

CENTER FOR HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

ARNOLD O. BECKMAN

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Jeffrey L. Sturchio and Arnold Thackray

at the

University of Pennsylvania

on

23 April 1985

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

Oral History Program

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Arnold O. Beckman

Arnold O. Beckman

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ARNOLD O. BECKMAN

1900 Born in Cullom, Illinois, 10 April

Education

1922 B.S., chemical engineering, University of Illinois  
1923 M.S., physical chemistry, University of Illinois  
1928 Ph.D., photochemistry, California Institute of  
Technology

Professional Experience

1924-1926 Research Engineer, Bell Telephone Laboratories  
1926-1929 Instructor, California Institute of Technology  
1929-1940 Assistant Professor, California Institute of  
Technology  
1934 Vice President, National Inking Appliance Company  
1937-1939 Vice President, National Technical Laboratories  
1939-1940 President, National Technical Laboratories  
1944-1958 President, Helipot Corporation  
1946-1958 President, Arnold O. Beckman, Inc.  
1940-1965 President, Beckman Instruments, Inc.  
1965- Chairman of the Board, Beckman Instruments, Inc.

Honors

1960 Illinois Achievement Award, University of Illinois  
1964-1974 Chairman, Board of Trustees, California Institute  
of Technology  
1965 Honorary Sc.D. degree, Chapman College  
1969 Honorary LL.D. degree, University of California at  
Riverside  
1969 Honorary LL.D. degree, Loyola University in  
California  
1974 Scientific Apparatus Makers Association Award  
1977 Honorary LL.D. degree, Pepperdine University  
1977 Honorary Sc.D. degree, Whittier College  
1977 Arnold O. Beckman Conference in Clinical Chemistry,  
established by American Association for Clinical  
Chemistry  
1980 Arnold O. Beckman Professorship of Chemistry,  
established by California Institute of Technology  
1981 Hoover Medal, American Association of Engineering  
Societies  
1981 Life Achievement Award, Instrument Society of  
America  
1982 Diploma of Honor, Association of Clinical Scientists

ABSTRACT: In this interview Arnold Beckman begins with his teenage experience as an industrial chemist at a local gas works in Bloomington, Illinois and the Keystone Iron and Steel Works. This is followed by reflections on his student days at the University of Illinois, with special emphasis on some of the faculty and students. The central portion of the interview considers Beckman as a student and faculty member at Caltech and includes his early experiences with instrumentation, patents, and serving as an expert witness. The interview continues with Dr. Beckman discussing the origin of the pH meter and DU spectrophotometer, and concludes with the beginning stages of manufacturing and sales, emphasizing the principles used to build National Technical Laboratories, the company that would become Beckman Instruments.

INTERVIEWERS: Jeffrey L. Sturchio holds an A.B. in history from Princeton and a Ph.D. in the history and sociology of science from the University of Pennsylvania. He is Associate Director of the Center for History of Chemistry and Adjunct Assistant Professor of History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania.

Arnold Thackray majored in the physical sciences before turning to the history of science, receiving a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in 1966. He has held appointments at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, the Institute for Advanced Study, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is Director of the Center for History of Chemistry, and Professor of History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania, and the 1983 recipient of the Dexter Award for outstanding contributions to the history of chemistry.

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