

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

J. ROGER HIRL

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

James G. Traynham

at

Dallas, Texas

on

29 January 1999

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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This project is made possible through the generosity of Society of Chemical Industry member companies.

J. Roger Hirl

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## J. ROGER HIRL

1931 Born in Bettendorf, Iowa, on 1 April 1931

### Education

1957 B.L.S., liberal arts, University of Iowa

### Professional Experience

#### Olin Corporation

1960-1967 Field sales, Blockson Chemical Company (Olin-Matheison Chemical Corporation)  
1967-1968 Assistant Product Manager  
1968-1970 Product Manager, Organic Chemicals  
1970-1973 Regional Manager, Sales, Houston Division  
1973-1976 Sales Manager, Industrial Products  
1976-1977 Director of Marketing, Industrial Products  
1977-1978 Vice-president and General Manager, Industrial Chemicals Division  
1978-1979 Vice-president of Administration  
1980-1983 Senior Vice-president, Chemicals Group

#### Occidental Chemical Corporation

1983-1991 President  
1991-present President and Chief Executive Officer

### Honors

1991 Honorary Doctorate of humane letters, Canisius College  
1992 Honorary Doctorate of commercial science, St. John's University  
1994 Individual Award for Philanthropy, Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation  
1996 Honorary Doctorate of commercial science, Niagara University  
1997 Chemical Industry Award, Society of Chemical Industry

## ABSTRACT

J. Roger Hirl begins the interview with a discussion of his early life and education. Hirl grew up in Iowa and Minnesota. After graduating from high school, Hirl attended the University of Iowa, earning his B.L.S. in liberal studies in 1957. While he was still in school, Hirl was drafted to serve in the Korean War, returning to the University of Iowa two years later. His early focus in college was pre-med, but he soon switched to business and liberal arts. Hirl worked for Skelly Oil Company both during school and after graduation. In 1961, he joined Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation, working in field sales. Six years later, he became a temporary assistant product manager in New York; this experience confirmed his desire to move into management at Olin. He continued to rise in sales management, moving from New York to Connecticut to Texas. He eventually became senior vice president of Olin Chemicals, a position he held until 1983, when he accepted an offer from Occidental Chemical Corporation [OxyChem]. At Olin, Hirl was active in the litigation regarding DDT sediments and mercury emissions; as president of OxyChem, he became involved in the Love Canal situation. This interest in environmental concerns led him to become active in Responsible Care. Hirl also sought to improve OxyChem's safety record, and initiated special training programs. He discusses his view of chemical industry, his opinions on the future of chemical innovation, and OxyChem's involvement in the Asian market. Hirl concludes the interview with his reflections on winning the Chemical Industry Medal, a description of his family, his civic interests, and his views on attracting people to the chemical industry.

## INTERVIEWER

James G. Traynham is a Professor of Chemistry at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. He holds a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from Northwestern University. He joined Louisiana State University in 1963 and served as chemistry department chairperson from 1968 to 1973. He was chairman of the American Chemical Society's Division of the History of Chemistry in 1988 and is currently councilor of the Baton Rouge section of the American Chemical Society. He was a member of the American Chemical Society's Joint-Board Council on Chemistry and Public Affairs, as well as a member of the Society's Committees on Science, Chemical Education, and Organic Chemistry Nomenclature. He has written over ninety publications, including a book on organic nomenclature and a book on the history of organic chemistry.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Family Background and Early Education  
Growing up in Iowa. Moving to Minnesota. Working on the farm. Davenport High School. Attending the University of Iowa.
- 2 University of Iowa  
Studying pre-med. Serving in Korea. Interest in business. Degree in liberal studies. Family. Working for Skelly Oil Company.
- 3 Olin Corporation  
Working in sales. Moving to Houston. Beginning in management. Moving up in management. Senior vice president. Decision to leave.
- 6 Environmental Concerns  
EPA litigation on DDT sediments. Lawsuit on mercury emissions. Involvement in Responsible Care. Love Canal.
- 9 Occidental Chemical Corporation  
Emphasis on safety. OSHA Star facilities. Innovative process technology.
- 14 Future of the Chemical Industry  
Chemical innovation. Need to focus on environmental issues. Economic implications.
- 19 Conclusion  
Receiving the Chemical Industry Medal. Honorary degrees. Family. Civic activities. Implications of liberal arts degree. Attracting youth to chemical industries.
- 26 Index

