

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 July 1985

CHF OH #0014B

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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 Dr. Arnold Beckman begins with the National Technical Laboratories in the late 1930s, and includes details on its policies and operations. Beckman continues with the change from NTL to Beckman Instruments, and emphasizes the development of spectrophotometry instrumentation during the 1940s in the central portion of the transcript. Other projects, including mass spectrometers, Geiger counters, pocket electroscopes, and especially the oxygen analyzer, are also discussed. Following World War II Beckman describes his reinvolvement with Caltech. The interview concludes with Beckman talking about air pollution work in Los Angeles, the formation of Shockley Laboratories, and the future of the instrumentation industry.

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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