

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

ERNEST H. VOLWILER

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

in

Lake Forest, Illinois

on

18 August 1986

Dr. Ernest H. Volwiler

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

Oral History Program

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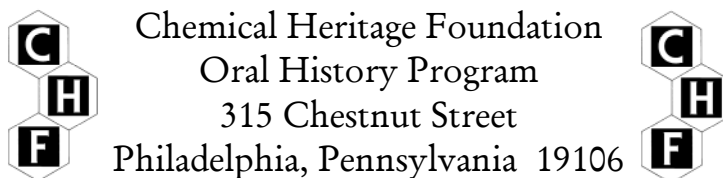
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ERNEST H. VOLWILER

1893 Born in Hamilton, Ohio on 22 August

Education

1914 B.A., chemistry, Miami University
1916 M.A., chemistry, University of Illinois
1918 Ph.D., chemistry, University of Illinois

Professional Experience

1910-1911 Teacher, Reilly Township Public School, Butler
County, Ohio
1913-1914 Teaching Assistant, Chemistry Department, Miami
University
University of Illinois
1914-1917 Teaching Assistant, Chemistry 1915
Chemist, Organic Chemical Manufacture (summer)
1916-1917 Chemist-in-Charge, Organic Chemical Manufacture
(summer)
1917-1918 Fellow in Chemistry
Abbott Laboratories
1918-1920 Research Chemist
1920-1930 Chief Chemist
1930-1933 Director of Research
1933-1946 Vice President, Research and Development
1946-1950 Executive Vice President
1950-1958 President and General Manager
1958 Chairman of the Board
1961- Consultant (retired)
1951-1961 President, Abbott Laboratories Fund
1958-1961 President, The Abbott Foundation
1958-1961 Chairman of the Board, Abbott Laboratories
International Co.
1958-1961 Chairman of the Board, Abbott Laboratories
Universal, Ltd.

Honors

- 1940 Modern Pioneers Award
- 1946 D.Sc. (Honorary), Miami University
- 1947 Honor Scroll Award, American Institute of Chemists
- 1949 D.Sc. (Honorary), Northwestern University
- 1951 Centennial Award, Northwestern University
- 1953 LL.D. (Honorary), Coe College
- 1954 LL.D. (Honorary), Knox College
- 1954 D.Sc. (Honorary), Philadelphia College of Pharmacy
and Science
- 1954 Chemical Industry Award
- 1955 Industrial Research Award
- 1958 D.Med.Sc. (Honorary), Southwestern at Memphis
- 1958 D.Sc. (Honorary), St. Louis College of Pharmacy and
Allied Sciences
- 1958 Priestley Medal, American Chemical Society
- 1958 Citation of Honor, Indiana Technical College
- 1959 Sesquicentennial Award, Miami University
- 1959 D.Sc. (Honorary), University of Illinois
- 1960 Gold Medal Award, American Institute of Chemists
- 1977 D.H.L. (Honorary), Lake Forest College
- 1986 Inventors Hall of Fame

ABSTRACT

Ernest Volwiler begins this interview by briefly discussing his early years in Ohio, leading to college study at Miami University, where he first became interested in chemistry. He recollects the influence of faculty there and his wish to undertake graduate studies at the University of Illinois. The recounts the circumstances of his decision to proceed to the Ph.D. program after completion of his Master's degree. Research work with Roger Adams and the summer organic chemicals production enterprise helped to introduce Volwiler to drug synthesis. His long career with Abbott Laboratories started in organic synthesis, including some plant production responsibilities. Volwiler recalls Dr. Abbott as well as some of his fellow workers in the laboratories in the 1920s and 1930s. World War II saw the production of penicillin and company expansion. Volwiler was a member of the pharmaceuticals investigating team sent to Germany immediately after the end of the war and he describes his experiences there. Post-war advancement led Volwiler to the presidency of Abbott Laboratories and he tells how he trimmed the production line and initiated development into new areas. His ACS activities culminated in his election as Society President in 1950. Volwiler ends his interview with Bohning by reflecting on the nature of the modern pharmaceutical industry.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning holds the B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in chemistry, and has been a member of the chemistry faculty at Wilkes College since 1959. He was chair of the Chemistry Department for sixteen years, and was appointed chair of the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences in 1988. He has been associated with the development and management of the oral history program at the Beckman Center since 1985, and was elected Chair of the Division of the History of Chemistry of the American Chemical Society for 1987.

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NOTES

1. Ernest H. Volwiler, "Recent Contributions of Chemistry to Medicine," Industrial and Engineering Chemistry, 15 (1923): 906-910.
2. "SCI Honors Volwiler," Chemical and Engineering News, 32 (1954): 4302.
3. See, for example, E. H. Volwiler and D. L. Tabern, "5,5-Substituted Barbituric Acids," Journal of the American Chemical Society, 52 (1930): 1676-1679. For a complete list of the publications of E. H. Volwiler see the research folder in The Beckman Center Oral History Program file #0050.
4. Ernest H. Volwiler and Arthur C. Cope, "Chemical Abstracts: Millstone or Milestone?" Chemical and Engineering News, 33 (1955): 2636-2639

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