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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(Signature) Robert W. Parry
Robert Parry

(Date) 03/26/03

Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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.

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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.

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