

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

ORLANDO ALOYSIUS BATTISTA

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

at

Fort Worth, Texas

on

23 February 1992

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY  
Oral History Program

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Orlando Aloysius Battista

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ORLANDO ALOYSIUS BATTISTA

1917 Born in Cornwall, Ontario, Canada on 20 June

Education

1940 B. Sc., chemistry, First Class Honors, McGill University

Professional Experience

1940-1963 American Viscose Corporation  
Research chemist  
Senior research chemist  
Manager, Corporate Applied Research

1961-1963 Assistant Director, Corporate Research

1963-1970 Assistant Director, Central Research, FMC Corporation

1971-1974 Vice President, Science and Technology, Avicon, Inc

1974- Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer,  
Research Services Corporation

1974- Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer, The  
O. A. Battista Research Institute

1975-1976 Adjunct Professor of Chemistry and Director, Center  
for Microcrystal Polymer Science, University of  
Texas, Arlington

1976- Founder and President, World Olympiads of Knowledge

1977-1979 President, American Institute of Chemists

1984- President and Chief Executive Officer, Fastcrete  
Corporation

1985- Director, Avacare, Incorporated

1986- Chairman, President, and Founder, Knowledge, Inc.

1987- Director, Carrington Laboratories

Honors

1955 Doctor of Science, Honors Causa, St. Vincent College

1955 Fellow, National Association of Science Writers

1965 Honor Scroll Award, New Jersey Chapter, American  
Institute of Chemists

1967 Honor Scroll Award, Philadelphia Chapter, American  
Institute of Chemists

1969 Chemical Pioneer Award, American Institute of Chemists

1969 Fellow, New York Academy of Sciences

1971 Golden Plate Award, American Academy of Achievement

1972 Boss of the Year, National Secretaries Association

1973 James T. Grady Award, American Chemical Society

1977-1979 President and Chief Executive Officer, American  
Institute of Chemists

1981 Lifetime Fellow, National Association of Science Writers

1983 Creative Invention Medal, American Chemical Society  
1984 Special Mention, Rolex Awards for Enterprise  
1985 Anselme Payen Medal, American Chemical Society  
1985 Doctor of Science, Honors Causa, Clarkson University  
1986 Napoleon Hill Gold Medal for Creative Achievement  
1987 Applied Polymer Science Medal, American Chemical Society

## ABSTRACT

O. A. Battista begins the interview by describing his childhood in Cornwall, Canada, as one of eight siblings born to a poor, uneducated laborer and a housewife. Battista proudly details his family's hard-working nature and the many professional accomplishments of his brothers, who include a chemist and company president and a world-renowned neurosurgeon. Attending McGill University along with his younger brother, Battista earned a B.S. in chemistry while supporting his household by writing epigrams for the Saturday Evening Post. Upon graduation Battista obtained a research chemist position at American Viscose Corporation, which was owned by Courtaulds, Canada, where his brother was well established and later became president. He worked on the rubber program and other war-related projects until the end of the war, when he married Helen Keffer and began inventing successful commercial products. Later, his work at American Viscose and its predecessor FMC earned him over sixty-five patents, including patents on viscose molding, novel yarn, pure cellulose, and microcrystalline collagen. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Battista wrote and published several works, including technical scientific texts, popular magazine articles on chemistry, a "human interest" chemistry text, an examination of the potential of psychopharmaceuticals, and several popular non-scientific collections. In the early 1960s, Battista realized the medical applications of microcrystalline collagen and obtained pharmaceutical backing from Alcon to license the substance as the patented hemostat Avitene. American Viscose and Alcon formed Avicon, Inc. in Fort Worth, Texas, and appointed Battista vice president for science and technology; Avicon obtained FDA approval for Avitene Hemostat, which today is used worldwide in hospital operating rooms. In 1974 Battista took early retirement from Avicon to start his own research institute and promote an Olympiad of Science that encourages and facilitates new product innovations. His institute created over fifty-five new products and publishes of Knowledge Magazine.

## INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is 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 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. He currently writes for the American Chemical Society News Service.

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## NOTES

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18. For a complete list of these articles, see Chemical Heritage Foundation oral history research file # 0103.
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