



## Monsanto Texas City Explosion Collection (S0591)

**Collection Number:** S0591

**Collection Title:** Monsanto Texas City Explosion Collection

**Dates:** 1947, 1997

**Creator:** Rooney, William Albert, 1917-2011

**Abstract:** The Monsanto Texas City Explosion Collection contains the insurance claim for the 1947 Monsanto explosion in Texas City, Texas, and articles reflecting on the disaster 50 years later. On April 16, 1947, the freighter *S.S. Grandcamp* exploded at a pier in Texas City, killing between 500 and 600 people. The insurance claim's cover page calls the explosion "the largest single risk loss in the history of insurance."

**Collection Size:** 0.25 cubic foot  
(1 folder)

**Language:** Collection materials are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

**Restrictions on Access:** Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at [stlouis@shsmo.org](mailto:stlouis@shsmo.org).

**Restrictions on Use:** Materials in this collection may be protected by copyrights and other rights. See [Rights & Reproductions](#) on the Society's website for more information about reproductions and permission to publish.

**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Monsanto Texas City Explosion Collection* (S0591); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

**Donor Information:** The papers were donated to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection by William Rooney on November 7, 1997 (Accession No. SA3282).

**Processed by:** Processed by Rachael Heriford, AJ Medlock and Isaac Alexander, October 2023

**Historical Note:**

John Queeny founded Monsanto Company (formerly Monsanto Chemical Company, 1933-1964 and Monsanto Chemical Works, 1901-1933) in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1901. The company's initial products were saccharin, then refined caffeine, vanillin, and aspirin. John's son, Edgar Queeny, took over the company in 1928. From the 1940s through the 1960s, Monsanto developed more products for food preservation, crop protection, and fine pharmaceuticals. The company also expanded into oil drilling and refining, plastics and other synthetics, and atomic energy research. Throughout the 1970s, Monsanto shifted to more environmentally conscious products and manufacturing. In 2000, the company merged with Pharmacia Corporation. By 2009, Monsanto's work exclusively focused on agriculture. In 2016, Monsanto merged with Bayer. Bayer purchased the company, and all its operations under "Monsanto" transitioned to using the Bayer name in 2018.

In 1943, Monsanto opened a chemical plant in Texas City, Texas, to assist in rubber manufacturing for the Rubber Reserve Corporation, and wartime production during World War II. On April 11, 1947, the French-owned *S.S. Grandcamp* arrived in Texas City to pick up sacks of fertilizer that contained ammonium nitrate and ammunition cargo. After a few days of loading materials onto the *S.S. Grandcamp*, longshoremen noticed smoke on the ship on April 16. A fire quickly spread, forcing workers to evacuate before unloading the ammunition cargo. The heat from the fire, as well as the location of the volatile ammonium nitrate between the fuel tanks and ammunition, caused the ship to explode. The blast caused a 15-foot tidal wave and destroyed the Monsanto plant. The fire from the *S.S. Grandcamp* caused a second cargo ship to catch fire and explode on April 17, causing even more damage and killing an additional two people.

After the explosion, Edgar Queeny asked two of Monsanto's advertising staff, William Rooney, and Wilbur Grosse, to write the insurance claim for the 1947 disaster. Queeny said having a non-insurance agent write the report would make it fair and impartial. Monsanto was the first company to pledge to rebuild their operations in Texas City. Nationwide, officials implemented new standards for ammonium nitrate transportation and handling, and industrial zones began creating better emergency response plans. Victims of the disaster filed hundreds of lawsuits, and a 1955 bill passed in the U.S. Congress to provide compensation to the victims.

**Arrangement:**

The collection has been arranged into one folder.

**Scope and Content Note:**

The Monsanto Texas City Explosion Collection contains the 1947 Monsanto insurance claim for the Texas City explosion and two 1997 articles reflecting on the event. The first article describes the experience of Forrest Walker on the day of the disaster. Walker was a high school student at the time and lost his father, who worked for Monsanto Texas City Chemical Plant. In the second article, former Monsanto advertiser William Rooney recalls how Monsanto chairman Edgar Queeny asked Rooney and another of his advertising colleagues to write the insurance claim for the 1947 disaster. The insurance claim for over \$22 million provides a background of the company's plant in Texas City, extensive diagrams and explanations of the plant's safety protocols, schedules of company losses and expenses, and an account of the disaster and immediate recovery efforts. Rooney styled the insurance claim in the inspiration of John Hershey's 1946 book *Hiroshima* and the intelligence reports Rooney wrote while serving in the

U.S. Army during World War II. The materials in this collection are arranged chronologically from 1947 to 1997.

**Container List:**

f. 1 Monsanto Texas City Explosion Collection, 1947, 1997

**Index:**

Index Terms	Folder
Ammonium nitrate--Accidents	1
Disasters--Texas--Texas City--History--20th century	1
Explosions--Accidents	1
Insurance claims--United States	1
Monsanto Company	1
Rooney, William Albert, 1917-2011	1
Texas City Disaster, 1947--History	1
Texas City (Tex.)--Fire, 1947	1
Queeny, Edgar M. (Edgar Monsanto), 1897-1968	1
Walker, Forrest A., 1929-2004	1
Workplace accidents--History	1