

Robert Campbell



DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Robert Campbell grew up in Passaic, New Jersey, a city with a past similar to that of New Brunswick: “It used to be a very vital place,” he said. [5] After he graduated from Fordham University he was recruited to work at Johnson & Johnson, which became his “real first involvement with New Brunswick,” in 1955. Campbell then left to serve for three years in the Air Force, returning to New Brunswick in 1959. [5] He received his MBA from Rutgers in 1962. [4] Campbell spent his entire career with Johnson & Johnson, beginning as an accounting trainee and eventually rising to chief financial officer and vice chairman of the board of directors, until his retirement in 1995. [6]

Though Campbell was not in a “position [at Johnson & Johnson] of making decisions whether to stay in New Brunswick or not,” he recalled what he had heard. [8] Johnson & Johnson had affiliates in the area surrounding New Brunswick; at that time many companies were relocating. “But when J&J decided it wanted to stay in New Brunswick,” Campbell said, “that didn’t come without wanting some things from the State.” One such thing was the desire to extend Route 18 across the Raritan River. [8] Previously, Route 18 ended abruptly on Albany Street, creating poor traffic conditions. “J&J felt that if it was going to stay, there had to be some *quid pro quo* here, and worked with the State in getting the extension of Route 18,” he said. [8]

He realized that the decision of Johnson & Johnson to build its headquarters in New Brunswick was really happening when Stan Anderson, the vice president of finance, asked him to verify that bills from a Philadelphia law firm were legitimate; those bills were then used to purchase properties in the surrounding area to allow for expansion. [9] Much of Campbell’s role in the 1970s was “being the financial guy who found the money here and there” for redevelopment initiatives. [9] During this time he worked closely with John Heldrich, “the mover, the shaker, the point person on what happened here.” [9]

Campbell illustrated the benefits of having Johnson & Johnson involved in the redevelopment process with an example of when he traveled to Boston to work out the financing for 300 George Street. Despite the tenuous state of New Brunswick, it was not hard to receive financing because “people knew Johnson & Johnson,” he said. [10] “One of the things that a lot of cities that would like to redevelop didn’t have is a J&J,” he added. [10]

Johnson & Johnson was also able to hire I. M. Pei to develop its new corporate campus. Campbell said that Pei identified the three cornerstones to developing New Brunswick: Johnson & Johnson, the Hyatt Hotel, and the Cultural Center area. [10] When Johnson & Johnson approached the Hyatt family about its concept for a hotel, “They said, ‘Well, fine. But we don't really want to build a hotel here; we'll manage it if you want to build it.’” [11] The City was then able to use an Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) to help finance the construction, in addition to money from Johnson & Johnson and loans from Prudential. “Over the years, the City asked to pull its money out so that it could then use that in other areas of redevelopment,” Campbell said. The loan with Prudential was repaid, and then Johnson & Johnson “ended up owning the hotel.” [12] The hotel, Campbell explained, was more than a financial investment; it was a step to move development across Albany Street, which he termed the “DMZ.” [12]

Campbell reflected upon the Johnson & Johnson Credo, “a philosophy that has permeated the company.” [13] He said that “J&J always not only allowed, but really encouraged, its people to get involved with the communities.” [14]

He explained that retail suffered in New Brunswick as shopping centers were built in the 1950s and that “little by little, people just started migrating to the malls and then started migrating to the towns around the malls, and so—the cities were kind of barren.” [15] He summed up how that process affected New Brunswick: “In the 1960s here, you could shoot a cannon down the street at night here and not hit anyone.” [15] Since then, “There was an attempt here to start resurrecting the city.” [15] Campbell described the process: “If you don't keep moving forward, you're going to regress.” [16] During this, subsequent generations of Johnson & Johnson management—without the local and historical connection to New Brunswick—have questioned the amount of money the company has invested in the city. [16] Still, Rutgers has expanded its geography into downtown New Brunswick, and the “void” between Livingston Avenue and Rutgers' Douglass campus has been filling in. [17]

