

LEWIS HASTINGS SARETT

**An Interview Conducted By
Leon Gortler**

**Viola, Idaho
September 6, 1990**

SARETT

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LEWIS HASTING SARETT

- 1917 Born in Champaign, Illinois on December 22.
(Parents: Lew and Margaret (Husted) Sarett)
- 1939 B.S. (Chemistry), Northwestern University
1942 Ph.D. (Chemistry), Princeton University
(Mentor: Everett Wallis)
- 1944 Married Mary Adams on March 1.
Children: Mary Nicole, Katharine Wendy

Merck

- 1942 - 1948 Research chemist
1948 - 1952 Assistant Director, Department of Organic Chemistry
and Biomedical Research
1952 - 1956 Director, Medicinal Chemistry
1956 - 1962 Director, Department of Synthetic Organic Chemistry
1962 - 1966 Executive Director, Fundamental Research
1966 - 1969 Vice President for Basic Research
1969 - 1976 President, Merck Sharp & Dohme Research Laboratories
1976 - 1982 Senior Vice President for Science and Technology,
Merck & Company, Inc.
1982 Retired
- 1969 Married Pamela Thorp on June 28.
Children: Will Hastings, Renee MacLeod
- 1982 - Director and consultant, biotechnology companies

Awards

- 1951 Merck Board of Directors' Scientific Award
1951 Northwestern Alumni Association Award of Merit
1951 Leo Hendrick Baekeland Award of the American Chemical
Society (New Jersey Section)
1959 Julius W. Sturmer Memorial Lecture Award
1964 William Scheele Lecture Award, Royal Pharmaceutical
Institute, Stockholm, Sweden
1964 Medal for Creative Research in Synthetic Organic
Chemistry, Synthetic Organic Chemical Manufacturers
Association
1966 New Jersey Patent Award, New Jersey Council for
Research and Development

1972 Chemical Pioneer Award, American Institute of Chemists
1972 D.Sc., Northwestern University
1975 National Medal of Science
1976 Perkin Medal, Society of Chemical Industry
1977 D.Sc., Bucknell University
1977 Member, National Academy of Sciences
1980 Election to the National Inventors Hall of Fame
1980 Industrial Research Institute Medal
1981 Gold Medal Award, American Institute of Chemists
1982 Proctor Medal, Philadelphia Drug Exchange

ABSTRACT: Lewis Sarett begins this interview by telling of his early life in Wisconsin and Illinois, the influence of his father, his development of an interest in the outdoors, and some of his experiences in college and graduate school. He then turns to his first assignment at Merck, the synthesis of cortisone. This is followed by a discussion of the efforts to discover a use for cortisone, the development of an economically viable synthesis of cortisone and finally, the efforts to supply cortisone for public use. The next short section of the interview deals with his movement into managerial positions, and this is followed by a discussion of a number of drugs developed under his direction, including Decadron, Amprol, Thibenzol, Indocin, Dolobid, and Clinoril. Interspersed in the interview are comments on the Merck organization and on the various presidents, research directors, and colleagues with whom he worked. A significant section deals with his accomplishments as President of MSDRL, and the problems he faced in this position. This is followed by a discussion of his last position at Merck, Vice President for Science and Technology. The interview concludes with talk of some of his work outside Merck, a description of his life in retirement, a comment on life in industry vs. life in academia, and some words of advice for young scientists.

INTERVIEWER: Leon Gortler is Professor of Chemistry at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. He holds A.B. and M.S. degrees from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He has long been interested in the history of chemistry and has conducted over forty oral and videotaped interviews with major American chemists.

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