

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

EMIL L. SMITH

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

at

University of California, Los Angeles

on

19 June 1991 and 17 March 1994

(With Subsequent Additions and Corrections)

THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program

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Emil L. Smith

Emil L. Smith

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EMIL L. SMITH

1911 Born in New York City, New York, on July 5

Education

1931 B.S., biology, Columbia University
1937 Ph.D., zoology, Columbia University, (Mentor, S. Hecht)

Professional Experience

Columbia University
1931-1934 Teaching assistant, zoology department
1934-1936 Teaching assistant, biophysics
1936-1938 Instructor, biophysics

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellow
1938-1939 Molteno Institute, Cambridge University (w/D. Keilin)
1939-1940 Yale University and the Connecticut Agricultural
Experiment Station (w/H. B. Vickery)

1940-1942 Fellow, Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research
(w/M. Bergmann)

1942-1946 Sr. Biochemist and Biophysicist, E.R. Squibb & Sons

University of Utah, College of Medicine
1946-1950 Associate Professor of Biochemistry
Associate Professor of Medicine
1950-1963 Professor of Biochemistry
Research Professor of Medicine
Head, Biochemical Section, Laboratory for the Study
of Hereditary and Metabolic Disorders
1958-1959 Acting Chairman, Department of Biochemistry

University of California, Los Angeles
1963-1979 Professor and Chairman, School of Medicine,
Department of Biological Chemistry
1979- Professor Emeritus

Honors

1961 Distinguished Service Alumni Award, Columbia University
1962 Member, National Academy of Sciences
1964 Utah Award, American Chemical Society
1965 Member, American Academy of Arts and Sciences

1973 Member, American Philosophical Society
1982 Foreign Member, Academy of Sciences, USSR
1985 Fellow, UCLA School of Medicine
1987 Stein-Moore Award, The Protein Society

ABSTRACT

Emil Smith begins this interview by discussing his family background and childhood in New York City. Smith learned to play the saxophone during high school and later earned money for college by playing concerts on weekends and holidays. Attending Columbia University, he studied biology under Selig Hecht. In 1938, he received a Guggenheim fellowship to Cambridge University, where he worked in David Keilin's laboratory. The outbreak of World War II in Europe forced Smith to return to the U.S., where he worked at Yale, the Rockefeller Institute, and later, E. R. Squibb & Sons. Smith accepted a position at the University of Utah and was a faculty member in both the department of biochemistry and medicine. He was later chairman of biological chemistry at the UCLA School of Medicine. Smith concludes the first interview by describing his activities after retirement activities.

In the second interview, Smith describes his research interests, which have included work with peptidases, immunoglobulins, cytochromes, subtilisin, histones, and glutamate dehydrogenases. He discusses his involvement with the International Union of Biochemists and the American Chemical Society. Smith concludes this interview with a recollection of his meeting with Chou En-lai concerning scientific exchange between the United States and China.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is Professor of Chemistry Emeritus at Wilkes University, where he was a faculty member from 1959 to 1990. He served there as chemistry department chair from 1970 to 1986 and environmental science department chair from 1987 to 1990. He was chair of the American Chemical Society's Division of the History of Chemistry in 1986, received the Division's outstanding paper award in 1989, and presented more than twenty-five papers before the Division at national meetings of the Society. He has been on the advisory committee of the Society's National Historic Chemical Landmarks committee since its inception in 1992. He developed the oral history program of the Chemical Heritage Foundation beginning in 1985, and was the Foundation's Director of Oral History from 1990 to 1995. He currently writes for the American Chemical Society News Service.

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