## INDEX

### A

Amazon.com, 24  
Austin, Minnesota, 1-2

### B

Bankers Trust Corporation, 21  
Bettendorf, Iowa, 1  
Blockson Chemical Company, 3  
Buffalo, New York, 8, 20

### C

Canisius College, 20-21  
*Chemical and Engineering News*, 19  
Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF), 25  
Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA)  
    Responsible Care, 6, 11-12, 15, 19  
Chlor alkali, 18-19  
Chlorine, 6, 12, 24  
Chloro-organic synthesis, 6  
Clinton, President William Jefferson, 21  
Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), 9  
Cumene oxidation, 3

### D

Dallas Citizens Council, 22  
    Chamber, 22  
Dallas Together Forum, 22  
Dallas, Texas, 1, 20-22  
Davenport High School, 2  
Davenport, Iowa, 1-2  
DDE metabolites, 6  
Deutsche Bank AG, 18  
Diamond Shamrock Chemicals, 20  
Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), 6, 8  
Doe Run, Kentucky, 4  
Dow Chemical Company, 15  
Dow Corning Corporation, 19  
DuPont, E. I. de Nemours & Co., 10, 12



## **E**

Eldridge, Iowa, 1  
Eli Lilly and Company, 13  
Eltech Systems, 12  
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 6

## **G**

Glycols, 4  
Grand Island, New York, 12-13  
Greenpeace, 11

## **H**

Halogenated aromatics, 12  
Hammer, Armand, 7  
High test hypochlorite (HTH), 4  
Hirl, J. Roger  
    brothers, 1-2  
    daughter, 21-22  
    daughters-in-law, 23  
    father, 1-2, 14  
    grandchildren, 20, 22, 24  
    mother, 1  
    son-in-law, 21  
    sons, 21-22  
    wife, 22-23  
Hooker Chemical Company, 7-9, 13  
    Hooker Industrial and Specialty Chemicals, 8  
Houston, Texas, 3-5, 7-8, 20-22  
Hurst, John L., III, 11

## **I**

Iowa, University of, 2  
Irani, Ray R., 5, 7

## **J**

Joliet, Illinois, 3-4

## **K**

Korean War, 2

## **L**

La Guardia Airport, 20  
Long Grove, Iowa, 1

Los Angeles, California, 8  
Love Canal, 6-9, 20-21

## **M**

McCausland, Iowa, 1  
McKennon, Keith Robert, 19  
Mercury, 6, 8  
Mississippi River, 1  
Monsanto Company, 14

## **N**

Nations Bank, 22  
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), 15  
New York City, New York, 4-5, 8, 20  
Niagara Falls, New York, 6, 8, 13, 20  
Niagara University, 21

## **O**

Occidental Chemical Corporation (OxyChem), 6-10, 12-13, 15-21  
    Information Technology, 21  
    Oxy Crude Sales, 21  
    OxyTech, 12  
Occidental Petroleum Corporation, 5, 8, 15  
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), 10  
Olin Corporation, 3-7, 13  
    Chemical Division, 4  
    Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation, 3-4

## **P**

Parachlorobenzaldehyde, 13, 24  
Parachlorobenzonitrile, 13  
Parachlorobenzotrifluoride (PCBTF), 13  
Phenol acetone, 3  
Phenolic resins, 18  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 20  
Phosphates, 3-4  
Polyvinyl chloride (PVC), 12

## **R**

Riordan, John, 8

**S**

Skelly Oil Company, 3  
Society of Chemical Industry (American Section), 15, 19  
    Chemical Industry Medal, 19-20  
    Perkin Medal, 19  
Soda ash, 4  
Southwestern Museum of Science and Technology, 22  
St. John's University, 20-21  
Story, Les, 24  
Sulfuric acid, 4  
Superfund, 9  
Surfactants, 4  
Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, 22-23  
    Individual Award for Philanthropy, 23

**T**

Tampa, Florida, 20  
Texas Instruments, 21  
Thackray, Arnold, 25  
Toluene, 13  
Treflan, 13

**V**

Vinyl chloride monomer (VCM), 12

**W**

World War II, 1, 18