TUXEDO PARK, by Jennet Conant

Summary

Abstract

This book is of particular interest as a historical account of "A Wall Street tycoon (Alfred Lee Loomis) and the secret palace of science that changed the course of WW II." Loomis influenced the Manhattan Project, the development of electric power, and many important U.S. scientific developments.

Extracts

Alfred Loomis, powerful and enormously wealthy, had for years led a double life, spending his days brokering huge deals and his weekends working with the world's leading scientists in his deluxe private laboratory hidden in a massive stone castle (just 40 miles Northwest of New York City; started in 1926 and shuttered in 1940). (Book jacket)

Genius Loomis got an early start. In World War I, a Major at age 30, he was in charge of ballistics research at the Aberdeen proving Ground. (Page 32)

He raced his own America's Cup yacht, and purchased Hilton Head Island, SC. (Jacket)

His Tuxedo Park lab was a meeting place for Einstein, Heisenberg, James Franck, Bohr, Fermi, (Kistiakowsky). Ibid

Loomis helped mobilize Vannevar Bush, Karl Compton, James Conant (Harvard President), etc. in the defeat of Nazi Germany. Ibid

He bankrolled pioneering research in radar detection systems. Ibid

With Ernest Lawrence, Loomis established the top-secret wartime RAD lab at MIT and recruited the most famous names in physics.

Through his cousin, Henry Stimson, U.S. Secretary of War, was able to convince FDR to spend $ hundreds of millions to create advanced Radar, Loran, and other

microwave technology defeating German Air Force and U-boats. Loomis was a key organizer of the Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb. Ibid

Loomis had the foresight to know that science would soon become a dominating force, and he used his immense fortune to attract a gifted group of young physicists to his private laboratory and endow pioneering research that pushed the frontiers of knowledge(xvi). An example of his breadth of scientific interests: he did early research on brain wave measurement and built the first EEG machine.

...some utility men consider Loomis and his partner in Bonbright, Landon Ketchum Thorne, with support of Charles A. Coffin, president of General Electric, as the most potent force in shaping the present and future organization of America's huge, complex power and light business. (42)

Professor R. W. Wood of Johns Hopkins University, taught Loomis physics. (52)

In 1929...the Morgan-Drexel-Bonbright holding company...etc...controlled more than a third of the power production in 12 eastern states. Loomis and partner Thorne (using his scientific approach to investment) liquidated their holdings before the October 24, 1929 Black Thursday...and were thus conveniently caught with their pockets full of money. (76)

After the crash, Loomis and Thorne were towering figures on Wall Street–dominant players in the Banker's Trust Co., Central Hanover Trust, First National. (80)

Loomis and Thorne were the young and restless forces behind the giant new power companies. (86)

In 1933, physicist Loomis was honored by AAAS as one of 250 American scientists, listed as foremost in their different fields of research. (90)

Loomis and Wood sat on the planning committee to select science exhibits for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. (105)

Loomis seemed to stand at the edge of important events, intimately involved and at the same time somehow overlooked. He was too complex to categorize–financier, philanthropist, society figure, physicist, inventor, amateur, dilettante... Loomis knew everyone. He was the ultimate insider. (page xv)

“Mr. Loomis is the twentieth century Benjamin Franklin.” (106)

The book* author, Jennet Conant, James Conant’s great-grand-daughter, had unrestricted access to published papers, as well as unpublished letters and documents, and conducted interviews with many family members, friends and colleagues of the scientists.

* Published 2002 by Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-87287-0, 330 pages

Footnote:

“Alfred Loomis’ contributions to radar and to the (Manhattan Project) have gone largely uncelebrated, an anonymity...which hardly does him justice. He was the last of the great amateurs of science. He was distinguished by a wide-ranging mind and the ability to learn about a completely new field in a remarkably short time.”
– – Luis W. Alvarez (pp. 78-79) “Alvarez–Adventures of a physicist”, 1987, 292 pages, ISBN 0-465-00116-5

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