

Do You Know?

Moistened baking soda will remove tea and coffee *stains* on china cups.

The export of American *medicinals* is a rapidly growing trade.

Raw oatmeal added to drinking *water* gives a distinctive taste and is said to prevent cramps.

A hundred million *visitors* have entered the New York zoo since its opening 48 years ago.

A new *pipe-smoking* champion kept a single bowlfull of tobacco alive for nearly 88 minutes by taking "frugal whiffs."

Belgium's *sand dunes*, which stretch along the coast from the Netherlands to France, cover an area about 15 square miles in extent.

The search for a substitute for *rubber* was begun by the English physicist, Michael Faraday, as early as 1826, it is said.

Ammonia gas is applied to soil as a nitrogen *fertilizer* from tractor-mounted tanks through nozzles five inches below the surface that follow cultivator plows.

Approximately 4% of *Belgium* is land reclaimed from the sea; about 40% of its total area has an elevation less than 300 feet above sea level.

American steel *scrap* salvaged in Europe is sold only for return to the United States; there is a shortage of scrap in the domestic steel industry.

Federal financial aid to the states for *road construction* is now 30 years old, but advisory aid has been available since 1893, when the old Office of Road Inquiry was established.

Entertainers mystify audiences by talking with helium-filled lungs; this *gas* has a density one-seventh that of air and it raises the resonance frequencies of the mouth to change the voice to a comedy falsetto.

CIVIL ENGINEERING

Buyers Delay Construction

Resistance to prices is holding up the building of plants and facilities important to production and manufacturing. Different viewpoints presented.

➤ **READY-TO-GO** construction projects, totaling some \$10,000,000,000, are being delayed by buyers' resistance to other commodity and service prices, the American Society of Civil Engineers was told in Duluth, Minn., by Forrest W. Parrott, Sioux City, Iowa, who is president of the Associated General Contractors of America.

The construction projects referred to include the enlargement of present factories and the building of new industrial plants, also many other types of facilities that play a part in America's production, transportation and manufacturing programs.

In addition to the \$10,000,000,000 worth of construction now in blue-print form, another \$40,000,000,000 worth is in other stages of planning, he said. Construction costs may decline gradually to what can be considered new normal levels, but "they cannot return to levels prevailing before the war unless the nation suffers an economic catastrophe."

The public should not be led to believe that there will be quick and drastic reductions in construction costs, he declared. The present "increase above prewar costs is about the same as the general average for most other services and commodities."

Science News Letter, July 26, 1947

Cost Reduction Essential

A somewhat different viewpoint was presented to the engineers by A. O. Babb of the U. S. Reclamation Service. Construction costs, he said, must be reduced to meet conditions under which "contractors allegedly are pricing themselves out of a juicy market, and owners and government engineers face costs that exceed the economic return of projects, or the unwillingness of the taxpayer to pay."

"If the construction industry, as a group, is to have any effect on our economy . . . it must, through cost analysis and control, keep the slope of the construction cost index just a little better than the others. Contractors today are not competing with each other

for jobs nearly as much as they are competing for dollars with other industries."

Science News Letter, July 26, 1947

Research May Lower Costs

A building industry research program, seeking technological methods to increase efficiency and lower costs, was detailed by J. C. Stevens of Portland, Ore. "Improved methods and materials offer an effective answer to the charge . . . that the construction industry is pricing itself out of the market."

Steps have been taken to organize a national building research advisory board, under the National Academy of Sciences. Dr. Frank B. Jewett, ex-president of the Academy, has agreed to serve as its chairman. The board would collect available information relating to building construction, evaluate it without bias, and circulate it to builders and others interested.

Science News Letter, July 26, 1947

CHEMISTRY

Process Makes Plastic From Bituminous Coal

➤ A **GROUP** of British inventors under the leadership of Donald Hugh Bangham of London have developed a process for making molded plastic articles simply by applying high pressure to powdered bituminous coal, at moderate temperatures.

The preferred temperature is about 345 degrees Centigrade, which is intermediate between the lower "tarry-softening" and the higher coking temperatures. Preferred molding pressures range between 4,500 and 6,700 pounds per square inch. Various fillers may be included if desired.

The product is glossy black, glassy in texture, does not make black streaks when rubbed on paper. It can be used for electric insulators, containers for corrosive chemicals, etc.

Rights in the patent, No. 2,424,012, are assigned to C. D. Patents, Ltd., of London.

Science News Letter, July 26, 1947