

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

FRED BASOLO

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

at

Northwestern University

on

1 March 1991

(With Subsequent Additions and Corrections)

THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION  
Oral History Program

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## FRED BASOLO

1920 Born in Coello, Illinois on 11 February

### Education

1940 B.Ed., Southern Illinois University  
1942 M.S., inorganic chemistry, University of Illinois  
1943 Ph.D., inorganic chemistry, University of Illinois  
(Mentor: John C. Bailar, Jr.)

### Professional Experience

1943-1946 Research chemist, Rohm and Haas  
Northwestern University, chemistry department  
1946-1948 Instructor  
1948-1953 Assistant Professor  
1953-1959 Associate Professor  
1059-1980 Professor  
1969-1972 Chairman of the Department  
1980-1990 Charles E. and Emma H. Morrison Professor  
1990- Emeritus Morrison Professor

### Honors

1954-1955 Guggenheim Fellow (University of Copenhagen)  
1961-1962 Senior NSF Fellow (University of Rome)  
1964 Award for Research in Inorganic Chemistry, American  
Chemical Society  
1971 North Regional Section Citation of Excellence,  
American Chemical Society  
1972 John C. Bailar, Jr. Medal, University of Illinois  
(first recipient)  
1974 Alumni Achievement Award, Southern Illinois  
University  
1975 Award for Distinguished Service in Inorganic  
Chemistry, American Chemical Society  
1976 Francis Patrick Dwyer Medal, University of New South  
Wales, Australia  
1977 Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of  
Science  
1977 Honorary Member, Phi Lambda Upsilon  
1979 Fellow, Japanese Society for the Promotion of  
Science  
1979 Member, National Academy of Sciences  
1981 Honorary Member, Italian Chemical Society  
1981 James Flack Norris Award for Outstanding Achievement  
in the Teaching of Chemistry, American Chemical  
Society, Northeastern Section

1982 Illinois House of Representatives Resolution No. 686  
Honoring Fred Basolo as a Resident of Illinois

1983 President, American Chemical Society

1983 Oesper Memorial Award, American Chemical  
Society, Cincinnati Section

1983 Corresponding Member, Chemical Society of Peru

1983 Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences

1985 Honorary Professor, Lanzhou University, People's  
Republic of China

1984 Doctor of Science (Honorary), University of  
Southern Illinois

1987 Foreign Member, Academia Nazionale dei Lincei  
(National Academy of Science), Italy

1988 Laurea Honoris Causa, University of Turin

1988 IX Century Medal, Bologna University

1988 Award for Research in Inorganic Chemistry, Società  
Chimica d'Italia

1988 Honorary Professor, Zhongshan University, People's  
Republic of China

1990 Harry and Carol Mosher Award, American Chemical  
Society, Santa Clara Valley Section

1991 Padova University Medal

1991 Distincion Bicentenario Medal, University of  
Los Andes in Merida

1991 Chinese Chemical Society Medal

1992 Chemical Pioneer Award, American Institute of  
Chemists

1992 Monie A. Ferst Award, Sigma Xi

1992 Humboldt Senior U.S. Scientist Award

1993 Gold Medal Award, American Institute of Chemists

## ABSTRACT

Fred Basolo begins this interview by discussing his childhood in Coello, Illinois, and his elementary and high school education. He attended Southern Illinois University where he studied to be a chemistry teacher but his instructors encouraged him to attend graduate school in chemistry. At University of Illinois, he studied inorganic chemistry with John Bailar. After receiving his Ph.D., he worked at Rohm and Haas in Philadelphia for three years. He decided to return to academia and accepted a position as professor of Chemistry at Northwestern University. His research interests have included kinetics and mechanisms, and metal carbonyls. Basolo describes the connections he made with Italian scientists and his American Chemical Society presidency and concludes by offering his opinion of how general and inorganic chemistry courses should be taught.

## INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning, Assistant Director for Oral History at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, holds the B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in chemistry. He was a member of the chemistry faculty at Wilkes University from 1959 until 1990, where he served as chair of the Chemistry Department for sixteen years, and chair of the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department for three years. He was Chair of the Division of the History of Chemistry of the American Chemical Society in 1986, and has been associated with the development and management of the Foundations's oral history program since 1985.

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- 7 University of Illinois  
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- 13 Rohm and Haas  
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- 16 Northwestern University  
Small number of graduate students in chemistry department. Colleagues. Gets first graduate student. Works on solution kinetics and mechanisms. Collaboration with Ralph Pearson. Disagreement with Christopher Ingold.
- 23 Guggenheim Fellowship in Copenhagen  
Introduced to crystal field theory. Attends international conference on coordination chemistry and meets Walter Hieber. Begins work with metal carbonyls. Collaborates with Arthur Adamson.
- 29 Return to Northwestern  
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