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WILLIAM VON EGGERS DOERING

1917  Born in Fort Worth, Texas on 22 June

Education
1938  B.S., chemistry, Harvard University
1943  Ph.D., organic chemistry, Harvard University

Professional Experience
Columbia University
1943-1945  Instructor
1945-1948  Assistant Professor
1948-1952  Associate Professor
1947-1969  Director of Research, Hickrill Chemical Research Foundation

Yale University
1952-1956  Professor
1956-1967  Whitehead Professor
1962-1965  Director of the Division of Sciences

Council for a Livable World
1962-1973  Chairman, Board of Directors
1973-1978  President

Harvard University
1967-1968  Professor
1968-1986  Mallinckrodt Professor of Organic Chemistry
1986-  Mallinckrodt Professor of Chemistry Emeritus

Honors
1945  John Scott Medal, City of Philadelphia
1953  Pure Chemistry Award, American Chemical Society
1962  A. W. Hofmann Medal, Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker
1966  Creative Work in Synthetic Organic Chemistry, American Chemical Society
1967  William C. DeVane Medal, Yale University
1970  Theodore Williams Richards Medal, Northeastern Section, American Chemical Society
1973 Humboldt Senior Fellowship, Federal Republic of Germany
1974 D.Sc., honorary, Texas Christian University
1980 Honorary Professorship, Fudan University, Shanghai
1987 D.Nat.Sci., honoris causa, University of Karlsruhe
1989 James Flack Norris Award in Physical Organic Chemistry, Northeastern Section, American Chemical Society
1990 Robert A. Welch Award in Chemistry
ABSTRACT

William von Eggers Doering begins these interviews with a discussion of his early life and family background. His parents were both musicians, and met while they were both studying music in Leipzig. When World War I broke out, they moved to the United States, and his father became a vital statistician. His father eventually got a job teaching at Harvard University’s School of Public Health, and the family moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Doering was influenced by his teachers during his early education to pursue science. After graduating from high school, Doering attended Harvard University, where he was inspired to major in chemistry. At Harvard, he took courses with Arthur Lamb, Louis Fieser, Elmer Kohler, and Paul Bartlett. Kohler encouraged Doering to continue on to graduate school, so he earned his Ph.D. in organic chemistry at Harvard in 1943. During his years as a graduate student, he did some research with Louis Fieser on new explosives, including trinitrobenzylnitrate, as well as anti-mustard gas work with Eric Ball. After he completed his graduate work, he joined Robert B. Woodward’s team at Harvard, who was attempting to synthesize quinine. Less than a year later, Doering took an instructorship at Columbia University, but continued with the quinine project in his free time. Doering outlines his relationship with Woodward, the difficulties of the quinine work, and the impact of that research on his career. Doering spent nine years at Columbia before moving on to Yale University in 1952. While at Columbia, he helped to establish the Hickrill Chemical Research Foundation, which focused on postdoctoral research. It was there that Doering did most of his work on carbene. In the 1960s, he was asked to join the Board of Leo Szilard’s new organization, Council for a Livable World. For over fifteen years, Doering was active in lobbying for this organization. Throughout his career, Doering was also a consultant for various companies. At Yale, Doering became Director of the Division of Sciences, and began to realize that administrative duties were taking too much time from his research. He planned to go to the University of Karlsruhe, but Woodward offered him a position at Harvard. Doering concludes the interviews with a discussion of his graduate students, his colleagues, and his interactions with Fudan University in China.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is currently Visiting Research Scientist 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.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Family Background and Early Education

7 College Education

25 Quinine research

37 Teaching at Columbia University

60 Position at Yale University

64 Joining Council for a Livable World
   Invitation from Leo Szilard. Supporting political candidates opposed to use of nuclear weapons. Experience in Washington, D.C. Involvement of other scientists. Fundraising efforts.

69 Consulting Experience

73 Move to Harvard University

79 Conclusion

87 Notes

90 Index
NOTES


INDEX

A
Adams, Roger, 68
Agassi School, 3
Also sprach Zarathustra, 35
Andover [Phillips Academy], 52
Aspergillus Ustus, 46

