CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

DELBERT H. MEYER

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James G. Traynham

at

Naperville, Illinois

on

20 January 1997

(With subsequent corrections and additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history is one in a series initiated by the Chemical Heritage Foundation on behalf of the Society of Chemical Industry (American Section). The series documents the personal perspectives of Perkin and the Chemical Industry Award recipients and records the human dimensions of the growth of the chemical sciences and chemical process industries during the twentieth century.

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THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program

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Oral History Program
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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

DELBERT H. MEYER

1926	Born in Maynard, Iowa, on 28 August

Education

1949	B.A., chemistry, Wartburg College
1953	Ph.D., chemistry, University of Iowa

Professional Experience

Amoco Corporation/Amoco Chemical Company

1953-1961	Research Chemist, Standard Oil Company, Whiting, Indiana
1961-1967	Research Chemist, Amoco Chemical Company, Whiting, Indiana
1967-1977	Research Supervisor, Naperville, Illinois
1977-1989	Director, Exploratory Research Division, Naperville, Illinois
1989-1992	Research Consultant, Naperville, Illinois
1992	Retired

Honors

1983	Alumni Citation Award, Wartburg College
1989	William M. Burton Award, Amoco Chemical Company
1992	U.S. Medal of Technology
1993	Honorary D.Sc., Wartburg College
1995	Perkin Medal, Society of Chemical Industry (American Section)

ABSTRACT

Delbert Meyer begins his oral history with a description of his family life as a youth in Maynard, Iowa. He was uncertain of his future career choice and served for two years in the U. S. Navy. Influential professors at Wartburg College and later at the University of Iowa fueled his interest in chemistry. Meyer spent thirty-nine years with Amoco, beginning as an exploratory researcher for Standard Oil Company in 1953 and later becoming a research consultant at Amoco in 1992. During his career at Amoco Corporation, Meyer developed a faster and more economical method for producing purified terephthalic acid (PTA), the major material used to make polyester. He eventually moved into research management and product development. Meyer concluded with a discussion scientific innovation as a result of need for products in the marketplace; speculation on the future of research and development management in the chemical sciences; and reflections on winning the 1995 Perkin Medal.

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.

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NOTES

1. Delbert H. Meyer, “The Preparation of Trimethylamine-p-Toluenesulfonimide,” Dissertation Abstracts, XIII, no. 6 (1953): 987.

2. Stanley Wawzonek, “Chemistry of Amineimides,” *Second Eng. Chem. Product Reseach and Development*, 19, no. 3 (1980): 338.

3. Delbert H. Meyer, “Fiber-Grade Terepthalic Acid by Catalytic Hydrogen Treatment of Dissolved Impure Terephthalic Acid,” U.S. Patent 3,584,039, issued 8 June 1971.

4. “Notable Books of the Year 1996,” *New York Times Book Review*, December 8, 1996.

5. John Horgan, *The End of Science: Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of the Scientific Age.* (Reading, MA: Helix Books/Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1996).

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