was not repaid within the year, he would lose the stock. John R. Oishei was very proud that he paid off the loan in less than one year.

**Americans Want Cars**

Just as Oishei got his company stabilized, the automobile took off as a necessity among Americans. It ceased to be a rich man's toy and became an object of mass consumption. In 1920, spurred by the success of Henry Ford's "Model T," more than 1.9 million motor vehicles were sold, 40 percent of them Fords. The year 1923, a boom year for automobile production, saw 3.6 million passenger cars and 438,000 trucks produced.

Buffalo emerged as an important city in the development of the automobile industry, housing one of four national branches of Ford Motor Company, as well as divisions of Chevrolet and General Motors (Harrison Radiator), and automobile companies Pierce-Arrow and Thomas Flyer.

Trico steadily manufactured the one and only safety device for windshields — the Rain Rubber Hand-Operated Windshield Wiper. Trico's sales slogan was, "It slides in the slot." Once installed on the Model T, it became an instant requirement for all other automobiles. But the Rain Rubber soon became obsolete when car manufacturers weatherproofed the windshield's slot with a rubber dam.

Always ready with a new innovation, Trico responded by introducing the Crescent Cleaner, a manual wiper that mounted in a hole in the header above the upper windshield. It swung in an arcuate pattern with a spring-loaded wiper arm, and for a time was standard equipment on virtually all automobiles. In 1921, Trico introduced the arcuate type vacuum-operated windshield wiper motor, which was far more reliable and dependable than the wipers run by electric motors. Trico also produced the first automatic windshield wipers and, in 1922, Cadillac adopted them as standard equipment.

In 1927, Trico reorganized, added capital, and undertook production on a large scale. The 21 Trico stockholders made available to the public 26 percent of their stock. Under the agreement, important patents upon which the success of the company depended were sold to Trico in consideration of the
payment annually to John R. Oishel of 10 percent of the company's profits for 15 years.

In 1928, Trico patented a "Five Ply" wiper blade, composed of a series of independent flexible edges that squeegeed the water from the windshield and removed it from the line of vision. This blade was outstandingly successful and was used on nearly all motor vehicles. By 1937, it was standard equipment on all passenger cars manufactured in the United States.

Another invention was the Twin Blade Visionall, introduced on the General Motors closed model cars and later used on trucks and buses. It featured a sun visor under which was mounted the twin blade vacuum cylindrical housing. It swept two blades across almost the entire windshield. The unique feature of the Visionall was the use of a reversal valve that moved the wipers back and forth with atmospheric pressure.

In the 1930s, global marketing was a concept unknown to most companies, but Oishel astutely decided to send his products worldwide. First, he paid $1 million to buy a competitor in Cleveland, the Folberth Auto Specialty Co. In 1930, Trico also took over Folberth's English subsidiary, which became known as Trico Folberth and was reorganized as Trico Limited in 1946. In 1955, Trico Limited organized Trico Pty Limited in Australia. With three facilities plus licensees in 38 countries, Trico had access to all major world markets.

In 1934, Trico supplied the first blade to wipe a curved windshield. After World War II, cars with laminated curved windshields became the norm. Trico produced a new product, the "Rainbow" wiper blade, with a flexible backing strip and a triple yoke for distributing pressure.

As the size of curved windshields increased, blades were needed with additional pressure points to hold them. Trico was ready with the stacked lever "Lbow" blade, then incorporated the Lbow design into the Panoramic Rainbow blade, which had spring-tensioned levers to preflex the blade and exert constant pressure on the ends.

In 1936, Trico introduced windshield washer systems. Their popularity grew substantially after 1945. In later years Trico introduced the automatic combination wiper/washer system (1949), the air pressure motor (1956), the vacuum-driven, rear-window wiper system (1959), the intermittent wiper system (1963), plastic wiper blades (1980), the unitized wiper system (1982), and the modular wiper system (1985).
Longer wiper arms and blades required higher arm pressures, so Trico's Hydro Wipe motor originated in 1961. Using the spent flow of the steering pump, the motor unfailingly supplied adequate power to the wipers. This feature was used on Lincolns and Thunderbirds. In 1965-66, intermittent wiper systems were first featured on three Ford models. The Trico Vibro Washer Pump operation was the first to combine washer and wiper action, jetting fluid through non-clog nozzles.

Trico also developed other products for safe driving. They include the Claireon Horn, which preceded today's electric horn, and the Throttle Guard, which prevented cars from stalling. The Vacuum Fan was a precursor to a defrosting mechanism, and the Lift-O-Matic automatically raised and lowered windows by vacuum. All were brainstormss of the Trico research and development department. Electric windows eventually supplanted the vacuum-operated Lift-O-Matic windows.

Inventing an operative windshield wiper and other peripheral car safety devices was not enough to create a successful company, however. From its early days, Trico needed an effective sales effort. One problem initially was that the concept of a windshield wiper was unfamiliar to motorists and manufactur-
Chapter 4

1920's Auto Industry
In 1920, John R. Oishei sought an aggressive presence in Detroit, the home of the big car manufacturers, so he sent his brother Charles there as a sales representative to market Trico Products. Charles subsequently became an officer of the firm and managed its standard equipment business. He headed the company's Detroit office and urged his brother to hire Carl Larson, a college friend of Charles. Larson joined the Detroit office on April 1, 1924, as co- assistant to Charles Oishei, and eventually served the company for 63 years.

John R. Oishei gave him a 30 day trial and, after passing the preliminary tests, Larson accepted a permanent position. A dapper man, always exquisitely dressed, he was able to sell just about anything and soon became Trico's presence in Detroit.

"What you have to remember," Larson explained in an article for the Automotive Hall of Fame, "is that cars didn't come in as complete a package as they do today. Certain things, such as bumpers, locks, chains, stop signals, were optional. And that's what windshield wipers were until Trico pushed them as standard equipment." Larson recalled, "I installed the first hand-wiper on Henry Ford's car. I knew that if I were to sell to the company, I had to convince him first.

So I kept after the people over at Ford and they finally let me put one on Mr. Ford's car. We got our order from them shortly after that."

Another anecdote about the early years recounts trying to sell General Motors on Trico's mechanical vacuum pump. The pump had passed a battery of tests at GM but the engineers wanted to give it the ultimate test: a trip to the top of Pike's Peak. The chief engineer promised Larson that if the pump operated all the way up and back, he would buy the system. When the mechanical pump did not falter during the trip, he agreed to buy it.

When Charles died on February 23, 1944, he left his Trico stock to Larson. The gift placed Larson in a commanding stock position at Trico for the rest of his life.