B
Baghdad, Iraq, 72
Ball, Eric, 24
Baltimore, Maryland, 1-2
Bartlett, Paul D., 9-10, 13, 48, 53, 69
Basel, Germany, 74
Baxter, Gregory V., 12
Baylor University, 1
Medical School, 1
Baytown, Texas, 69-71
Beckman, Charlie, 63
Bedford, New York, 51
Beijing, China, 85
Beilstein, 27, 32, 52-53
Belmont Hill School, 4-6, 8, 10, 21, 23, 73
Benzidine, 57
Benzoic acid, 18
Bergmann, Werner, 61
Berson, Jerome A., 41, 55
Beverly, Massachusetts, 3
Bonnett, Raymond, 75
Brahms, Johannes, 1
Bremen, Germany, 15
Brewster, Kingman, 73
Bronx High School of Science, 41, 77
Brookhaven National Laboratory, 41, 55
Buchner acids, 69
Bundy, George, 73
Business Week, 34
Butyl bromide, 14
Butyl isobutyl, 14
C
California, University of, Berkeley, 43, 73, 77
California, University of, Los Angeles, 85
Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1-3, 5-6, 16, 58, 62, 73-74
Camphene, 50
Carbene, 58-59, 62, 79
Carbonium, 50, 54, 70, 79
Carnegie-Mellon University, 43
Carpenter, Clifford D., 38, 40, 62
Carwin Company, 72
Cassidy, Harold G., 61
Central High School, 1, 4
Chang, Frederick Chew-ming, 84
China
   Cultural Revolution, 84
   Ministry of Education, 85
   Tiananmen Square, 86
Chloroform, 59
Chromium trichloride, 63
Church, Frank, 67
Ciba-Geigy Corporation, 82
Cicero, 3
Cinchona tree, 26
Claisen condensation, 29
Closs, Gerhard, 75
Colchicine, 57
Cologne, Germany, 16
Columbia University, 28-30, 37, 39-43, 45, 47-48, 50, 52-55, 60, 62-64, 77-78, 82
   Chandler Laboratory, 30
   College of Pharmacy, 37
Conant, James B., 16, 73
Conroy, Harold, 43
Conservation Foundation, 64
Cope, Arthur, 54-55, 78
Copenhagen, Denmark, 1-2
   Tivoli Gardens, 2
Corey, E. J., 74, 76, 81
Corley, Richard S., 28-29, 33
Council for a Livable World, 46, 67, 83
Cranston, Alan, 67
Criegee, Rudolf, 73
Cuban missile crisis, 65
Curtin, David, 43
Curtius, Theodor, 56
Cyclohexane, 59
Cyclokeptatriene, 56
Cyclopropane, 74

D
Dallas, Texas, 1
Daniels, Farrington, 77
Dauben, Hyp, 84
Davis, Kingsley, 64
Day, --, 23
Day, Richard, 23
Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), 24
Dervan, Peter, 81
Deuterium, 70, 82
Dewar, Michael, 51, 56, 78
Dialkyl magnesium, 14
Diazomethane, 48, 58-59
Dibenzene chromium, 64
Dibenzoyl tartaric acid, 30
1,2-dibromocyclohexane, 12
Diethyl ether, 58
Digitoxin, 23
Dimethyl sulfoxide, 70, 80
Diphenic acid, 16
Diphenyl, 16, 64
Divinyl sulfide, 24
Doering, William von Eggers
   brother (Harvey), 2, 4, 23
   father (Carl Rups Doering), 1-2, 4-6, 11
   mother (Antoinette von Eggers), 1-2, 4-6, 23
Doisy, Edward A., 15
Dow Chemical Company, 72
Dubos, René, 45-46, 84
DuPont, E.I. de Nemours & Co., Inc., 69
Durant, Aldrich, 12

E
Eastman Kodak Company, 48
Edgett, Ruth, 3
Edsall, John, 67
Elderfield, Robert C., 30, 42-43, 55
English, James, Jr., 47, 52, 61
Essen, Germany, 81
Esso, 70-72
Ethylidiazooacetate, 56
Evans, David, 76
Eyring, Henry, 41

F
Fantasia, 35
Field, Frank, 69
Fieser, Louis, 7-9, 13, 15, 17, 21-22, 33, 46-47, 84
Fieser, Mary, 33
Fisher, Roger, 67
Forbes, George Shannon, 13
Fort Worth, Texas, 1-3
Franklin, Joe, 69
Freeport, Texas, 72
Freiburg, Germany, 16
Freiburg, University of, 59, 79
Friedel-Crafts reaction, 69
Fudau University, 84
Fulbright, J. William, 67
Fuoss, Raymond M., 61

G
Geneva, Switzerland, 65
Gensler, Walter, 30, 43
George Washington Bridge, 60
Getting to Yes, 67
Geuther, A., 59
Gong, Xu-zhi, 84
Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, 72
Goro, Fritz, 34-35
Gowmac, 59
Great Depression, The, 6
Grignard reagent, 14, 63
Griswold, Whitney, 61, 73
Gulf of Mexico, 70

