

John F. Queeny

Founder, Monsanto



Six years of public schooling was the extent of John Francis Queeny's formal education. Born in Chicago, Illinois in 1859, John Francis, the eldest of five children, learned the value of hard work from his parents.

The Queeny family was doing well in Chicago until 1871 – the year of the Great Chicago Fire. As a twelve year-old boy, John Francis simply could not afford the luxury of continuing his education. After several months of searching for a job in the fire-ravaged city of Chicago, he entered the chemical business as an office boy with the drug firm of Tolman and King earning \$2.50 per week. John Francis quickly advanced to become a delivery boy. Years later, his employer recalled, “He wore out more wagon wheels than any boy I ever had.” Mr. Queeny continued to work up the ranks and in 1891 came to St. Louis as an employee of the Meyer Brothers Drug Company. It was shortly after this that Mr. Queeny married Miss Olga Monsanto. On November 30, 1901, Monsanto Chemical Works was incorporated with \$5,000.

While with Meyer, Mr. Queeny conceived the idea of manufacturing saccharin in St. Louis. Saccharin, a sweetening chemical, was then a German monopoly. The Monsanto Company used saccharin as its chief product and expanded into the general manufacture of fine chemicals, and eventually established plants throughout the United States. The company grew rapidly during World War I, when saccharin was widely used instead of sugar.

John Francis Queeny was extremely active in the St. Louis community. He was a director of the Manufacturers' and Merchants' Association and the Lafayette-South Side Bank & Trust Company. He was also a founder and director of the Business Men's Association of South St. Louis and a member of the Missouri Historical Society.