**Dealing with Detroit**

Trico's close relationships in Detroit insured the success of the company. Realizing that maintaining a large sales force and engineering staff right in Detroit was crucial, Trico assigned account executives to each of the four major automobile and truck manufacturers. The salesmen provided the vital link to the engineers in the windshield wiper
development department at Trico in Buffalo. Anecdotal evidence suggests that General Motors, at one time, decided to manufacture its own windshield wipers. Giving an ultimatum to Oishei, GM told him to move his operation to Detroit or GM would begin producing its own blades. Never one to be intimidated, Oishei responded by urging them to go right ahead. He told GM that Trico was a Buffalo business and that he would never move it.

In the 1950s, Oldsmobile's chief engineer asked Trico engineers to help develop a wiper system for a new model car that had hidden wipers. The wipers dropped out of sight into a well below the windshield. Trico succeeded where competitors failed, designing and producing the first working model while meeting deadlines on a very tight production schedule.

Larson and his Detroit sales force were not the only cogs in the Trico machine. Oishei, from the very beginning, appreciated the value of excellent research and development. He hired talented engineers to refine and improve the product over the decades of the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

Late in the 1930s, when Oishei heard about an engineer named Henry Hueber, whose innovations with valves on washing machines could be applied to windshield wiper systems, he immediately phoned him. Hueber would not come to Buffalo, so Oishei traveled to Seattle to inspect his invention. He promptly hired the inventor to create a new valve for the wiper, employing atmospheric pressure to the wiping of windshields. The mechanism created by Hueber moved the wipers back and forth on the windshield. Communicating over long distance telephone for a few years, Oishei finally enticed Hueber to relocate to Buffalo by buying him property for a new home and building him a house.

Oishei went to lunch each week with his top engineers to keep abreast of new projects and patents. At Christmas time, Oishei came to the shop floor and viewed a display of the inventions and refinements created in windshield wipers that year. Some years, the engineers would file upwards of 60 patents. Energized and inspired by the creativity of his engineers, Oishei would call Raymond Deibel, the chief engineer, and thank him, commenting: "You made my day."

But in the 1970s and 1980s, when Trico struggled with profitability, consultants advised the management to cut costs by eliminating the research and development department. The decision seemed
shortsighted at a time when innovation should have been a priority.

Oishei also had creative ideas for marketing Trico's products. According to Deibel, Oishei acquired real estate in areas where there was a high volume of car traffic and erected Trico billboards at these locations. In conjunction with his company, Whitmier-Ferris, he advertised Trico's newest innovations by billboard. What began as a way to sell more windshield wipers eventually developed into a windfall, since the locations themselves became valuable real estate to developers; Oishei sold the land at a profit.

John Oishei's leadership of Trico hinged upon an inclusive style of decision-making. He often consulted his engineers, salesmen, and production managers, hoping to gain consensus on innovations. He always chose high-quality options for his products. His leadership was also distinguished by his shrewd hiring practices. He spotted talented, hard-working people who would give their prime efforts to Trico. He was a boss who demanded 24 hour a day access to those on whom he depended.

He hired three of his brothers, as well. In addition to Charles, who worked in sales in Detroit, Bill O'Shei (who chose a different spelling of the family name) worked at Trico Folberth in England, but had a falling out with John Oishei over the management of the company.

Bernard, who attended University of Buffalo Law School, joined Trico right out of school, worked his way up to vice president, but left in 1937. He went on to form his own plastics company that provided many items for the Army and Navy during World War II. Oishei always remained on amicable terms with his brothers.
Chapter 5

His Employee Family
Inspiring His Employees

Stories of his generous support for his employees abound. Many associated with Trico in the days of Oishei remarked on the loyalty that employees had for him. From his personal assistant, Nettie Nathan, to his treasurer, Elsie Lodge, to his engineers, Anton Rappl and Raymond Deibel, all spoke of a feeling of family at Trico.

Deibel, chief engineer at Trico and trusted advisor to Oishei, believes that Oishei’s encouragement and appreciation of the efforts of his employees inspired them to achieve bigger and better things. When they would install an innovative product on Oishei’s car, he would drive out to Deibel’s house and comment on how great it was working.

When Deibel once made a decision which resulted in the loss of $27,000 to the company, he immediately went to Oishei to apologize and explain. Oishei put the error in the context of the larger budgets for advertising and other expenses and let Deibel off the hook. Further, when Oishei’s son, Julian, called his father to complain about the mistake, Oishei claimed he had authorized the expenditure - graciously taking the responsibility onto his own shoulders. He praised success and minimized failures.

Oishei enjoyed recounting this story to Deibel: Summoned to Detroit by Henry Ford in 1930 to discuss the windshield wiper business, Oishei said Ford proposed that Trico wipers be produced in Ford’s assembly plant for five years, and assured Oishei that Trico would receive all of Ford’s business during that time. Oishei refused Ford’s offer, commenting that his patents were good for 17 years and he did not want to forfeit them. He also felt responsibility for his workers in Buffalo and would not move his operation.

He thanked Ford for his consideration and left the office.Ford got angry and followed Oishei into the hall yelling, “You’ll never see any more of our business!” Oishei politely remarked that, “In that case, we’ll have to find some other business.”

When Oishei returned to Buffalo, his top executives were waiting for news about the conference with Henry Ford. They had received cancellation orders from Ford and wondered what had happened. Oishei reassured them that the company could survive without Ford’s business. Ironically, Trico had its best year in replacement parts in 1931. They made more money replacing the
Ford-produced windshield wiper than they would have made supplying the original equipment. In one year, Ford returned to Trico as a customer.

Oishei's loyalty to Buffalo is also evident in another anecdote regarding General Motors. When he attended a new car show at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, Alfred P. Sloan, chairman of General Motors, arranged a lunch with Oishei. At the lunch, he invited Oishei to consider running the General Motors Company. Oishei inquired whether General Motors would then own and operate Trico. When Sloan said of course, Oishei refused, saying that he could not leave since he owed too much to the people in Buffalo. He passed up an opportunity for personal advancement in the interest of building his own company with the help of Buffalo employees.

Deibel is a good example of one of Oishei's loyal employees. He began working at Trico in 1935 at the age of 18. Happy to get a job at that time, he began as an apprentice. He stayed at Trico for 43 years. In his first year, he became acquainted with the work of various departments. He worked in the tool room, moved to the model shop, and then to the development department. His job involved making parts requested by the experimental engineers.

Deibel worked cooperatively with Anton Rappl, the chief experimental engineer at Trico, who with chief engineer Irwin Horton ran the engineering department. After working in engineering for ten years, Deibel received a promotion. In 1949, Deibel was made chief experimental engineer, and eventually took over all manufacturing and engineering responsibilities.

