

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

ROBERT W. PARRY

Reflections on the Gordon Research Conferences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Arnold Thackray and Arthur Daemmrich

at

Salt Lake City, Utah

on

19 July 2002

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This oral history is one in a series initiated by the Chemical Heritage Foundation in collaboration with the Gordon Research Conferences. The series documents the perspectives of key individuals who organized and managed the Gordon Research Conferences and records the conferences' impact on scientists' research, careers, and lives.

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ROBERT W. PARRY

1917 Born in Ogden, Utah, on 1 October

Education

1940 B.S., chemistry, Utah State University, College of Agriculture
1942 M.S., inorganic chemistry, Cornell University
1946 Ph.D., inorganic chemistry, University of Illinois

Professional Experience

University of Illinois
1943-1945 Research Assistant, National Defense Research Committee, Munitions
Development Laboratory
1945-1946 Teaching Fellow

University of Michigan
1946-1969 Faculty Member
1958-1969 Professor of Chemistry

1960-1963 Founding Editor, *Inorganic Chemistry*

University of Utah
1969-1997 Distinguished Professor of Chemistry
1997-present Professor Emeritus

Honors

1972 Manufacturing Chemists Award for College Teaching
1980 Senior U.S. Scientist Award, Alexander Von Humboldt-Stiftung
1985 D.Sc., *honorary causa*, Utah State University
1987 First Governor's Medal of Science, State of Utah
1997 D.Sc., *honorary causa*, University of Utah

ABSTRACT

Robert W. Parry begins the interview with a discussion of his childhood in Ogden, Utah. After graduating from Ogden High School, Parry attended Weber College for two years, where he studied chemistry until his funding ran out. At that point, Parry started performing research for the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service. When Rudger H. Walker, Parry's supervisor at the Forest Service, became dean of the College of Agriculture at Utah State University in Logan, Parry followed him, and there received his B.S. in 1940. Parry continued his education, earning his M.S. from Cornell University in 1942 and his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois in 1946. Parry briefly discusses his early career, which included positions at E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, the Munitions Development Laboratory at the University of Illinois, the University of Michigan, and the University of Utah. Parry then discusses at length his experiences with the Gordon Research Conferences [GRC]. Parry attended his first conference on inorganic chemistry in the 1950s and has attended almost every Inorganic Chemistry Conference since. Parry has served GRC as a conference chairman, as an executive committee member, and as chairman of the board of directors. Parry describes the evolution of GRC through four distinct eras: the Gibson Island Conferences, and the directorships of W. George Parks, Alexander M. Cruickshank, and Carlyle B. Storm. Parry concludes the interview with a discussion of the strengths and importance of GRC.

INTERVIEWERS

Arnold Thackray is President of the Chemical Heritage Foundation. He majored in the physical sciences before turning to the history of science, receiving a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in 1966. He has held appointments at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, the Institute for Advanced Study, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 1983 he received the Dexter Award from the American Chemical Society for outstanding contributions to the history of chemistry. He served on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania for more than a quarter of a century. There, he was the founding chairman of the Department of History and Sociology of Science, where he is the Joseph Priestley Professor Emeritus.

Arthur Daemmrich is a policy analyst at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia. He holds a Ph.D. in Science and Technology Studies from Cornell University and has published on biotechnology policy and politics, the sociology of medicine, and pharmaceutical drug regulation. In his research, he brings long-range perspectives to bear on the analysis of globalization, risk, health, and environmental policy. Daemmrich has held fellowships from the Social Science Research Council/Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies, and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Personal Background and Education
Family background and encouragement of education. Undergraduate studies at Weber State College and Utah State University. Research work for the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service. Graduate studies at Cornell University.
- 2 Career Path
Development of a new tetryl plant for E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company during World War II. Work at the Munitions Development Laboratory at the University of Illinois. Doctoral studies with John C. Bailar. Tenured professorship at the University of Michigan. Being lured to the University of Utah by James C. Fletcher.
- 5 First Experiences with the Gordon Research Conference [GRC]
Attending the first Inorganic Chemistry GRC, presentation on boron chemistry, and being “eaten alive” by conferees. Format and atmosphere of GRC presentations. Attendance and continuity of the Inorganic Chemistry Conference. Conference sites.
- 10 Conference Operations
Applying to GRC. Election of conference chairs. Institution of vice chairs. Cultivation of industrial support by W. George Parks. Establishment of daily schedule by Neil E. Gordon. Involvement of women. Conferees’ families at GRC.
- 15 Financial Support of GRC in the 1950s and 1960s
Institutional diversity of conferees. Industrial participation and support. Fundraising techniques of Parks and Gordon. First non-industry grant, and development of federal support for GRC. Controversy over military-funded research in the 1970s.
- 21 Parks’ Resignation
Four eras of GRC. Parry as board chair. Parks is prosecuted by the IRS and resigns.
- 25 Evolution of GRC after Parks’ Directorship
Roles of Alex and Irene Cruickshank in operations under Parks. Alex appointed director. Gradual shift to academic domination of attendance. Conference evaluation and the selection and scheduling committee. GRC finances. Diversity of attendance and relationship to successful conferences. Storm’s leadership and expansion overseas.
- 34 Conclusion
Path to becoming GRC board chair. GRC expansion and public relations. GRC’s impact on science.
- 40 Notes
- 41 Index

