

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

HENRY TAUBE

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Leon Gortler

On the way to Grand Central Terminal
New York, New York

on

19 March 1986

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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



HENRY TAUBE

1915 Born in Neudorf, Saskatchewan, Canada, on 30 November
1942 Became naturalized United States citizen
2005 Died in Stanford, California, on 16 November

Education

1935 B.S., University of Saskatchewan
1937 M.S., University of Saskatchewan
1940 Ph.D., chemistry, University of California, Berkeley

Professional Experience

1940 University of California, Berkeley
Instructor

1941-1944 Cornell University
Instructor
1944-1946 Assistant Professor

1946-1948 University of Chicago
Assistant Professor
1948-1953 Associate Professor
1953-1961 Professor
1956-1959 Chairman

1961-1986 Stanford University
Professor
1972-1974 Chairman
1978-1979 Chairman
1986 Professor Emeritus

Honors and Awards

1949 Guggenheim Fellow
1955 Guggenheim Fellow
1955 American Chemical Society Award for Nuclear Applications in
Chemistry
1960 Harrison Howe Award, Rochester Section, American Chemical Society
1964 Chandler Medal, Columbia University
1966 John Gamble Kirkwood Award, New Haven Section, American Chemical

- Society
- 1967 American Chemical Society Award for Distinguished Service in the
Advancement of Inorganic Chemistry
- 1971 Nichols Medal, New York, American Chemical Society
- 1971 Willard Gibbs Medal, Chicago Section, American Chemical Society
- 1973 F.P. Dwyer Medal, University of New South Wales, Australia
- 1973 Honorary Doctorate, (L.L.D.) University of Saskatchewan
- 1976 Marguerite Blake Wilbur Endowed Professorship
- 1977 National Medal of Science, Washington, D.C.
- 1979 Allied Chemical Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching &
Innovative Science
- 1979 Degree of Ph.D. *Honoris Causa* of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- 1980 T.W. Richards Medal of the Northeastern Section, American Chemical
Society
- 1981 American Chemical Society Award in Inorganic Chemistry of the
Monsanto Company
- 1981 The Linus Pauling Award, Puget Sound Section, American Chemical
Society
- 1983 National Academy of Sciences Award in Chemical Sciences
- 1983 Bailar Medal, University of Illinois
- 1983 Doctor of Science, University of Chicago
- 1983 Robert A. Welch Foundation Award in Chemistry
- 1983 Nobel Prize in Chemistry
- 1984 Doctor of Science, Polytechnic Institute, New York
- 1984 Honorary Member, College of Chemists of Catalonia and Belears
- 1985 Priestly Medal, American Chemical Society
- 1985 Doctor of Science, State University of New York
- 1985 Corresponding Member, Academy of Arts and Science of Puerto Rico
- 1986 Honorary Member, Canadian Society for Chemistry
- 1986 Distinguished Achievement Award, International Precious Metals
Institute
- 1986 The Oesper Award, The Cincinnati Section of the American Chemical
Society
- 1987 Doctor of Science, University of Guelph
- 1988 Honorary Member, Hungarian Academy of Sciences
- 1988 Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, Seton Hall University
- 1988 Doctor of Science, Lajos Kossuth University of Debrecen, Hungary
- 1989 Honorary Fellowship, Royal Society of Chemistry
- 1989 Honorary Fellowship, Indian Chemical Society
- 1990 G. M. Kosolapoff Award, Auburn Section, American Chemical Society
- 1990 Doctor of Science, Northwestern University

ABSTRACT

Henry Taube begins his interview with a description of his early career at Cornell University and the University of California, Berkeley, and cites some of the reasons for his decision to accept a position at the University of Chicago. While at Cornell, Taube felt suffocated by the authoritarian style of compartmentalized departments. Taube also felt some level of separation at the University of Chicago between department members and members of the Institute for the Study of Metals and the Institute for Nuclear Studies. In 1956, he became chairman of the chemistry department at the University of Chicago. Taube then discusses his relationship with Warren Johnson, the dean of the physical sciences, who he felt helped the department survive in terms of balancing the budget and finding financial support. Taube then reflects on the history of the chemistry department and the various members of the faculty who ran the department in its early years. Next, Taube discusses his means of funding his research during his early years at the University of Chicago and his work with mass spectrometry. While at the University of Chicago, Taube worked with Frank H. Westheimer, a man he greatly respected, as well as Willard H. Libby, who was a personal friend. As a member of the chemistry faculty, Taube enjoyed numerous discussions with his colleagues and enjoyed the friendly atmosphere where faculty felt encouraged to share their research, which greatly contrasted with the atmosphere at Cornell. Taube also describes a confrontation with Morris S. Kharasch, which he felt greatly affected the early part of his term as chairman. Taube concludes his interview by discussing the ways in which his career as an instructor at Cornell and the research he was involved with negatively affected his first marriage and how he learned later to delegate authority and find balance between his professional and personal life.

INTERVIEWER

Leon Gortler is professor of chemistry at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. He holds A.B. and M.S. degrees from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from Harvard University where he worked with Paul Bartlett. He has long been interested in the history of chemistry, in particular the development of physical organic chemistry, and has conducted over fifty oral and videotaped interviews with major American chemists.

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