He jokingly described Oishei as, “a one-horse man and I was the horse.” Day and night, year-round, he was available to Oishei. At one point, he hadn’t taken a vacation in seven years and he had a case of shingles. The doctor told Deibel’s wife, Mary, that he needed a vacation. When Oishei heard this, he called American Airlines and set up a vacation for the Deibels for two weeks in Arizona, all expenses paid.

Deibel became a trusted friend of Oishei, lunching with him each day and discussing business at all hours. Oishei often called Deibel at seven in the morning. Deibel lived in West Falls, New York, and at that time had a phone with a seven-party line. The other parties often had to wait for Oishei to finish all he had to tell Deibel before they could use the phone. Oishei eventually got a one-party line for
Deibel. Oishei not only began Deibel's day with a call but ended it with one. When Deibel reached his driveway around 7 p.m., he could hear the phone ringing. Another conversation of at least an hour ensued.

After Oishei's death, Deibel served Oishei's son R. John Oishei (who used this spelling of the family name), for 11 years. He became a corporate officer and a trustee of the John R. Oishei Charitable Appreciation Trust that benefited Trico employees. In 1998, Deibel joined the John R. Oishei Foundation board of directors. Oishei credited his company's success to the "good fortune of having ingenious engineering personalities among its ranks." Raymond Deibel was uppermost among them. Deibel received the proceeds from one of Oishei's life insurance funds and many generous gifts of stock during Oishei's lifetime.

Another engineer who can testify to the personality and interests of John R. Oishei is William Milliken, a long-term member of the Trico board of directors. Proposed for the board by R. John Oishei, the two met through their association in the Sportsman Club of America in the 1930s. Oishei invited Milliken for dinner to size up his suitability. They then met for lunch at the Buffalo Club, where Oishei acquainted Milliken with Trico's business. In the late 1950s, Milliken joined the board, which at that time consisted of Oishei, his sons Julian and R. John, Carl Larson, Rupert Warren, and Paul Schoellkopf.

As Milliken remembers, the board room itself was extremely sparsely furnished. With all of the members assembled, Oishei would make his entrance from an adjoining door. Milliken describes Oishei as totally in control of each meeting. He would review the successes and problems of the business without referring to notes. He often brought samples of new products and discussed their use. Without a formal agenda, without presentations by other officers, the board meetings featured Oishei acquainting the directors with information he thought they should know. Board meetings were clearly his show and he was an extremely entertaining and loquacious person.

Another example of one of Oishei's loyal employees is Rupert Warren. In 1944, Oishei lured the promising young lawyer away from a New York City firm. He was hired as general counsel to Oishei and to Trico. Warren also assumed general corporate executive duties. Their close relationship lasted until Oishei's death in 1968, but Warren's commitment to Trico continued. Oishei had appointed Warren
to succeed him as president of Trico, describing him as "one of the finest of minds I have ever met."

Warren stayed at Trico, and then ran the Julia R. and Estelle L. Foundation, now the John R. Oishei Foundation, until 1997. He died in 1998. Through Warren's autobiography, written after his retirement, we are able to learn more about the life of Oishei.

Warren first worked for Trico in 1942, as a lawyer in the New York firm of Root, Clark, Buckner and Ballantine. At the time, Trico was mired in overwhelming legal problems. One arose from the practice of limiting dividends to $2.50 a share annually on the company's outstanding unrestricted stock and investing the remainder of the company's earnings in blue chip securities. The then Bureau of Internal Revenue made penalty assessments on Trico, accusing it of accumulating earnings beyond the reasonable needs of the business for the purpose of avoiding surtaxes on the income of stockholders.

Simultaneously, Oishei encountered problems with the Bureau concerning his personal tax returns. The conflict stemmed from an agreement entered into by Oishei with Trico in 1927 on the sale to the public by the 21 stockholders of 26 percent of their stock. Oishei, who personally owned the important patents for the company, was obligated to sell those patents to Trico for the payment annually of ten percent of the Company's profits before taxes, for the period from 1927 to 1942.

When he sold the patents, he unwittingly reported those payments as ordinary income. Thereafter, ordinary income tax rates rose appreciably and Oishei's accountants advised him that the payments were not ordinary income at all, but capital gains on the sale of his patents, taxable at a lesser rate. Basically, the question came down to whether at the time of the sale of the patents he had been engaged in the "trade or business" of making inventions and selling them. If he had, the income would be ordinary income, just as are royalties received by an author who regularly publishes books.

John Lord O'Brian, a prominent Buffalo lawyer, agreed to represent Oishei in the case but was called to the War Production Board. He recommended that Arthur Ballantine of Root, Clark, Buckner and Ballantine take over responsibility. Ballantine drafted Rupert Warren to take charge.

Warren eagerly took up the tax cases.
When he made his first trip to Buffalo to meet personally with Oishei, Warren reports that he was well prepared for the meeting. Oishei launched into what looked like a lengthy discussion of the tax cases, but Warren interrupted and demonstrated an expert knowledge of the details involved. After about an hour, Oishei said, "You seem to know this case as well as I do; how about a game of golf at the Country Club?"

Thus began a friendship and a professional affiliation that continued for more than 25 years. After meeting Oishei, Warren commented that he "liked and admired this outgoing, intelligent, creative, and warmhearted man. He in return felt, I think, that he had found in me someone who could be helpful."

Warren's role in Trico and the life of Oishei proved far more than just "helpful."

Warren lost his first case on appeal for Oishei but felt that Oishei "always demanded one's best efforts, but when they were given and a case was lost, he was a good sport. Truly and without feigning, he did not feel in the least sorry for himself but only expressed regret that counsel, after such strenuous efforts, could not have the satisfaction of winning. He was vested with a self-assurance and maturity that permitted com-

passion, insight and tolerance, while keeping him from becoming difficult, angry or unreasonable." This description illuminates one appealing aspect of Oishei's concern for others.

Over a period of two years, when Warren commuted from New York, they often arranged their work to get in a late afternoon round of golf at the Country Club of Buffalo or a visit to the Buffalo Club. Oishei welcomed companionship during the evening hours since his wife had passed away and his children were grown.

**Bringing Warren to Buffalo**

In 1944, Oishei persuaded Warren to leave New York City, move to Buffalo and begin working at Trico. That affiliation provided Warren with a stimulating career. After the loss of the tax case, the minority stockholders filed suit. Warren defended Trico in a series of stockholder suits against the Internal Revenue Service and the Department of Justice. Even with great effort, filing a series of appeals and eventually petitioning to the Supreme Court, Warren was not successful in these suits or appeals. Trico paid a total of $3.9 million in penalty taxes and interest in 1945 for the tax years 1934-
37. Again, Oishei took the news with equanimity and urged Warren to concentrate on future battles. Warren and Oishei rarely clashed on business matters. Warren served as vice president, handling legal matters, other corporate duties, and often being dispatched on special assignments.

