

THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

CHARLES D. HURD

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

in

Evanston, Illinois

on

28 February 1991

With Subsequent Additions and Corrections

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY  
Oral History Program

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(Signature) Charles D. Hurd  
Dr. Charles D. Hurd

(Date) 02/27/91

CHARLES DEWITT HURD

1897 Born in Utica, New York on 7 May

Education

1918 B.S., chemistry, Syracuse University  
1921 Ph.D., organic chemistry, Princeton University

Professional Experience

1917 Thomas A. Edison, West Orange, New Jersey  
1918 Chemical Service Section, United States Army  
1921-1924 Instructor, chemistry department, University of  
Illinois  
  
Northwestern University, chemistry department  
1924-1928 Assistant Professor  
1928-1933 Associate Professor  
1933-1949 Professor  
1949-1951 Morrison Professor  
1951-1965 Clare Hamilton Hall Research Professor 1965-  
Clare Hamilton Hall Research Professor, Emeritus

Honors

1943 Sc.D., honorary, Syracuse University  
1958 Midwest Award, American Chemical Society, St. Louis  
Section  
1971 Austin M. Patterson Award, American Chemical Society  
1974 Honorary membership, Illinois State Academy of  
Science  
1978 Distinguished Service Award, American Chemical  
Society, Chicago Section

## ABSTRACT

Charles Hurd begins the interview with information and anecdotes about his childhood in upstate New York and his stepfather's career in administering boarding schools and colleges. He discusses his undergraduate education at Syracuse University, his research during World War I in the Chemical Service Sector on poison gas, and a summer job working with Thomas Edison for the Naval Consulting Board. Hurd then describes his graduate work at the University of Minnesota and Princeton University, during which he began his work on ketenes and pyrolysis. This work continued during his instructorship at the University of Illinois, which culminated when Hurd was recruited to Northwestern University by Frank Whitmore. Hurd describes his career at Northwestern and discusses his interests in nomenclature, his work on sugar chemistry and his numerous consultancies in industry. Hurd names many of the graduate students with whom he worked and describes the dynamics of his relationship to them as mentor and his introduction of "Molecular Models" as a teaching tool. Hurd discusses the media's "chemophobia" and negative portrayal of the chemical industry, and describes his own published efforts to dispel this negative image and his writings for encyclopedias and dictionaries. Hurd concludes the interview by briefly examining other research projects, patents and colleagues.

## INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning, Assistant Director for Oral History at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, 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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Born in Utica, New York. Father dies and mother remarries. Stepfather heads Cook Academy, the first high school in the U. S. to be attended by Chinese students. V. K. Wellington Koo. Stepfather moves to Keuka College. Hurd attends numerous schools and enjoys all sciences.
- 6 Undergraduate Education and Early Professional Experiences  
Majors in chemistry and physics. Influential professors and early laboratory work. Chemical Service Sector research at American University during World War I with L. W. Jones. Summer job working with Thomas Edison for Naval Consulting Board in Orange, New Jersey. Meets future wife.
- 14 Graduate Education  
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- 17 Instructorship at the University of Illinois  
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- 22 Early Career at Northwestern University  
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- 29 Academic Activities, Consulting and Teaching  
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## NOTES

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