Another aspect of growth was that of the hospitals in New Brunswick. Campbell noted that “The whole healthcare system played a very important role because it gave a lot of people—not necessarily living in New Brunswick—a reason to keep coming into town.” [18] He spoke about the growth of UMDNJ and the proposal to merge Robert Wood Johnson Hospital and Saint Peter's Hospital, an idea vetoed by the Pope. [19] Campbell also acknowledged that the healthcare industry in New Brunswick “played an important role from the point of view of jobs.” [19] Campbell, a past chairman of the Cancer Institute of New Jersey, said that Johnson & Johnson “has always been very much involved with the hospitals, not only from a financial point of view but from a time and talent point of view. Many J&J executives have been on the boards of the hospitals” and have held leadership positions. [20] This cooperation, Campbell noted, “wasn't something that suddenly started as part of the revitalization.” [21] Robert Wood Johnson II, also known as the General, started the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which was originally called

“The New Brunswick Foundation.” [21] Campbell explained that 3 percent of donations disbursed by the foundation is reserved for New Brunswick and the Greater New Brunswick Area. [34] The foundation gives out \$300 million to \$400 million per year, which translates to \$9 million to \$12 million per year allocated to New Brunswick or surrounding areas. [35] Though Campbell could not speak of any dealings with the State government, he acknowledged the involvement of local politicians and noted that the mayors “deserve a lot of credit for taking leadership roles.” [21]

When asked about the future of redevelopment in New Brunswick, Campbell responded: “I don’t think it’s a process that ends.” [22] He added that “There are still a lot of problems out there,” albeit different ones from when the project began. [22] These include social services that address the growing Latino population, housing in residential neighborhoods, and attracting better retail. [22] About changes in the redevelopment process, Campbell noted, “The J&J financial role in the projects, I think, has lessened.” [23] The presence of Johnson & Johnson “still gives lenders a certain degree of confidence that you have x-thousands of people coming in here,” but it is less crucial; the New Brunswick Development Corporation (Devco) is now able to find financing on its own, and some developers “are even willing to finance themselves to do what they want to do.” [23] He added that Johnson & Johnson leasing office space is “more prevalent than dollars.” [23]

“I would have liked it if we could have gotten better cooperation with the hospitals, for example,” Campbell said. However, the result “wasn’t for the lack of trying. People really did work on it; the fact that it failed wasn’t something that we overlooked.” [25] Campbell then reflected on the Hiram Market area, near where the Johnson & Johnson headquarters is now. While some have depicted the neighborhood as “a nice old section,” Campbell argued that “It was a terrible section. It had run-down buildings and small businesses that actually relocated into better places than where they were.” [26] He concluded that he sympathized with the idea that historic areas should be preserved.

Campbell spoke highly of the investments of Johnson & Johnson in New Brunswick. He said that their investments are a “benefit to the community, but also a return to J&J.” [28] About the transferability of the redevelopment process to other cities, Campbell thought it would be difficult given that “other urban areas don’t necessarily have a corporation whose headquarters is in that town” and that New Brunswick has Rutgers University. The city is a manageable size: “You could stand up in the J&J tower and kind of look at the various edges of New Brunswick.” [29] There was a “solid political structure” with a focus, and “they wanted to cooperate and work with it.” [30] Another factor was that leaders lived in New Brunswick and the surrounding area, which helped create a connection to the city. [31]

KEY QUOTATIONS

[Quotations have been edited for grammar and alphabetized by topic]

Healthcare in New Brunswick

The whole healthcare system played a very important role because it gave a lot of people—not necessarily living in New Brunswick—a reason to keep coming into town. And J&J was always involved with the hospitals—Saint Peter’s and Middlesex, which became Robert Wood Johnson. [18] So, it played an important role. It also played an important role from the point of view of jobs. I mean, healthcare is a huge job producer, at all levels, highest to start-up positions; it’s been a great mover—and again, a multiplier, as I mentioned about the theater. [19-20]