Oishei sent his brother Bill to supervise operations at Trico-Folberth in London. By the mid 1940s, however, it became obvious that Bill was not following directions issued from Buffalo. He launched two independent businesses, one a gravel pit supplying bagged gravel to the City of London for use as barricades, and the other a factory that produced five-gallon gasoline cans for transporting fuel.

Oishei discovered that these activities were not conducted on behalf of Trico-Folberth, but instead on behalf of Bill O'Shei. When combined with other irregularities in the ownership of patents and the purchase of stock at nominal amounts, Warren advised Oishei that his brother was not representing the best interests of the stockholders.

Oishei dispatched Warren to London to handle the distasteful job of "straightening out" the matter. Warren, much to the surprise of Bill O'Shei, accepted his resignation and appointed a new manager of the business. Warren tried to reason with O'Shei, asking him to repay the company the money he had borrowed. O'Shei was intractable, forcing Warren to hire a solicitor.

Negotiations dragged on for two years in the hopes of avoiding a suit, but eventually the case came to trial. The judge required O'Shei to make reparations to the company. After the decision, O'Shei voluntarily gave up the patents and waived his claims to stock interest. One of the British judges having received some of the voluminous correspondence

Trico office displayed this painting of female motorists
The John B. Oishei Foundation.
between John Oishei and Bill, referred to Oishei as the "Polonious of the type-writer," aptly comparing him to the loquacious but lovable statesman from Shakespeare's Hamlet. Warren recalled that this comparison did not strike Oishei as at all amusing.
Trico vs. Anco

Another longstanding legal struggle in the history of Trico was the series of patent suits it adopted against the Anderson Company (Anco). Anco was Trico's most formidable competitor. Oishi founded Trico in 1917; John L. Anderson founded Anco in 1919. The companies thereafter were engaged in ongoing trade wars, lawsuits, claims and counterclaims until both founders passed away. The first series of trials ended in 1947, when the companies settled claims against each other "with prejudice," meaning that both sides withdrew their complaints about the original patents for wiper blades and agreed not to assert any more claims on the patents in use. The settlement satisfied no one. In fact, the groundwork was being laid for new battles regarding wipers for curved windshields.

In 1944, Anco and Trico, unaware of each other's action, filed patent applications on blades for wiping compoundly curved windshields - Anderson on December 13, 1944, and Trico on December 21, 1944. No blade was ever commercially produced by Anderson in quite that form, however. Anderson offered a blade in October 1946 and Trico produced a blade in March 1947. Trico filed a patent application on this improved design. Anderson did not file an application on their improved design until August 1947. Thus began a patent "battle of the century" that was not resolved until after the deaths of both company founders.

In 1948, the Patent Office concluded that there was a conflict between the Anderson application of 1944 and the Trico application of 1947, eventually awarding the interference claim to Anco. In July of 1950, Trico filed suit against Anco for infringement on some earlier Trico patents on wiper components. Anco filed a counterclaim in 1952, and included an anti-trust claim for $17 million. Trico moved for dismissal and the motion was granted in federal court. Warren believed that by the time Trico's lawyer, Frank G. Raichle, was through collecting depositions from Anderson, the anti-trust action evaporated.

As the case proceeded, Trico filed 11 more patent counterclaims against Anco and asked that they be tried with the original case. The judge refused and the cases were tried individually over the next 17 years. The patent lawsuits were the longest standing suits of their time. After years of haggling, the patent suits were put to rest in January 1971 for $375,000. Oishi and Anderson may have kept the suits open in order to
discourage competition, since no new
design could be produced until litigation
ended.

A Taskmaster

Warren maintains on a tape recording
made late in his life that he never had a
significant difference of opinion with
either Oishei or his son, R. John.
Warren’s son, Bob, affirms that Oishei
was the most important person in
Rupert Warren’s life, a cherished friend
he served with exceptional devotion and
loyalty. Bob Warren believes that his
father and Oishei had a complementary
working relationship. Oishei believed “in
confronting problems and solving them.”
His business acumen and tough but fair
leadership was matched with Warren’s
ability to understand people and help
facilitate change.

For example, Warren handled all labor
relations at Trico from 1944 to 1973.
During his tenure, there was never a
strike at Trico. Employees felt loyalty to
Oishei and appreciation for Warren, who
attended the union dinners, company
picnics and employee parties. Warren
handled problems on the corporate side,
learned patent law to help with the Anco
cases, and also fielded questions on taxes
and finance at Trico. Oishei respected
Warren’s intellect and Warren appreci-
ated Oishei’s confident decision making.

Oishei was a tough taskmaster who
worked 65 hours a week, every week. He
demanded complete attention and
expected his employees to respond to
him 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
He ran the company with a tight rein
over his key employees and drove them
hard. They were never out of reach of
his phone calls or a summons to his
office.

Rupert Warren reported that on a trip to
Kentucky to discuss legislation regarding
vacuum-operated windshield wipers,

![Visionall ad for Spanish-speaking markets](image-url)
Warren’s plane was delayed in Pittsburgh and he put up at a hotel next to the airport, waiting for a flight the next morning. As he rested peacefully, his sleep was shattered by the loud ring of the phone at 2 a.m. Oishei was on the line. When Warren queried, “How did you know where I was staying?” Oishei replied, “I found out your plane was delayed and decided you would have to stay over in Pittsburgh and I assumed you would stay at the hotel closest to the airport.” Oishei then went on to discuss a number of ideas he had for dealing with the problem in Kentucky.

None of his key men begrudged their very tough, demanding boss because he asked as much from himself. In addition, he generously shared the fruits of his hard work with his staff. He appointed Warren his successor in the position of president of Trico, sharing duties with R. John Oshei. He also made Warren an executor of his estate.
Chapter 7

THINKING TWO YEARS AHEAD
Many credit Oishei with creative imagination and the ability to think at least two years ahead of his industry competitors. Oishei was the mastermind of Trico's climb to corporate prominence, but he preferred to deflect praise from himself and instead shower it on his employees. That earned him accolades from his workers. Oishei was gifted at spotting and nurturing talent, both in the research and design area and in the administrative levels of the company.

Oishei believed that a great business, to continue successfully, must demand the utmost in time and attention from its executives as well as from its employees. He remained loyal to Buffalo, often repeating, “Buffalo is where we operate, and Buffalo is where we stay.” At its most productive moment, operating three plants in Buffalo, Trico employment was 4,595 in 1950.

Fiercely independent, Oishei liked to call his own shots and not be in debt to anyone. One way Oishei insured the independence of Trico was to create a closed-end investment fund that owned millions of dollars in stock in other companies, primarily allied automotive industries. Income from these investments helped cushion Trico from the harsh cycles of the automobile industry.