H
Halford, Ralph, 43, 63
Hammett, Louis Plack, 42-43, 55
Harned, Herbert S., 61
Harvard University, 1, 6-7, 10-12, 15, 18, 21, 31, 40-41, 45, 58, 62, 68-69, 73-77, 83-84
Faculty Club, 68
School of Public Health, 1, 6
Harvey School, 51
Heidelberg, Germany, 15, 41
Hein, F., 63
Henderson, Lawrence, 10-11
Heptamethylbenzenonium, 70
Hercules Incorporated, 69
Hershberg, E. B., 17
Hexamethyl phosphoramid, 70
Heyman, Hans, 22
Hickrill Chemical Research Foundation, 45, 47-49, 56, 58, 62, 69
Hill, Arthur, 61
Hiroshima, Japan, 83
Hobart College, 11
Hocking, --, 3
Hoffmann, Roald, 74
Hofmann elimination, 29-30
Holy Grail, 78
Homomeroquinene, 29
Homotropilidene, 78
Horace, 3
Hückel, Erich, 15, 41-42, 50, 77
Humble Oil, 69-72
Husigen, Rolf, 59

I
Illinois, University of, 10, 42-43
Isobutyl alcohol, 14
Isopentane, 59
Isopropyl, 58

J
John Scott Award, 36
Johns Hopkins University, The, 1
School of Public Health, 1
Jones, Irma, 51
Jones, Maitland, 51
Jones, Maitland, Jr., 51, 78
Journal of Organic Chemistry, 52
Journal of the American Chemical Society, 15, 52

K
Karlsruhe, Germany, 73, 77
Karlsruhe, University of, 79
Katonah, New York, 45, 48, 52, 55, 62
Kimball, George, 41, 63, 78
Kirkwood, John G., 9, 42, 61-63
Kirmse, W., 79
Kishi, Yoshito, 76
Kissinger, Henry, 67
Kistiakowsky, George, 11, 42, 68, 74
Klärner, Frank, 81
Klumpp, Gerhard, 79
Knowles, Jeremy, 76
Knox, Lawrence Howland, 48, 51, 56
Kohler, Elmer Peter, 7, 9-13, 53
Krayer, Otto, 23

L
Lamb, Arthur Beckett, 7-8, 15, 23-24
Land, Edwin H., 25, 37, 71
Leermakers, Peter, 79
Leipzig, Germany, 1, 6
Leonia, New Jersey, 60
Levy, Harold, 54
Levy, Lillian, 54
Lewis, G. N., 43
Life, 25, 34-35
Linstead, Sir Reginald P., 15-16, 20, 22-23
London, England, 51, 56
Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, 5

M
Magnesium bromide, 14
Malaria, 25, 37
Martius Yellow, 8
Marvel, Carl S., 16, 68
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 10
Massachusetts, University of, 41
Mayer, Joe, 42, 63
McCarthy, --, 3
McEwen, William E., 41
McGovern, George, 66
Meerwein, Hans, 50, 58
Meislich, Herb, 41
Meroquinene, 29
Messelson, Matthew, 67
Meta-nitrobenzaldehyde, 28
Methylene, 48, 56
Mexico City, Mexico, 51
Michael reaction, 53
Middlebrook, Gardner, 45
Mind and Society, 11
Monsanto Company, 69
Mount Holyoke College, 3
Munich, Germany, 16

N
Napalm, 8, 47
National Science Foundation, 77
Nef, John U., 59
New Bedford, Massachusetts, 48
New Haven, Connecticut, 51, 60, 72
New York Times, The, 25, 34
New York University, 57
New York City, New York, 1, 51-52, 64
New Yorker, 25, 34, 37
Newsweek, 34
Noller, Carl, 13-14
Norman Fund, 50
Northeastern University, 57
Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR), 20, 62, 80
Nuremberg, Germany, 23