Hiram Market

I’ve read articles over the years in which people who were activists talked about where J&J is now and what a nice old section it was. Well, the fact is, it was a terrible section. It had run-down buildings and small businesses that actually relocated into much better places than where they were. I don’t think there were any permanent people living there to speak of. People like their romance sometimes, if there was a bohemian neighborhood or something, but it wasn’t. So, things like that come up, and I’m sure people honestly feel that that shouldn’t have happened, or that in making way for some of the buildings some historic areas were taken down. I sympathize with that. Where we can save those things as part of the structure, we should. [26]

Hyatt Hotel

We weren’t really looking at it as a financial-return kind of thing. But at the same time, we built it with the idea that J&J could use it. So there were meeting rooms and such, and the space that we had over there we didn’t necessarily have to have when we built the tower and things here. It turned out to be, obviously, a very significant move in the city. It became a social setting as well as for business use. It became a place where people in New Brunswick could have affairs. You know, whether it was galas of hospitals and what have you, they said it was important that it moved something across the street, and you didn’t have the DMZ. Albany Street was the DMZ. [12]

I. M. Pei

We brought in I. M. Pei in terms of developing the J&J campus itself. His concept was “A park in the city and a company in the park,” I think his words were at the time. And he identified what he thought were the three cornerstones in terms of developing New Brunswick. One was Johnson & Johnson. Then he said we really had to have something across the street—Albany Street couldn’t be the defining line between New Brunswick and J&J and Rutgers. It had to move, move over. So the concept of the hotel came up—the Hyatt Hotel. And then the third leg of the stool, so to speak, was the Cultural Center area—the redevelopment of that, which gave you a foothold further down into town—and, of course, the concept being the multiplier effect of the theater district, bringing people into the restaurants. There had been some pioneers in terms of restaurants and things like that, even before the area across the way was cleared. [10-11]

Johnson & Johnson

One of the things that a lot of cities that would like to redevelop didn't have is a J&J. I mean, once we had made the commitment to be here, the financial resources were there, and so that obviously helped a lot in terms of anybody you spoke to about it. [10]

I worked closely with John Heldrich, who was really the mover, the shaker, the point person on what happened here in New Brunswick. And so John would have an idea or a discussion with somebody and come in, and we would work out how to do that from a financial point of view. [9]

Momentum (in Redevelopment Process)

It's one of those things: If you don't keep moving forward, you're going to regress; it doesn't stay the same. [16]

Political Stability in New Brunswick

You had a solid political structure here. I mean, politics is politics, but they [the City] did have a focus, and they wanted to cooperate and work with it—whereas, if you go to Camden, I think the last six mayors have been in prison. [30]

Retail

A lot was going on in terms of the retail stores. And one of the reasons for the town going downhill, which is the same in Passaic or Paterson or anywhere, is that you had the malls that sprung up there in the 1950s, and little by little, people just started migrating to the malls and then started migrating to the towns around the malls—and so, the cities were kind of barren. In the 1960s here, you could shoot a cannon down the street at night here and not hit anyone—it was closed-up stores and what have you. [15]

Route 18 Expansion

There were the pilings in the river for the John Lynch Bridge, but no bridge; J&J felt that if it was going to stay, there had to be some quid pro quo here, and worked with the State in getting the extension of Route 18 and things of that type. [8]

Transferability

Not easy. You start with the fact that other urban areas don't necessarily have a corporation whose headquarters is in that town—that has a Credo philosophy—and is doing well enough in its own businesses to be able to partake; and then you also have Rutgers, which is a huge influence in many ways people don't even know about. So, you start off with a couple of benefits that a lot of towns don't have. It's also manageable in size. I mean, you could stand up in the J&J tower and kind of look at the various edges of New Brunswick, so to speak, whereas if you stand up in the Prudential Building in Newark, it's all over the place. [29-30]