When he was selected the University of Buffalo’s Businessman of the Year in 1955, Oishei acknowledged his employees. He said, “I thank you on behalf of our workers for this great honor. I feel deeply that no business has ever been built without the real heart and soul of loyal workers. Buffalo has been very good to Trico. I have nothing but gratitude to our people and to Buffalo itself, where we have found a well of willingness...
sufficiently strong and intelligent to keep our enterprise growing. I can truly say that I am merely the spokesman here for a great group of people - for Buffalo and for our workers, some of whom have been with us for more than 35 years.”

He further remarked, “It’s been a precarious business to deal with the largest employer of talent in the world - the auto industry. Our business came along at an opportune time. To keep it moving has been the combined effort of many.”

The UB citation also noted that Oishei’s interest in the welfare of employees led Trico to be among the first to install “company-wide pension, life insurance, sickness and disability plans followed by a company-wide Christmas participation plan.” Many former Trico employees talk about the feeling of family that pervaded Trico’s working culture. At Christmas time, Oishei greeted as many employees as possible. Each employee received a bonus check based on a percentage of salary and years of service, along with a one-pound box of Heubusch candy.

Deibel clearly remembers his first few days at Trico, when he met the owner even though he was a young newcomer in the shop. He remembers Oishei joking with longtime employees and his ability to put each one at ease. Socializing among employees was part of working at Trico. Deibel once planned a party at Burst’s Grove on Broadway, where he provided steaks and beverages for his men. When he told Oishei about the good time the group had, Oishei offered to subsidize the party.

In another generous act, as Oishei grieved the death of engineer Anton Rappl in an auto accident in Germany in 1949, he purchased a house where Rappl’s widow could “occupy the premises rent free so long as she shall live.” Provisions in his will confirmed the arrangement.

Oishei’s generosity extended throughout the Buffalo area. When a tragic fire struck Cheektowaga’s Cleveland Hill School in 1954, Oishei sent an anonymous donation to the school. He gave money to homeless people, sent shares of stock to the children of his employees, aided a fellow parishioner of St. Louis Church who had lost his job, and helped the family of a former Trico lawyer during the man’s fatal illness. Hundreds of such anecdotes could be collected about Oishei.
SHOWING APPRECIATION
Perhaps John R. Oishei's most significant gesture on behalf of Trico employees was the formation of a trust to benefit them and their families. In November of 1967, the 50th year of Trico's operation, Oishei felt so blessed by the prosperity and success he had achieved in Buffalo that he wanted to recognize the people who made up the Trico organization.

He created an instrument, a trust for "charitable and educational purposes for the benefit of the public as an expression of his gratification and affection for the thousands of employees and former employees of the Company over the years." On January 13, 1968, Oishei transferred 80,782 shares of capital stock of Trico Securities Corporation into a trust. Trico Securities Corporation operated primarily for the purpose of holding shares of stock of Trico Products Corporation.

Upon John R. Oishei's death, the Securities Corporation stock held by the trust had a value of nearly $13 million. He named the trust the John R. Oishei Charitable Appreciation Trust, insisting that the word appreciation be in the title since he wanted to demonstrate to his employees how much their service meant to him. The funds existed to benefit employees and former employees of Trico and their families, as well as the families of deceased employees. It provided for "their needs, medical care, education, welfare and assistance in such manner the Trustees shall determine." Officers and directors were excluded.

It was the largest charitable trust of its kind ever set up by an individual in Buffalo at that time. For ten years following his death, until 1978, the trustees paid one half of the annual income up to $300,000 to or for the benefit of employees and former employees of Trico. Everything in excess of $300,000 went into the Julia R. and Estelle L. Foundation. Julian Oishei, John Oishei, Deibel and Larson became the trustees of the trust.

Between 1978 and the mid 1990s, the income went into the Julia R. and Estelle L. Foundation and was disbursed as the trustees saw fit. Ultimately, Rupert Warren devised a program distributing the money to seven private colleges and universities to grant scholarships to eligible students from Trico's employee family.

Warren believed that the trust was an effort by Oishei to express both his gratitude to Buffalo for the opportunities it had afforded him, and his deep appreciation to Trico's employees with whom he had been so long and amica-
ably associated. In 1999, the John R. Oishei Charitable Appreciation Trust's net assets of more than $56 million were merged into the John R. Oishei Foundation.
Chapter 9

DEATH OF AN INDUSTRIALIST
At age 82, after 50 years at the helm of Trico, Oishei died in 1968. In a lengthy obituary, The Buffalo Evening News reported, “The internationally known industrialist, who harnessed a vacuum to wipe the windshields of the world, had — by his creative imagination and ability to think at least two years ahead — made Trico known wherever motor vehicles are used.”

A special tribute on the editorial page described Oishei as “one of those creative men whose lives seem indissolubly linked to businesses they nurture over the years from an idea to a multi-million-dollar enterprise. John R. Oishei’s death removes from Buffalo one of its ablest and most enterprising industrial leaders who built a booming business and kept it here.”

Succeeded by R. John, who assumed the title of chairman and chief operating officer, and Rupert Warren, who was named president, Trico continued to prosper.

R. John Oshei spent his entire business career with Trico. He began as a production department stock chaser when the corporation was only 11 years old. He handled successive assignments and as a result, when he assumed the corporate leadership, possessed an in-depth and firsthand knowledge of virtually every phase of Trico’s processes.

Although he held positions as vice president, manager of purchases and director of overseas subsidiaries, R. John took particular pride in his development of the automotive replacement parts business. He recognized that the requirements for replacement parts presented a new opportunity and he felt Trico should have a share in it. As a result, the sale of replacement parts became a considerable portion of Trico’s business.

Richard L. Wolf, who had been a lawyer with Jaekle, Fleischmann and Mugel, succeeded R. John Oshei as Trico president. He said, of R. John’s achievement, “He took the replacement parts business from practically no business to a very important part of our strategy and sales.”

In addition to Trico-branded products, which were marketed through discount stores, parts stores and repair shops, the company produced private-label products for NAPA, Carquest, Atlas and Canadian Tire. Trico supplied 30 percent of the linkages, 83 percent of the wiper arms and 66 percent of the wiper blades used as original equipment by the four major U.S. automakers and truck manufacturers.
During R. John Oshei’s tenure, Trico’s profits came from three sources – domestic operations, overseas interests, and its investments. The major source of profits was the three Buffalo plants that produced wipers and other products such as headlight actuators and controls, windshield washer solvent, rubber and plastic tubing, vacuum and air pressure controls, and metal parts. Some income came from its subsidiaries in England and Australia. Trico’s investment portfolio also was an important component.