NOTES

1. Weber State College became Weber State University in 1991.
2. The first Inorganic Chemistry Conference was held in 1951 at the New Hampton School in New Hampton, New Hampshire.
3. See for example: A. Stock, "Die Gefährlichkeit des Quecksilberdampfes," *Zeitschrift für Angewandte Chemie* 39 (1926):461-68; Ibid., "Die Gefährlichkeit des Quecksilbers und der Amalgam-Zahnfüllungen," *Medizinische Klinik* 24 (1928):1114-17, 1154-58; Ibid., "Die Gefährlichkeit des Quecksilberdampfes und der Amalgame," *Medizinische Klinik* 22 (1926): 1209-12, 1250-52; *Zeitschrift für Angewandte Chemie* 39 (1926):984-89.
4. Herbert C. Brown won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1979. Retrieved from <http://www.nobel.se/> on 23 July 2004.
5. Henry M. Robert, *Robert's Rules of Order Revised for Deliberative Assemblies* (New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1915).
6. W. George Parks was born 30 December 1904 and died 9 October 1975. *American Men of Science: The Physical and Biological Sciences*, 11th edition (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1967), 4061. University of Rhode Island.
7. Records of the Gordon Research Conferences. Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia.
8. The Division of Inorganic Chemistry met at the 133rd National Meeting of the American Chemical Society in San Francisco, California in April 1958.

INDEX

A

American Chemical Society [ACS], 4, 16-17, 29, 39
Audrieth, Ludwig F., 15

B

Bailar, John C., 3, 5, 11, 14-15
Basolo, Fred, 8, 15, 17, 25, 35
Batchelder, Augustus H., 16, 23-24, 36
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 13
Boron chemistry, 5, 7, 35
Brewster Academy, 14, 29
Brown, George B., 17
Brown, Herbert C., 7, 34-36
Bueche, Arthur M., 17, 36
Burg, Anton B., 7

C

Cairns, Robert W., 16, 36
Caldor, Andrew, 17
California at Berkeley, University of, 6
Carter, Herbert E., 24
Chicago, University of, 7
Chloride, 5
Clifford, Alan F., 6
Colby College, 32
Comings, Edward W., 3
Coppoc, W. Joseph, 17, 23-24, 36
Cornell University, 2, 20
Cruickshank, Alexander M., 12, 20-26, 29-30, 37
Cruickshank, Irene, 12, 22-26
Crystal field theory, 17

D

Diammoniate of diborane, 5
DiSalvo, Francis J., 36
DuPont, E. I. de Nemours & Company, 3, 16-17, 19, 31-33

E

Elliott, Dennis, 17-20, 39
Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 20
Erving, Henry, 4

F

Fernelius, W. Conard, 5, 11, 14-15
Finholt, Albert E., 7
Fleming, Susan, 13
Fletcher, James C., 3-4
Florini, James R., 17
Flouride, 5-6

