

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

DONALD L. KATZ

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

at

Holland, Michigan

on

22 August 1986

Donald L  
Katz  
JH  
3/15/96

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

Oral History Program

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DONALD L. KATZ

1907 Born in Jackson County, Michigan on 1 August  
1989 Died in Ann Arbor, Michigan on 29 May

Education

University of Michigan  
1931 B.S.E., chemical engineering  
1932 M.S., chemical engineering  
1933 Ph.D., chemical engineering

Professional Experience

1933-1936 Research Engineer, Phillips Petroleum Company  
  
University of Michigan  
1936-1942 Assistant Professor of Chemical Engineering  
1942-1943 Associate Professor  
1943-1964 Professor  
1951-1962 Chairman, Chemical Engineering Department  
1964-1977 A. H. White University Professor  
1977-1989 Emeritus Professor

Honors

1950 Hanlon Award, Gas Processors Association  
1959 President, American Institute of Chemical Engineers  
1959 Michigan Engineer of the Year, Society of Petroleum  
Engineers  
1962 Distinguished Lecturer, Society of Petroleum Engineers  
1963 Visiting Professor, National School of Chemistry,  
Rio de Janeiro  
1964 Carll Award, Society of Petroleum Engineers  
1964 Distinguished Faculty Achievement Award, University  
of Michigan  
1964 Founders Award, American Institute of Chemical  
Engineers  
1967 Warren K. Lewis Award, American Institute of Chemical  
Engineers  
1968 Member, National Academy of Engineering  
1968 William H. Walker Award, American Institute of  
Chemical Engineers  
1969 Honorary Member, Phi Lambda Upsilon  
1970 Mineral Industries Award, American Institute of  
Mining Engineers  
1972 Distinguished Public Service Award, U.S. Coast Guard  
1975 Murphree Award, American Chemical Society  
1977 Gas Industry Research Award, American Gas  
Association  
1978 Lucas Gold Medal, American Institute of Mining  
Engineers

- 1979 Award of Merit, Michigan Historical Society
- 1983 Selected as an Eminent Chemical Engineer, 75th  
Anniversary of American Institute of Chemical  
Engineers
- 1983 National Medal of Science
- 1984 Designated Distinguished Member, Society of  
Petroleum Engineers
- 1986 Honorary Member, American Institute of Mining  
Engineers

## ABSTRACT

The late Donald Katz starts the interview by briefly referring to his current projects but then describes his family background and his genealogical interests, stimulated by his 1952 trip to his father's birthplace in a German village. Katz went to a small country school in rural Michigan but was encouraged by a church minister to attend high school in a nearby town. After working in a machine shop, Katz entered the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and majored in chemical engineering. He put himself through college by hard effort; cleaning offices, restaurant work and some summers back in machine shops. As he continued into graduate studies, Donald Katz acted as George Brown's assistant, helping other graduate students, junior faculty and with patent cases. He recalls courses, coworkers and faculty at Ann Arbor and gives three anecdotes illustrating the influence of surface chemistry, as taught by Floyd Bartell, at later stages of Katz's career. When Katz started his research career at Phillips Petroleum he was assigned to reservoir studies and he summarizes some of his activities during this period. An invitation by Brown brought Katz back to the University of Michigan and he details his early researches and consulting work. The war years altered some of his teaching and research responsibilities and led him, for instance, into heat transfer investigations. On Brown's promotion to Dean, Katz took over as departmental chairman for several years. During this part of the interview Donald Katz describes his involvement in the introduction of computer education into the chemical engineering curriculum, both at Ann Arbor and nationally. Other recollections follow; safety and the hazards of bulk chemicals; pipelines; the underground storage of gas and air; the origins of the Handbook of Natural Gas Engineering. Katz concludes his interview with some thoughts on the changes in the academic chemical engineering profession over his long career.

## INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning holds the B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in chemistry, and has been a member of the chemistry faculty at Wilkes College since 1959. He was chair of the Chemistry Department for sixteen years, and was appointed chair of the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences in 1988. He has been associated with the development and management of the oral history program at the Beckman Center since 1985, and was elected Chair of the Division of the History of Chemistry of the American Chemical Society for 1987.

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