Over the years, the company amassed huge blocks of stock in some of the biggest companies in America, including General Motors and Ford. These stocks had a market value of $38.4 million in the early 1980s, generating significant dividends to the company.

But even with this huge investment cushion, Trico suffered serious reverses in the 1980s. Competition sharpened when Anderson Company was purchased by Champion Spark Plugs and launched a major television campaign that Trico could not match.

Unfortunately, it fell to R. John Oshei to renege on a promise his father had made repeatedly to Buffalo. Where his father had steadfastly refused offers to relocate, R. John decided that Trico must do so.

By moving its manufacturing operations to Texas and its assembly operations to Mexico, Trico thereby formed a maquiladora (cross-border) enterprise.

**A Bold Move**

Cutting costs became increasingly important as, despite strong sales, Trico’s manufacturing operations lost more than $27 million between 1980 and 1984. The company posted a profit of $781,000 in 1985 on then-record sales of $145.5 million, but the die was cast. In 1985, Wolf and Oshei announced jointly, “The advent of economic change in the automotive industry and the emergence of worldwide competition have combined to deny us any realistic opportunity to carry on our Buffalo manufacturing operations on a profitable basis over a sustained period... Our plan of restructuring represents a bold move to assure the future of Trico.”

Over the next two years Trico closed two of its three plants in Buffalo and eliminated 1,100 of its 2,550 local jobs. Buffalo’s business leaders and Trico workers expressed their objections as the company’s manufacturing jobs shifted to new factories along the Texas-Mexico border. The company built a technology center and warehouse in Brownsville.
Texas, to handle product development and distribution in the United States. Close to 3,000 Buffalo jobs were eventually eliminated, leaving only about 430 employees.

The restructuring appeared to work. After posting an operating loss of $16 million in 1987, Trico reported net income of $5.6 million on sales of $232.7 million in 1988. By 1991, however, Trico was again losing money, posting a $14.6 million loss on sales of $228.7 million. Another 350 jobs were eliminated. The company posted modest earnings in 1992 and 1993 and sales began to rise. However, the company would have posted losses in both years if it had not liquidated almost $20 million in securities.

In 1994, Peter Cundill & Associates Ltd., a Vancouver-based investment firm that owned 13 percent of Trico's stock, began pressing for the company to be sold. In a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Cundill & Associates stated that selling the company was the best way for shareholders to maximize the value of their investment.

At the time, Trico had voted dividends on its stock just three times since 1981, paying $1 that year and 75 cents in 1986 and 1992. Moreover, the investment firm also asked the Charities Bureau in the New York Attorney General's office to require the John R. Oishei Charitable Appreciation Trust and other family trusts, which then owned 33 percent of Trico, to sell their shares if a buyer could be found. Trico put itself up for sale in the summer of 1994.

That November, the Stant Corporation, a Richmond, Indiana-based manufacturer of hose clamps, engine thermostats, radiator caps, car heaters and other automotive equipment, including motors for windshield-wiper systems, offered $85 a share for 1.9 million outstanding shares of Trico stock, which was then trading for $61.50 on the NASDAQ exchange. In December, the offer was accepted and Stant, itself a subsidiary of Bessemer Capital Partners LP, acquired 93.5 percent of Trico's stock for $160 million.

The new owners opened a research and development center in Rochester Hills, a suburb of Detroit, to consolidate the research, testing and sales operations of Trico. The 81,600 square foot facility provided space for elaborate product development and for laboratories where products could be tested under extreme conditions. In his lifetime, Oishei was able to resist the urgings of Detroit to
move closer to the center of the auto industry, but the economic realities of the 1980s and early 1990s made it impossible for his son to keep that resolve.

Tomkins plc bought out Stant Corporation in 1997 and the next year moved Trico headquarters to Michigan. By 2001, all that remained of Trico in Buffalo was a plant on Thielman Drive, where approximately 200 employees manufactured parts for support and supply of the Detroit operation. Operations on the fourth floor of Plant One on Washington Street, where Trico extruded rubber wiper blades, were moved to Texas.

Oishi might be pleased, however, with the disposition of the Trico buildings. Old Plant One is recognized as an architecturally significant example of the daylight factory. Since its purchase in 1998 by Stephen B. McGarvey, the plant housed several software service businesses and high tech companies.

Former Plant Two began as a Ford Plant manufacturing the Lincoln Continental. It was purchased by Bell Aerospace, who developed the P-49 airplane there. Trico purchased the building in the late 1940s. After the sale of Trico, Canadian developer Elgin Wolfe purchased the plant at 2495 Main Street and engaged both business and arts tenants.

Known as the Tri-Main Building, it has been home to organizations such as the Buffalo Inner City Ballet, the Buffalo Arts Studio and Hallwalls, providing studios for 70 working artists, as well as exhibition and gallery space. ArtSPACE, a collaborative for working artists, occupied 30,000 square feet. Some small businesses and non-profit organizations, including Just Buffalo Literary Center, Inc. and Young Audiences of Western New York, also located there.

The Elk Street plant, designated Plant Three, that once served as a warehouse for Trico's finished products, became the headquarters for Austin Air Company, a manufacturer of indoor air cleaners and filters. The building owner, Richard Taylor, made significant improvements to the building.
In 1940, when John R. Oishei established the Julia R. and Estelle L. Foundation, Inc. in memory of his deceased mother and wife, he funded it with annual contributions and charitable remainder trusts. Oishei directed the Foundation from its establishment until his death in 1968. Under his leadership, the Foundation concentrated its support on hospitals, schools, cultural organizations and social service providers in Buffalo.

Originally the Foundation was a family concern, with Oishei's sons, R. John and Julian, serving as the directors and officers. The minutes of the first meeting reflect the appointment of R. John as president and Julian as vice president. Elsie Lodge, Oishei's treasurer at Trico, served as secretary and treasurer. John R. Oishei chaired each meeting.

When Oishei created the Foundation, the certificate of incorporation explained his intention. The original trust agreement states that the Foundation was established first, "to provide funds in whole or in part for the education of boys, girls, young men and young women."

Secondly, he planned to "contribute to schools, colleges, and other educational institutions for the mental, physical well-being and development of young people of the United States and especially in the city of Buffalo."

He provided college scholarship assistance to young men and women from the city of Buffalo and aid for the building, equipment and maintenance of clubs, gymnasiums and recreation centers. Oishei's own education was abruptly terminated due to his family obligations. Perhaps this influenced his desire to fund the educations of others. The original incorporation also allowed the trustees to fund scientific research either through individuals or organizations.

