

NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

SIDNEY M. EDELSTEIN

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Arnold Thackray and Jeffrey L. Sturchio

in

New Orleans, Louisiana and West Palm Beach, Florida

on

31 August 1987 and 24 February 1988

Sidney M.
Edelstein
JH
3/15/96

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SIDNEY M. EDELSTEIN

1912 Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee on 22 January

Education

1932 B.S., chemistry, Massachusetts Institute of
Technology

Professional Experience

1932-1935 Textile Microscopist and Research Chemist, Dixie
Mercerizing Company
1935-1938 Research Associate, American Association of Textile
Chemists and Colorists, University of Chattanooga
1938-1939 Vice President and Director of Research, Lameda,
Inc.
1939-1945 Vice President and Director of Research, Hart
Products Corporation
1945-1985 President, Dexter Chemical Corporation
1985- Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer,
Dexter Chemical Corporation

Honors

1956 Honorary D.Sc. degree, Lowell Technological
Institute
1959 Fellow, Textile Institute (Great Britain)
1960 Fellow, Society of Dyers and Colourists (Great
Britain)
1970 Honorary citizen of Biella and Venice, Italy
1987 Honorary Ph.D., Hebrew University

ABSTRACT

In this interview Sidney Edelstein begins with his family life in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and includes his early education and experiences at the Baylor School in Chattanooga. He describes his undergraduate career at MIT, his interest in cellulose chemistry, and recalls his first employment at the Dixie Mercerizing Company in the midst of the Depression. The interview continues with Edelstein's early entrepreneurial activities, and his term as an AATCC Research Associate. The formation of Lamede, Inc., and Edelstein's position as research director at Hart Chemical Company are discussed in detail. Edelstein continues with his work with the Army Quartermaster Corps during World War II, and difficulties with the Sylvania Industrial Company.

The second section of the interview begins with the formation of the Dexter Chemical Corporation, and continues with the company's development, first products, sales figures, subsidiaries, and international operations. Edelstein explains his interest in the history of dyestuffs, including the articles he wrote, and the benefit of history to the textile industry. The interview continues with Edelstein's key role in the history of the American Chemical Society Division of the History of Chemistry, and focuses on the personalities and operations in the early days of the Division. The origin of the Dexter Award is described, and the first recipients discussed. The interview concludes with Edelstein's philanthropic activities, and the Edelstein Center at the Hebrew University.

INTERVIEWERS

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. In 1983 he received the Dexter Award from the American Chemical Society for outstanding contributions to the history of chemistry. He is Director of the Beckman Center for the History of Chemistry.

Jeffrey L. Sturchio received an A.B. in history from Princeton University and a Ph.D. in the history and sociology of science from the University of Pennsylvania. He was Associate Director of the Beckman Center for the History of Chemistry from 1984 to 1988, and has held teaching appointments at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rutgers University, and the University of Pennsylvania as well as a fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. After a sojourn on the senior staff of the AT&T Archives, Dr. Sturchio joined Merck & Co., Inc., as Corporate Archivist in June 1989.

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