

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

WILLIAM H. GAUVIN

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

in

Montreal, Quebec

on

11 July 1991

With Subsequent Corrections and Additions

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY
Oral History Program

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William H. Gauvin

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WILLIAM H. GAUVIN

1913 Born in Paris, France on 30 March

Education

1941 B. Eng., chemical engineering, McGill University
1942 M. Eng., chemical engineering, McGill University
1945 Ph.D., physical chemistry, McGill University

Professional Experience

McGill University, Department of Chemical Engineering
1942-1945 Lecturer
1947-1961 Associate Professor
1961-1971 Research Associate
1971-to date Senior Research Associate

Pulp and Paper Research Institute of Canada, Montreal
1951-1957 Consultant
1957-1961 Head, Chemical Engineering Division

1945-1947 Plant Superintendent, F. W. Horner Ltd., Montreal
1961-1970 Research Manager, Noranda Research Center, Montreal
1970-1982 Director, Research and Development, Noranda Mines Ltd.
1970-1971 Délégué-Général, National Research Council of Canada-Policy and Planning
1982-1983 Director, Advanced Technology, Noranda Research Center, Montreal
1983-1990 Scientific Advisor to Director, Hydro-Quebec Research Institute
1983-to date President, William H. Gauvin Technologies, Inc.

Honors

1958 L. H. Weldon Medal, Canadian Pulp and Paper Association
1960-1961 Chemical Institute of Canada Awards (for best papers published in the Canadian Journal for Chemical Engineering)

1963 R. S. Jane Award, Canadian Society for Chemical Engineering
1964 Senior Moulton Medal, Institution of Chemical Engineers of Great Britain
1966 Palladium Medal, Chemical Institute of Canada
1966 Médaille Archambault, ACFAS
1967 D. Eng., Honoris Causa, Waterloo University

- 1968 Membre d'Honneur de la Société de Chimie Industrielle de France
- 1968 Best Paper Award, Canadian Society for Chemical Engineering
- 1969 Fellow, Royal Society of Canada, Academy of Science
- 1970 Alcan Award, Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy
- 1972 Distinguished Lecturer Award, Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy
- 1973 Fellow, American Institute of Chemical Engineers
- 1975 Companion of Order of Canada
- 1979 Gold Medal, Société d'Encouragement pour la Recherche et l'Invention, France
- 1981 Honorary Fellow, Institution of Chemical Engineers, United Kingdom
- 1982 Honorary Fellow, Chemical Institute of Canada
- 1982 Chemical Institute of Canada Award (for best paper published in the Canadian Journal for Chemical Engineering)
-
- 1983 Montreal Medal, Chemical Institute of Canada
- 1983 D. Sc., Honoris Causa, McGill University
- 1984 Jules Stackiewicz Award in Heat Transfer, Canadian Society for Chemical Engineering
- 1984 D. Sc., Honoris Causa, Queen's University
- 1984 Prix Marie-Victorin (Prix des Sciences du Québec)
- 1985 Medal of the Canadian Research Management Association
- 1986 Thomas W. Eadie Medal, Royal Society of Canada
- 1986 D. Sc., Honoris Causa, McMaster University
- 1986 Julian C. Smith Medal, Engineering Institute of Canada
- 1986 Founding Member, Canadian Academy of Engineering
- 1987 Foreign Member, National Academy of Engineering of the United States
- 1988 The Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Prize in Engineering
- 1988 Award for Innovation in Drying, Versailles, France (Sixth International Drying Symposium)
- 1989 Inaugural Lecturer, First Eugenie Lamothe Symposium, McGill University

ABSTRACT

William Gauvin begins with background information about his childhood experiences in Europe, his formative education, and his emigration during the Depression to join his family in Canada. He describes his education at McGill University, which culminated in both wartime work on RDX as well as several early electrochemistry papers. He next recounts his employment with Frank W. Horner Ltd., and the initiation and development of his lifelong spray drying work. Gauvin relates his recruitment to the Pulp and Paper Research Institute, his move to Noranda, and his associations with Hydro-Quebec and other industrial research centers. While recounting the circumstances behind each of these professional "turning points," he discusses the evolution of the chemical engineering department at McGill and the involvement of his graduate students at these research centers. Throughout the interview, he emphasizes the often difficult balance between research and management views on R&D, and between technical feasibility and economic feasibility of new technologies. Gauvin reviews his contributions to science policy, industry-academe cooperation, and government support for R&D. He concludes the interview with a consideration of chemical engineering in Canada today, and of the highlights of his own career in the field.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning, Assistant Director for Oral History at the Beckman Center, holds the B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in chemistry. He was a member of the chemistry faculty at Wilkes University from 1959 until 1990, where he served as chair of the Chemistry Department for sixteen years, and chair of the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department for three years. He was Chair of the Division of the History of Chemistry of the American Chemical Society in 1987, and has been associated with the development and management of the Center's oral history program since 1985.

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