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## **A Phoenix Rises from the Ashes: Birth of the International Salt Company Following the Demise of the National Salt Company Monopoly**

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### **Abstract**

Explosive growth of evaporated salt production during the 1880s and 1890s in the U.S., particularly in New York State, resulted in ferocious competition, over-production, depressed prices and lost profits. In March 1898, the National Salt Company of West Virginia was organized to take control of more than half the salt production in New York State with the intention to stabilize prices. The consolidation effort was soon thereafter expanded to Michigan, Kansas, Ohio and Texas by formation of the National Salt Company of New Jersey. By mid-1900, the National Salt Company of New Jersey had control over about 67% of the evaporated salt produced in the U.S.

Although initially successful in raising salt prices for about a year, new start-ups of independent salt plants increased competition once again. The National Salt Company also labored under burdensome trade agreements made with independent producers. Ultimately, the increase in competition and crippling trade agreements led again to over-production of evaporated salt and price declines, driving the National Salt Company into receivership in 1902.

The early success of the National Salt Company caught the attention of Edward L. Fuller of Scranton, Pennsylvania, who was, at the time, prominent in the rock salt branch of the industry. Fuller sought to acquire National Salt Company's evaporation plants, four rock salt mines under control of the Retsof Mining Company, and other salt plants in the U.S., Puerto Rico and Great Britain. To that end, the International Salt Company of New Jersey was incorporated on August 22, 1901. The new company, led by Fuller, after considerable litigation, was ultimately able to acquire the assets of the failing National Salt Company at a very low price.

In the early years, International Salt maintained East and West divisions. The East was run by Fuller from Scranton headquarters. In January 1909, E. L. Fuller died and was succeeded as company president by his son, Mortimer B. Fuller. International West was run by Joy Morton with headquarters in Chicago. The remarkable duo of powerful families operated together until about 1910, when Morton acquired the assets of International Salt Company of Illinois and became, for a time, a "cooperative competitor." The new Joy Morton & Co. still served as a sales agent for International Salt Company's rock salt in the West.

International Salt Company struggled for the first 15 years or so of its existence but finally became steadily profitable by about 1915. The company's turn to profitability was coincident with reorganization (streamlining) and increased domestic salt demand brought about by the onset of World War I.

As of 1920, International Salt was operating its evaporative salt plants at Ludlowville and Watkins Glen, New York as well as its rock salt mines at Retsof, New York, Avery Island, Louisiana, and at Detroit, Michigan.

International Salt Company would remain a powerhouse in the American salt industry through 1968 at which time a majority interest in the company was acquired by Akzo.

**Key words:** International Salt Company, National Salt Company, Retsof Mining Company, Joy Morton, Edward L. Fuller, Archibald S. White, Mortimer B. Fuller, Monopoly, Combination, Trust