In the early 1940s, the assets of the Foundation amounted to only a few thousand dollars. In February of 1942, the treasurer reported a bank balance of just under $3,000. The Foundation began disbursing funds to worthy organizations such as the American Society for the Control of Cancer, the Defense Project Committee, the American Association for the Blind, Memorial Hospital at Cornell University, and Hobart College.

By the next decade, J.R. Oishei's gifts of stock to the Foundation increased its value to almost $270,000. In 1957, the Foundation established a chair in cardiology at the University of Buffalo School.
of Medicine. The Foundation also endowed a room at the Buffalo General Hospital and contributed to the building of an Allergy Room. Hospitals such as Children's and Buffalo General continued to benefit from the Foundation's gifts. Oishei was a 22-year member of the Buffalo General’s board of trustees.

As the assets of the Foundation grew, so did the amount of grants awarded. The Foundation records show $86,000 in grants given out in 1962. Twenty years later, in 1982, nearly $15 million was disbursed. By 1992, more than $2.3 million was given to the Buffalo community.

Anonymity for Objectivity

Until 1997, all of the Foundation's contributions were made on an anonymous basis, a practice consistent with the procedures Oishei followed with regard to the substantial personal charitable gifts he made during his lifetime. His penchant for anonymity was driven by his strong sense of modesty and an equally strong belief that anonymity allowed him to make philanthropic decisions with greater objectivity. He consistently refused recognition or honor for his generosity. It wasn't until 1997, almost 30 years after his death, that the foundation's name was changed to the John R. Oishei Foundation.

During the early years of the Foundation, few people realized that Oishei was perhaps the largest single charitable benefactor in Buffalo. His generosity knew few limits.

When a policeman on the beat near Trico headquarters confided to Oishei that his wife was ill, Oishei immediately covered the medical bills. When he noticed that a friend who sat nearby in St. Louis Church stopped attending Mass, he found out that he had lost his job. Oishei stepped in to help his family. These small acts of generosity were joined by larger gifts to area hospitals, schools, colleges and churches. When Oishei found a worthy cause, he would have a cashier's check drawn up and sent to the organization with a note indicating that it was from an anonymous donor.

A devout Catholic who firmly believed in his responsibility to help the poor, Oishei generously supported Catholic Charities and St. Louis Church. Parishioners of that time said that he paid the heating bills for the cavernous edifice. When Oishei died, St. Louis Church recognized his “anonymous gifts made over the years.” In his memory, a Mass was said on the anniversary of his death for 20 years.

St. Louis Church
Buffalo & Erie County Public Library
Oishei's giving habits parallel the handling of his personal finances. Guarding his privacy at all times, Oishei trusted few people with knowledge of his accounts. Allan R. Wiegley, a junior accountant for Price Waterhouse in 1966, first met Oishei when he was called to work on his tax returns. Oishei received a notice from the Internal Revenue Service indicating that he was paying too much in income tax. Apparently most of his income was taxed in the 90% bracket at the time. His taxes exceeded 78% of his income, which was not allowable by law.

At the time, Oishei was paying $2 million a year to the IRS through quarterly payments to the government. Wiegley asked to see the checks payable to the IRS and was surprised to find that there were 16 different checks written for differing amounts. According to Wiegley, Oishei never wanted any one bank to know how much he paid in taxes so he withdrew varying amounts from different banks each quarter.

The tax return filed following his death indicates that the total gross estate amounted to nearly $58 million. At that time, it was one of the two or three largest estates ever administered in Erie County. Oishei owned little real estate but had $44 million in stocks and bonds and approximately $1 million in insurance policies. After removing more than $20 million for charitable bequests and paying over $27 million in federal and state taxes, the estate ended up with approximately $11 million.

The bulk of the estate was left in trusts. Ninety percent of the residuary was equally divided among three life income trusts, one for the benefit of each of his three children, with the principal to pass to the Foundation upon the deaths of the life beneficiaries. Another five percent of the estate was placed in a trust to pay over the income “to or for the benefit of the sisters, nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandchildren of the Donor.”

Albert R. Mugel, then an estate tax lawyer with Jacek Fleischmann and Mugel, handled most of Oishei’s estate planning. Mugel died in 2003. Oishei made provisions for his children and friends, and used many estate planning vehicles to preserve his wealth and pass it to loved ones and employees. During his life, Oishei created 12 different trusts for each of his sons and 13 trusts for his daughter. Upon her death, the principal of the 13th trust reverted to Buffalo General Hospital, subsequently part of Kaleida Health. Upon the death of his
children, these trusts were combined into two consolidated trusts that now benefit the Foundation. They generate nearly $1 million each year to be distributed by the Foundation.

Oishei also provided life insurance proceeds for his loyal employees including Caroline Campbell, a Scottish woman who cared for his home; Nettie and Sarah Nathan, and Ray Deibel.

**Christmas Giving**

Another form of giving for Oishei began in the 1950s, when he inaugurated a practice of making substantial Christmas gifts to his children and friends. For his children, the gifts came in the form of individual trusts. His friends and trusted employees often received gifts of stock. For ten years (1957-1967) Oishei followed this plan, which involved the disposition of a large amount of stock in Trico and other companies.

For example, for Christmas gifts in 1965, Oishei distributed more than 400 shares of stock in J. C. Penney. Ray Deibel and his wife, Mary; Rupert Warren and his wife, Eileen; Nettie Nathan, Martin Bitzer and Tony Scinta all received shares of stock. Bob Warren remembers the ritual of the uniformed deliveryman ringing the doorbell at the Warren home each Christmas at three o'clock. He discreetly announced that he was sent by Mr. Oishei, wished them Merry Christmas and handed over an envelope. The envelope contained the stock certificates. These annual gifts usually came in similar amounts. They recognized the most important people in Oishei’s life. Oishei helped employees and friends build stock portfolios when, in many cases, they had previously owned little or no stock.

When Oishei died, Allan Wiegley and a team of accountants inventoried Oishei’s assets for tax purposes. Wiegley worked for six weeks tracing back the 350 different securities that Oishei owned to original purchase dates. Some extended as far back as the 1930s. He found original Standard Oil stock bought for 15 cents a share. When Standard Oil was deregulated and split up, Oishei then owned stock in nine oil companies, including Exxon.

Wiegley served with a team of professionals charged with opening Oishei’s safety deposit box and conducting an inventory of the contents. Two lawyers from Jereck,Schlesinger, and Muller; a partner from Price Waterhouse, a state tax examiner and Wiegley found four file drawers full of stock and security certificates and $25,000 in cash in envelopes.
Each envelope had a date on it; most pre-dated 1950. Apparently, before 1950, Oishei did not have a checking account, so he always used cash. When he bought new clothes, he came down to the safety deposit box and took an envelope full of cash to the store with him.

