

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

DEXTER F. BAKER

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

in

Naples, Florida

on

27 January 1995

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Oral History Program
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Mr. Dexter D. Baker

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Oral History Program
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DEXTER F. BAKER

1927 Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on 16 April

Education

1950 B.S., mechanical engineering, Lehigh University
1957 M.B.A., Lehigh University

Professional Experience

1945-1946 Seaman First Class, U.S. Navy

1950-1952 Corps Engineer, Private First Class, U.S. Army

Air Products and Chemicals, Inc.

1952-1956 Sales Engineer
1956-1957 General Sales Manager, Process Equipment Division
1957-1964 Managing Director, Air Products Limited
1964-1967 Chief Executive of Air Products Operations in Europe
1964- Board of Directors
1967-1978 Executive Vice President
1978-1986 President
1986-1992 Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
1990-1992 Chairman of the Board, President
1992-1998 Chairman, Executive Committee, Board of Directors

Honors

1991 Chemical Industry Award, Society of Chemical Industry

ABSTRACT

Dexter Baker begins the interview by discussing his childhood and early education in the suburbs of Philadelphia. After graduating from Upper Darby High in 1945, Baker was drafted into the navy and admitted to the naval academy prep. program. Before he completed the program, however, World War II ended and Baker was discharged. He then enrolled at Lehigh University, where he studied mechanical engineering and developed an interest in turbines. After graduating in 1950, Baker took a job with Allis-Chalmers, but was soon drafted into the army and served in the Korean War. While in the army, Baker was appointed to the engineering research and development laboratories, where he worked on the development of high-speed, small-size gas turbine engines. After he had completed his two years in the army, Baker accepted a position with Air Products and Chemicals in Emmaus, Pennsylvania. He worked in sales while attending night school at Lehigh to get his MBA. He was soon sent to England to begin an Air Products division in Europe. A decade later, Baker returned to the United States and completed his climb up the corporate ladder, becoming president of Air Products in 1978 and Chairman of the Board in 1986.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is currently a professor at Lehigh University. He has served as Professor of Chemistry Emeritus at Wilkes University, where he was a faculty member from 1959 to 1990. He served there as chemistry department chair from 1970 to 1986 and environmental science department chair from 1987 to 1990. He was chair of the American Chemical Society's Division of the History of Chemistry in 1986, received the Division's outstanding paper award in 1989, and presented more than twenty-five papers before the Division at national meetings of the Society. He has written for the American Chemical Society News Service, and he has been on the advisory committee of the Society's National Historic Chemical Landmarks committee since its inception in 1992. He developed the oral history program of the Chemical Heritage Foundation beginning in 1985, and was the Foundation's Director of Oral History from 1990 to 1995.

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NOTES

1. Andrew J. Butrica, *Out of Thin Air: A History of Air Products and Chemicals, Inc., 1940-1990* (New York: Praeger, 1990).
2. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, 1962).

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