

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

ALBERT ESCHENMOSER

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Tonja A. Koepfel

at the

Swiss Federal Institute of Technology

on

7 October 1985

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

Albert Eschenmoser

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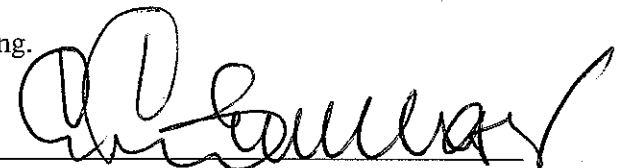
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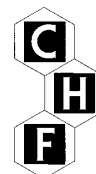
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ALBERT ESCHENMOSER

1925 Born in Erstfeld, Switzerland, 5 August

Education

1949 Dipl.sc.nat., Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zurich
1951 Dr.sc.nat., Organic Chemistry, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zurich

Professional Experience

Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich
1956-1960 Instructor, Organic Chemistry
1960-1965 Associate Professor, Organic Chemistry
1965-1992 Professor, Organic Chemistry
1992- Professor Emeritus

The Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, California
1996- Professor, Skaggs Institute for Chemical Biology

Honorary Degrees

1966 University of Fribourg
1970 University of Chicago
1979 University of Edinburgh
1989 University of Bologna
1990 Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität
1991 Université Louis Pasteur de Strasbourg
1993 Harvard University

Awards

1949 Kern Prize, ETH
1956 Werner Prize, Schweizerische Chemische Gesellschaft
1958 Ruzicka Prize, ETH
1966 Fritzsche Award, American Chemical Society
1973 Marcel Benoist Prize, Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern
1974 Robert A. Welch Award, Houston

1976 Kirkwood Medal, Yale University
1976 August Wilhelm von Hofmann Medal, Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker
1976 ACS Centennial Foreign Fellow, American Chemical Society
1977 Dannie Heineman Prize, Akademie der Wissenschaften
1978 Davy Medal, Royal Society
1980 Dr. Cliff S. Hamilton Award in Organic Chemistry, Lincoln, Nebraska
1981 Honorary Fellow, Royal Society of Chemistry
1981 Tetrahedron Prize for Creativity in Organic Chemistry, Pergamon Press
1982 George Kenner Award, University of Liverpool
1984 Arthur C. Cope Award, American Chemical Society
1986 Wolf Prize in Chemistry, Wolf Foundation
1988 M. M. Janot Medal, Gif-sur-Yvette
1991 Cothenius Medal, Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina
1994 CIBA-Drew Award in Biomedical Research, Drew University
1995 H. H. Inhoffen Medall, Gesellschaft für Biotechnologische Forschung
1998 Nakanishi Prize, Chemical Society of Japan

ABSTRACT

Albert Eschenmoser begins the interview with a discussion of his early life and education. Born in Switzerland, he attended school in the canton of Uri. At the age of sixteen, he decided that he wanted to become a secondary school teacher, and attended an Oberrealschule in St. Gallen. He received his Maturität in 1944, and continued on to the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH). Eschenmoser was encouraged to pursue chemistry, and—inspired by Leopold Ruzicka—concentrated on organic chemistry. His research focused on sesquiterpene chemistry. In 1949, he earned his diploma, and became a doctoral student under Ruzicka. His doctoral thesis addressed acid-catalyzed cyclization, and in 1951 he received his doctorate. Eschenmoser's research interests then turned to the synthesis of colchicine, which his group accomplished in 1959. Next came vitamin B₁₂ and the corrin ligand system. ETH collaborated with Robert B. Woodward's Harvard research group on this project, and in 1972 they announced the success of the vitamin B₁₂ synthesis. Eschenmoser concludes the interview with a discussion of research funding, his professional recognition, and the ramifications of the vitamin B₁₂ synthesis.

INTERVIEWER

Tonja A. Koepfel received a master's degree in chemistry from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in 1944. Since then she has written about chemistry, conducted research, and taught college chemistry. In 1973 she earned a Ph.D. degree in the history and sociology of science from the University of Pennsylvania. She is especially interested in the development of organic chemistry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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