O
Olah, George, 70
Onsager, Lars, 9, 20, 56, 61, 63-64, 76

P
Pareto, Vilfredo, 11
Paris, France, 82
Pasteur, Louis, 29, 38
Pauling, Linus, 46
Peabody School, 3
Pedersen, Charles, 70
Peng, Li, 85
Penicillin, 3, 36
Pentane, 59
Perkin, Sir William Henry, 26
Peter Stuyvesant High School, 41, 77
Phenylmagnesium bromide, 63
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1, 11, 36
   Chamber of Commerce, 36
Physical Society, 63
Piatigorsky, Gregor, 27
Polaroid Corporation, 23, 25, 30-31, 34, 36, 71
Polyurethane, 72
Ponzi reaction, 46
Portland, Maine, 42
Positron emission tomography [PET], 41, 55
Prelog, Vladimir, 26, 31, 45, 49
Price, Charles C., 67
Princeton University, 73
Prinzbach, Horst, 59, 79
Procter & Gamble Company, 69-72
Putnam, --, 3-4
Pyridine, 53
Pyronine, 46

Q
Quinine, 23, 25-29, 31-36, 38-40, 42, 45, 53
Quinone, 15
Quinotoxine, 29-30

R
Rabe, Paul, 26, 29
Reader's Digest, 35
Reimer-Tiemann reaction, 59
Rhine River, 16
Rhoads, Sarah Jane, 41
Rice University, 21, 86
Richards, Theodore W., 12
Rock, John, 64
Rockefeller Foundation, 45
Rosenwald, Julius, 48
Roth, Wolfgang, 79
Russell School, 3

S
Sachdev, Krishna, 74
Santonic acid, 27, 32
Saytzeff rules, 30
Schacht, Hjalmar Horace Greeley, 23
Schreiber, Stuart, 76
Schriesheim, Alan, 70
Schröder, Gerhard, 79
Schumann, Robert, 1
Science, 34, 37, 65
Science News Letter, 34, 37
Scientific Method, The, 47
Scientists for a Livable World, 67
Sears, Roebuck & Co., 48
Shady Hill School, 3-5, 21, 23
Shanghai, China, 84
Silver nitrate, 21
Smith College, 3, 47
Southbridge, Massachusetts, 5
Sparrow, Donald, 33
Stanford University, 13-14
Stauffer Chemical Company, 72
Stereochemistry, 16, 20, 56, 74
Stereoisomers, 16
Stieglitz, Julius, 59
Stipitatic acid, 57
Stone, Izzy, 36
Stork, Gilbert, 43
Strietweiser, Andrew, 41, 55
Sturtevant, Julian, 61
Syntex Corporation, 51
Szilard, Leo, 46, 64-67, 84

T
Tappan Zee Bridge, 61
Tartaric acid, 29
Taylor, T. Ivan, 53-54
Tetrachloroauminate, 70
Tetramethylcyclobutane, 14
Texas Christian University, 1-2
Thackray, Arnold, 29
Theoretische Grundlagen der organischen Chemie, 15
Thiophosphate, 24
Thomas, Steve, 1, 43, 66
Thorpe, Alice, 5
Time, 34
Toluene, 59
Triethylamine, 14
Trinitrobenzene, 21
Trinitrobenzylbromide, 21
Trinitrobenzylnitrate, 21-22
Trinitrotoluene (TNT), 21
Tropilidene, 56, 59
Tropolon, 48, 56-58
Tropylium, 48
Tropylium bromide, 57
Turner, Richard B., 21-22
U
United States
Army, 23, 83
House of Representatives, 65
Senate, 65
State Department, 48
Upjohn, 72
Urey, Harold, 54

V
Van Winkle, Carl, 72
Vietnam War, 67
Virgil, 3
Vitamin B12, 33
Vitamin K, 15

W
Washington, D.C., 16, 65-66
Washington, University of, 84
Waters HPLC, 33
Weil, Frank, 62
Weil, Ruth Alice Norman, 39, 47, 51, 53, 62
Weiss, Karl, 57
Welch Award, 16, 35
Westheimer, Frank, 35, 69
Wheeler, Burton K., 16
Whitesides, George, 76
Wiberg, Kenneth B., 17, 41, 55-56
Willcott, Robert, 78
Winstein, Saul, 24, 59
Wisconsin, University of, 60
Wolf, Alfred P., 41, 55
Wolfgang, Richard L., 63
Woodward, Robert B., 23-33, 35-37, 40, 43, 45, 52-53, 58-59, 68, 73-76
Woodward-Hoffmann rules, 74-75, 78
World Federalists, 67
World War II, 1, 8, 16, 21, 23, 25-26, 36, 40, 42, 47, 50, 55, 58, 65
Wyoming, University of, 41

Y
Yale University, 42-43, 50, 52, 56, 58, 60-63, 68, 72-73, 75-77
Sterling Laboratories, 62

Z
Zaugg, Harold A., 70
Zeiss, Harold, 56, 63
Zimmerman, Howard, 42, 61