



John Dessauer.

JOHN H. DESSAUER

1905–1993

BY ROBERT J. SPINRAD

JOHN H. DESSAUER, retired officer and director of the Xerox Corporation and the man who brought to a small company the invention that later became xerography, died on August 12, 1993, in Rochester, New York. He was eighty-eight years old.

Dessauer was born in Aschaffenburg, Germany, on May 13, 1905. He earned his B.S. degree in 1926 from the Munich Technical Institute and his M.S. and D. Eng. degrees from the Aachen Technical Institute in 1927 and 1929, respectively. Dr. Dessauer emigrated to the United States in 1929 and went to work for the Agfa-Ansco Corporation in Binghamton, New York. In 1935 he moved to Rochester, New York, to work for the Rectigraph Company, which was later acquired by the Haloid Company. (Haloid changed its name to Haloid Xerox in 1958 and later, in 1961, to Xerox.)

Dr. Dessauer became the head of research at Haloid in 1938. In 1946, as part of an investigation into new technologies, he came across a description of Chester Carlson's electrophoto-graphic process in the April 1945 issue of Kodak's *Monthly Abstract Bulletin*. From this brief twenty-five line abstract, Dessauer immediately sensed the potential for document copying. He described his excitement in his book, *My Years with Xerox: The Billions Nobody Wanted*: "By the time I had finished the abstract I was so excited by its possibilities that I immediately sent it to [Haloid President] Joe Wilson's office."

Ironically, Chester Carlson, the inventor of the process, had taken his ideas to more than twenty companies, including Kodak and IBM. They had all rejected him. Dessauer persuaded the Haloid management to look into it and, in 1947, they successfully negotiated with Battelle Memorial Institute in Columbus, Ohio, for the rights to xerography. In 1959, after many frustrating years, Dessauer's team produced the first successful, fully automatic, plain paper copier, the Xerox 914. Xerox was on its way.

From 1959 to 1968 Dessauer served as an executive vice-president of Xerox. In 1968, after heading Xerox research activities for thirty years, he relinquished that post. However, he continued to serve as a member of the board of directors, a position he had held from 1946 to 1973. He was vice-chairman of the board from 1966 to 1970. He also served on the board of directors of Rank Xerox, Ltd. from 1959 to 1973. Dessauer held many xerographic and photographic patents and was the author of numerous articles. In 1971 he wrote *My Years with Xerox*, recounting his fascinating industrial odyssey.

In 1967 Dr. Dessauer was elected to the National Academy of Engineering (NAE). He served on the NAE Council from 1970 to 1976. During his long and constructive career, Dessauer received honorary degrees from Le Moyne College, Clarkson University, and Fordham University, where he also served as a trustee. He was honored by the Industrial Research Institute, which named him its 1968 medalist, and in 1973 he was awarded the Frederik Philips Award from the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Dessauer was a fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences, the American Institute of Chemists, and the Photographic Society of America. Most recently, in 1992, he was named honorary member of the Society for Imaging Science and Technology.

John Dessauer lived up to his reputation as a person committed to social issues. He once said: "I feel a company can be profitable and can meet these [social] responsibilities at the same time. In fact, if management can manage by instilling enthusiasm and mutual respect rather than fear, then a company can be eminently more successful."

Shortly after he retired from Xerox, Dr. Dessauer set up a modest suite of offices for "J. M. D. Associates" in Pittsford, a Rochester suburb. "J" was for John; "M" was for his wife, Margaret; and "Associates" was for his three children. When asked what J. M. D. Associates did, he replied, "It's simply an office devoted to the goal of helping people. It's not a business venture. I'm no longer interested in personal profit. I just want now to devote myself mainly to education and religious and charitable works."

John Dessauer closes his book, *My Years with Xerox*, by observing: "Though the machine has in many ways made man immensely richer, it can also do harm and impoverish him unless he uses it with prudence. This is the challenge that awaits those who follow us. One can only hope that they will meet it with a sense of high responsibility not only to themselves but to all mankind. As new scientific discoveries and new technologies become available at an even faster pace, finding ways of applying them for the welfare of society will be the greatest opportunity that awaits man in the future."

We can only agree—and give thanks that the world was privileged to benefit from John Dessauer's fine mind and good heart.