G

Gibson Island Conferences. *See* Gordon Research Conferences [GRC]
Gibson Island, Maryland, 12, 30
Girardot, Peter R., 18
Goddell, Julian, 20-21
Good, Mary L., 13
Gordon Research Conferences [GRC], 6, 13, 22-23, 35
 archives, 24
 Biology and Chemistry of Tetrapyrroles Conference, 32
 Biomathematics Conference, 33
 board of directors, 25
 board of trustees, 1, 18
 Coatings and Films Conference, 33
 conference chairs, 1, 10, 36
 conference vice chairs, 11
 Drug Carriers Conference, 33
 evaluator, 27-28
 executive director, 25, 28
 Fiber Science Conference, 33
 fundraising, 11, 21, 24, 26, 30
 Gibson Island Conferences, 12, 17, 19, 30
 Inorganic Chemistry Conference, 5, 7-8, 10-11, 15, 17, 29, 31, 33, 38
 Nanostructures Conference, 32
 Natural Products Conference, 33
 Non-linear Optics and Lasers Conference, 32
 Organic Chemistry Conference, 38
 Organic Reactions and Processes Conference, 32-33
 Physical Organic Conference, 32
 Polymer Conference, 8-9, 21, 27, 33
 scheduling and selection committee, 27-28, 33-34, 38
 Staphylococcal Diseases Conference, 33
 Stereochemistry Conference, 32
 Theoretical Biology Conference, 33
 Thin Films Conference, 33
Gordon, Neil E., 12, 17, 21, 30
Gray, Harry B., 14
Gutowsky, Herbert S., 24

H

Haight, Gilbert, 14
Harvard University, 6, 32-33
Hashaw Chemical Company, 17
Hoffman, John D., 17

I

Illinois, University of, 3
 Munitions Development Laboratory, 3
Indiana, University of, 7
Inorganic Chemistry, 13
Internal Revenue Service [IRS], 22-23, 30

J

Jaworski, Ernest G., 17, 36
Jordan, Alec, 23, 37

K

Kankakee, Illinois, 3

L

Latimer, Wendell M., 15
Logan, Utah, 2
Louisiana State University, 13

M

Martin, Donald, 17
Massachusetts, University of, 25
McCall, David W., 17, 36
McCullough, John P., 17, 24, 36
Michigan State University, 11, 33
Michigan, University of, 3-5, 13, 20, 32, 33
Moeller, Therald, 14-15
Morse, Joseph G., 13
Morse, Karen Williams, 13
Muettertie, Earl, 17
Mustard gas, 3

N

National Science Foundation [NSF], 18, 20
New Hampshire State Tennis Championship, 14
New Hampshire, University of, 28
New Hampton School, 29
New Hampton, New Hampshire, 8-9, 14
New York, New York, 29

Newport, Rhode Island, 29
Nitrogen, 13
Nobel Prize, 7
Non-protonic acid, 6
Nuclear magnetic resonance [NMR], 6

O

Ogden High School, 1
Ogden, Utah, 1
Ogg, Richard A., 7
Olefin, 33

P

Parks, W. George, 11-12, 15, 17-26, 30, 37-38
Parry, Robert W.
 brother, 2
 father, 1-2
 grandfather, 1
Pearson, Ralph G., 15, 35
Pennsylvania State University [Penn State], 5, 7
Petroleum, 33
Pittman, Don, 2
Purdue University, 7

Q

Quill, Laurence L., 11, 14-15

R

Rampton, Calvin E., 4
Rhode Island, University of, 25
Roosevelt Hotel, 29

S

Salt Lake City, Utah, 29
Salve Regina University, 9, 29
San Francisco, California, 35
Schaeffer, Riley, 7
Schaffer, George, 7
Schlesinger, Herbert I., 7, 35
Smith, J. Harold, 25
Snowbird Ski and Summer Resort, 29
Southern California, University of [USC], 7
St. Louis University, 7
St. Olaf College, 7
Standard Oil of California, 16, 23

Stanford University, 7
Stock, Alfred, 6
Storm, Carlyle B., 21, 30

T

Taube, Henry, 15
Taylor, Kathleen C., 17, 36
Tetryl, 3
Trinitrotoluene [TNT], 3

U

United States Air Force, 19-20
 Office of Scientific Research, 17
 Research Laboratory, 18
United States Army, 3
 Army Research Office, 20
United States Department of Agriculture [USDA] Forest Service, 2
 Research Laboratory, 2
United States Navy, 3, 20
 Office of Naval Research, 18
Urry, Grant W., 7
Utah State University, 2
 College of Agriculture, 2
Utah, University of, 3-4, 20, 34
 archives, 24

V

Vacuum lines, 6-7

W

Walker, Rudger H., 2
Walling, Chevis, 4
Ward, Roland, 14
Wartik, Tom, 7
Weber College. See Weber State University
Western Washington University, 13
Wisconsin, University of, 2, 21
Woodward, Lowell, 2
World War II, 2-3