PLANT DEDICATED — Gov. McKeithen talks with top-ranking officials of the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corp., at Tuesday’s dedication of Olin’s new $19 million anhydrous ammonia plant in the Lake Charles industrial complex. With the governor are Olin President Gordon Grand, center, and Charles Smith, Olin executive vice president, right. — AP wirephoto

New Olin Ammonia Plant
Opened at Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — The world’s largest ammonia plant—a $19 million giant—was officially started up Tuesday by Olin Mathieson Chemical Corp., marking the beginning of a new era in ammonia production. The plant is part of Olin’s $45 million expansion in agricultural products.

More than 2,000 persons heard Gov. McKeithen, principal speaker at the dedication ceremonies, hail the start-up as a giant step forward for the state and for Olin.

C. W. Smith, executive vice president of the chemicals group, praised Gov. McKeithen for building a climate attractive to business. He said that this climate was responsible for the economic growth enjoyed by the state in recent years.

W. B. Copeland, vice president and general manager of the agricultural division, described the plant as an example of the ability of free enterprise to gear up to feed a hungry world. Ammonia is a major ingredient of fertilizer.

The plant is capable of producing 1,400 tons a day of ammonia—roughly a ton a minute. It shares a site with other Olin facilities that produce soda ash, caustic soda, sodium nitrate, nitric acid, hydrazine, and about 280 tons of ammonia a day.

A highlight of the dedication was a giant barbecue prepared by Walter Jetton, chef who has handled President Johnson’s barbecue. — AP wirephoto

The new era in ammonia production—marking the end of an industry made up mainly of small plants and the beginning of one in which giant facilities will be the rule—was heralded in an announcement in January 1964 that Olin would construct the Lake Charles plant. Similar announcements by other companies followed. Currently a number of new installations are in either construction or planning stages. Many of these will be able to produce 1,000 tons a day or more.

Adjacent to the new Olin ammonia plant and still under construction is a urea plant with a capacity of 150,000 tons a year. It will begin operations early next year. The urea to be made will be a nitrogen fertilizer produced principally from ammonia. It also is used as a high-protein cattle feed and has a number of industrial uses.

Ammonia is composed of one part nitrogen and three parts hydrogen, obtained from natural gas, steam and air. It has a number of industrial uses in addition to its being an ingredient of fertilizer. For example, it is used for pharmaceuticals, missile fuels and plastics. It is used also as a building block for organic and inorganic chemicals.

The new plant offers no air or water pollution problems. Also, it produces a product of exceptional purity. Unlike plants using reciprocating compressors, the plant will produce oil-free ammonia. Oil contamination of ammonia has proved a problem in the past.

Olin also is one of the first companies to use centrifugal compressors exclusively rather than reciprocating compressors. These make possible relatively low-pressure synthesis that significantly reduce construction costs per ton of ammonia in large plants. Labor and services costs also are lower than in the smaller units that have been the standard up to this time.

Olin’s new ammonia plant was designed and built by the Bechtel Corp. of San Francisco. The urea plant was designed and is being built by Arthur G. McKee & Co. of Cleveland and utilizes a process licensed to Olin by Stamicarbon, NV, a subsidiary of Dutch States Mines, with headquarters in Geleen, The Netherlands.

Natural gas for the process is being supplied by Continental Oil Co.