

Obituaries

ALFRED DUPONT CHANDLER, JR.

The fields of business and economic history, the history of technology, and business policy lost a magisterial figure when Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., passed away on May 9, 2007. He was born in Guyencourt, Delaware, on September 15, 1918; raised in Buenos Aires, Philadelphia, and Wilmington; and educated at Phillips Exeter Academy, the University of North Carolina, and Harvard University. Chandler spent his long and extraordinarily productive career studying the emergence and impact of managerial capitalism in the modern world. He was elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in April 1978. At the time of his death, his list of publications included more than twenty books, dozens of essays, articles, and book reviews, and significant editorial contributions to *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* and *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*.

Alfred Chandler's first book defined his subsequent scholarly career as a student of large corporate organizations. Entitled *Henry Varnum Poor: Business Editor, Analyst and Reformer* (Harvard University Press, 1956), it focused on the life of his great-grandfather, whose career was closely linked to the railroad industry, the nation's first big business. His next book was *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the Industrial Enterprise* (MIT Press, 1962), a path-breaking study of General Motors, DuPont, Standard Oil, and Sears, Roebuck, and Company that established a causal relationship between the business strategies of large corporations and their organizational structures. Written during his years as a professor of history at MIT, *Strategy and*

Structure propelled Chandler's career and resulted in an offer from Johns Hopkins University's history department in 1963.

The Hopkins years proved particularly productive. There Chandler trained his first cohort of graduate students—among them Harold Livesay, Glenn Porter, and Mary Yeager. While at Hopkins he collaborated with Stephen Salsbury to produce *Pierre S. du Pont and the Making of the Modern Corporation* (Harper & Row, 1971). He also began work on his most famous book, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Harvard University Press, 1977), a broad ranging study that advanced the compelling thesis that 'in many sectors of the economy, the visible hand of management had replaced what Adam Smith referred to as "the invisible hand" of market forces.'

The Visible Hand subsequently won the Pulitzer and Bancroft prizes and established Chandler as the world's preeminent historian of business and the economy. By the time the book appeared in 1977, Chandler had moved to the Harvard Business School as the Strauss Professor of Business History where he focused primarily 'on teaching and writing business history.' In 2003, speaking as the recipient of Massachusetts Historical Society's John F. Kennedy Medal ('Luck and the Shaping of a Historian's Professional Education'), he recalled that at Harvard, 'I . . . began playing my own role in the institutionalizing of business history.' By the late 1970s, Chandler's reputation had spread beyond business and economic historians to historians more generally who appreciated the telling connections he made between technological change, modern management, and the emergence of the corporate business world. Deeply influenced by his work, students and admirers began to refer to themselves proudly as 'Chandlerians.'

Alfred Chandler continued to research and elaborate upon the emergence and spread of managerial capitalism in his later years. Retiring from Harvard in 1989, he published *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Harvard University Press, 1990), an impressive comparative study of the growth of business enterprise in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, considered

by many a companion volume to *The Visible Hand* and an essential expansion of key themes elaborated in his earlier works. Two more monographs, several edited volumes, and numerous essays followed *Scale and Scope*, all of them focusing on Chandlerian themes, such as technological innovation, professional management, and the expansion of big business. At the time of his death, Professor Chandler was working on a biography of his maternal grandfather, a senior executive of the Du Pont Company.

Although warmly embraced by business educators, the business press, and the business community, Chandler considered himself first and foremost a historian. He took considerable pride in his role as a mentor and teacher—something that often gets lost in the wake of his many scholarly accomplishments. At Hopkins and Harvard, he trained a generation of business historians who went on to carve out distinguished careers for themselves. As the Strauss Professor at Harvard he also mentored numerous younger scholars in the business history and the history of technology who held Newcomen Postdoctoral Fellowships at the Harvard Business School, among them Thomas McCraw, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian in his own right, Chandler's esteemed successor as the Strauss Professor at Harvard, and co-author with him of *The Essential Alfred Chandler: Essays Toward a Historical Theory of Big Business* (1988). In a quiet understated way, Chandler took particular pleasure in advancing the careers of former students and postdocs, often recommending them for positions in the academic and museum worlds. Shortly after his death, his wife, artist Fay Martin Chandler, wrote that 'Al's students were so very important to him and . . . he was especially eloquent when he thought he could sense a match. He wanted to understand how business worked and always insisted that he was an historian. He died feeling fulfilled rather than frustrated.'

Al Chandler, to be sure, had a wonderful life. He will be missed, though the products of his fertile mind will live on in the annals of American history.

Merritt Roe Smith

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