

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

VLADIMIR HAENSEL

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

at

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

on

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(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106



VLADIMIR HAENSEL

1914 Born in Freiburg, Germany on 1 September

Education

1935 B.S., general engineering, Northwestern University

1937 M.S., chemical engineering, MIT

1942 Ph.D., chemistry, Northwestern University

Professional Experience

1937 Chemical Engineer, Universal Oil Products Company (UOP)

1939 Research Assistant, Ipatieff High Pressure Laboratory

1942-1945 Chemical Engineer, UOP

1945 Inspector, German synthetic oil plants, Technical Oil
Mission for the

Petroleum Administration of War

Universal Oil Products Company

1945 Coordinator, Cracking Research Division

1951 Director of Refining Research

1960 Director of Process Research

1964-1972 Vice President, Director of Research

1972-1979 Vice President, Science and Technology

1980- Professor of Chemical Engineering, University of Massachusetts,
Amherst

Honors

1944 Chicago Junior Chamber of Commerce Award

1952 Precision Scientific Company Award in Petroleum Chemistry

1957 Professional Progress Award, American Institute of Chemical Engineers

1965 Modern Pioneers in Creative Industry Award, National Association of
Manufacturers

1967 Chemical Pioneer Award, American Institute of Chemists

1967 Perkin Medal

1971 Member, National Academy of Sciences

1973 National Medal of Science

1974 Member, National Academy of Engineering
1977 Eugene J. Houdry Award in Applied Catalysis
1984 Chancellor's Medal, University of Massachusetts
1991 National Academy of Sciences Award for Chemistry in Service to
Society
1993 Henry J. Albert Award, International Precious Metal Institute
1994 Chancellor's Outstanding Teacher Award, University of Massachusetts
1997 Charles Stark Draper Prize, National Academy of Engineering

ABSTRACT

Vladimir Haensel begins this interview by discussing his family life. Haensel, though born in Germany, spent parts of his childhood in Russia, Austria, and Germany. He attended a German gymnasium, where he had only a few science courses. However, family friends encouraged his burgeoning interest in chemistry. When his father was offered a faculty position at Northwestern University, Haensel's family moved to the United States. Haensel studied engineering at Northwestern, receiving his B.S. in 1935. He earned a scholarship for graduate school at MIT, where he studied polymerization under Edwin R. Gilliland. With the help of a family friend, Vladimir Ipatieff, Haensel was offered a summer position at Universal Oil Products (UOP). After earning his M.S. in chemical engineering in 1937, Haensel took a permanent position at UOP, and helped Ipatieff to set up a high-pressure laboratory (funded by UOP) at Northwestern. During this time, Haensel also earned his Ph.D. in chemistry from Northwestern, writing a thesis on the decomposition of cyclohexane. In the 1940s and 1950s, Haensel moved into research management. He was also integral in UOP's development of the Platforming process. Haensel concludes this interview with a discussion of the importance of instinct in research, the future of research and development, and his thoughts on winning the Perkin Medal.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is 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 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. He currently writes for the American Chemical Society News Service.

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NOTES

1. Charles D. Hurd, interview by James J. Bohning at Evanston, Illinois, 28 February 1991 (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, Oral History Transcript #0090).
2. Hoyt Hottel, interview by James J. Bohning at MIT, 18 November and 2 December 1985 (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, Oral History Transcript #0025).
3. Phillip R. Westmoreland, "Putting the *Chem* Back into Chemical Engineering," 21 October 1994; typescript in Chemical Heritage Foundation oral history research file #0115.
4. Vladimir N. Ipatieff, *The Life of a Chemist*, ed. by X. J. Eudin, H. D. Fisher, and H. H. Fisher; trans. by V. Haensel and R. H. Lusher (Stanford University, California: Stanford University Press, 1946).
5. V. Haensel and V. Ipatieff, "Selective Demethylation of Paraffin Hydrocarbons," *Journal of the American Chemical Society*, 68 (1946): 345-346.
6. V. Haensel and V. Ipatieff, "Selective Demethylation of Paraffin Hydrocarbons: Preparation of Triptane and Neopentane," *Industrial and Engineering Chemistry*, 39 (1947): 853-857.
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10. Charles Remsberg and Hal Higden, *Ideas for Rent: The UOP Story* (Des Plaines, Illinois: UOP, 1994).
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12. Vladimir Haensel, "Lucky Alva," *Research Management*, 10 (1967): 135-139.

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15. See Note 9b, p. 148ff.
16. For a copy of these lecture notes, see Chemical Heritage Foundation oral history research file #0115.
17. See Note 9, p. 152.
18. See Note 14, p. 13; Vladimir Haensel, "Lucky Proteus Or How Not to Hire a Genius," *Research Management*, 14 (1971): 44-48.
19. Vladimir Haensel, "Transportation Costs and the National Debt," *Science*, 262 (1993): 163.

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