The team spent two days in the vault. When they realized how many valuable stock certificates and how much cash was stashed there, they decided to work straight through. They called out for coffee and lunch and stayed until the audit was complete.

Wiegley recounts that Oishei was so focused on the company in its early years that he neglected to think about an initial investment strategy. Elsie Lodge handled all of the royalties coming in from the patents in Oishei's name and she advised him to invest in companies associated with Trico and the automobile industry. They bought automobile stocks such as General Motors, and since cars ran on gasoline, they bought oil stocks. Eventually, Lodge managed an extensive portfolio that grew exponentially over the decades.

Jaeckle, Fleischmann and Mugel prepared the tax return for Oishei's estate. Determining that Oishei owed $21 million in federal taxes, they prepared a check for the IRS. Instructed to type out the check, Ruth Stieger disappeared for over one-half hour. Summoning her back, Wiegley asked if there was a problem. She replied: “I can't fit the number $21,000,000 on the check form!” Finally, on the last day allowed by law, the tax return stood ready and the local IRS director received it personally.

Warren’s responsibilities with the Foundation spanned 35 years, beginning with his role as legal advisor and concluding with his service as president from 1989 to 1997. Warren's exceptional investment skills contributed to the growth of the Foundation's assets, making it the largest of any foundation in Western New York.

After Warren’s retirement, Richard Wolf became its chairman and president. His energy, vision and passion for the potential role the Foundation could have in the lives of Buffalo area residents led the transition from the Julia R. and Estelle L. Foundation to the John R. Oishei Foundation in 1997.
His Daughter and Sons

Oishei's children, R. John, Julian and Patricia, followed the philanthropic example of their father. Each of the siblings made generous contributions to charitable causes in the city of Buffalo. After they died, the trusts their father set up for them passed to the Foundation. In addition, the consolidated trusts are the source of nearly $1 million a year, which is distributed by the John R. Oishei Foundation for worthy community purposes.

R. John, graduated from Lafayette High School. A lifelong antique car enthusiast, he enjoyed purchasing and restoring vintage automobiles. He was a charter member of the Antique Car Club of America. A tall man with a handlebar mustache, Oishei engaged in amateur boxing matches. He generously responded to requests from area nonprofit organizations with anonymous gifts, just as his father had done.

Named Businessman of the Year by the Canisius College School of Business Administration in 1973, he also received awards from several local colleges including Hilbert, Daemen and Villa Maria. Canisius awarded him an honorary doctorate and its Regents Distinguished Citizen Achievement Award. He was a past president of the Buffalo Club and the Country Club of Buffalo. After R. John died in 1990 and his wife, Jean, died in 1994, the R. John Oishei Unitrust, as well as a portion of Jean's estate, was left to the Foundation. The total of these two sources amounted to approximately $24 million.

Julian Oishei attended Public School 30 and Nichols School before attending Cornell University School of Engineering. During World War II, he served in the Army Signal Corps in the United States and then in Japan after the war. Oishei spent his business career at Trico. At his father's death, he directed Trico's plants, equipment and processing. He retired in the 1980s.

Julian, a longtime Town of Clarence resident, was an avid golfer and a founding member of Crag Burn Club. He also was a member of the Buffalo Club and the Country Club of Buffalo. He died August 14, 1995, at the age of 82. He and his wife, Varue Whitten Oishei, are the parents of John Roffo Oishei II.

Varue Whitten Oishei, also a generous contributor to the Buffalo community, donated to Nardin Academy two houses owned by the Oishei family and located on West Ferry Street. One house serves as its Montessori campus. The other, John R. Oishei's house, provides a residence for
the Daughters of the Heart of Mary, the religious order that operates Nardin Academy.

Patricia Oishei McDowell Colby was also a major volunteer and philanthropic supporter of many community and charitable causes. From childhood, she had been the source of her father's great delight.

In a letter to his sister, Bertha, Oishei discussed Patty's performance in a play at her high school, Buffalo Seminary. He remarked, "Pat is cast in the part of the villain and is the finest thing ever. I haven't had as good a laugh in years... She strutted on and used a deep voice that I don't know where she got. She really was good and I got some of the kick that old Peter Cornell must have got some years ago. Her singing was perfectly timed and very professional."

Patty attended Sarah Lawrence College and then served in the American Red Cross Motor Corps during World War II. She married Buffalo obstetrician Robert McDowell in the mid-1940s. He died in 1964, at age 56, after suffering a heart attack. Patricia's second husband was businessman Robert W. Colby, whom she married in 1969. He died in 1982. She died on November 10, 2000.

The list of Mrs. Colby's philanthropic projects is extensive. Upon her death, the trust her father set up passed $25.6 million to the Foundation. Two stepsons, Jonathan Colby and Seth Colby, a stepdaughter, Michal Wadsworth, and seven grandchildren survived her.
Chapter 12

A Catalyst for Change
The Foundation underwent enormous change in 1997 and 1998. At the urging of Richard Wolf and the board members at that time, the Foundation transformed itself from a gift making organization to a Foundation that promotes positive change in Western New York. Among the board members who participated in this transition were Albert Mueg, Allan Wiegley, Ray Deibel, Louis Lange and Christopher Dunstan. After adopting its new name, the Foundation published guidelines, hired Thomas E. Baker as its first executive director, elected a new board chair and several new board members, and publicized its grant-making activities to the general public.

The Foundation began to describe itself as a “catalyst for change,” stating that its purpose was to provide substantial contributions to non-profit organizations that would lead to improvements in the overall quality of life in the Buffalo area.

The Foundation’s mission statement is to enhance the quality of life for Buffalo area residents by supporting education, healthcare, scientific research, and the cultural, social, civic and other charitable needs of the community.

The Foundation’s grant-making priorities are linked to the concepts established by Oishel at its founding six decades ago.

Its principal funding priority is creative programs which attempt to advance from the status quo, are strategically sound and can effectively meet community needs. The Foundation is particularly supportive of collaborative programs and those in which Foundation support can be leveraged into greater support from other sources.

The Foundation has grown dramatically both in public presence and in the number of grants. Since the transformation of the Foundation in 1997-98, close to $80 million has been awarded. By the end of 2003, the Foundation’s total contributions to the Buffalo region since its establishment in 1940 approximated $140 million. The Foundation’s assets grew through the sale of Trico, from the remainder trusts of the Oishel children, and through stock market appreciation. As of December, 2003, the assets were approximately $240 million.

John R. Oishel’s devotion to the Buffalo community lives on through the activities of the Foundation, which is endowed for perpetuity. Now and in the years to come, Foundation staff and directors will continue to assess community needs, identify key institutions and leaders and invest in their capabilities. The Foundation will continue to encourage and fund positive change for the benefit of Buffalo area residents.
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