

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

PAUL A. WILKS, JR.

BECKMAN HERITAGE PROJECT

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

David C. Brock and Arthur Daemmrich

at

Chemical Heritage Foundation
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

on

29 October 2002

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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



PAUL A. WILKS, JR.

1923 Born in Springfield, Massachusetts on 16 June

Education

1941 Springfield Technical High School
1944 B.S., engineering, Harvard University
(Class of 1945. Graduated in 1944 because of accelerated wartime schedule)

Professional Experience

Perkin-Elmer, Inc.
1944-1952 Assembler/Designer
1952-1957 Director, Marketing

Connecticut Instrument Corporation
1957-1962 Co-Founder and Assistant CEO

Barnes Engineering Company
1962-1963 Manager, Commercial Products

Wilks Scientific Corporation
1963-1977 Founder and CEO

Foxboro Company
1977-1979 Manager, Foxboro Wilks Division

General Analysis Corporation
1979-1993 Founder and CEO
1993-1999 Member, Board of Directors

Wilks Enterprise, Inc.
1997-present Founder and CEO

Honors

1981 Williams-Wright Award, Coblenz Society

ABSTRACT

Paul A. Wilks, Jr. begins the interview by discussing his early years and family life in Springfield, Massachusetts. After graduating from Springfield Technical High School, Wilks went to Harvard University where he majored in engineering. In 1945, he began working at Perkin-Elmer, Inc. Wilks worked as an assembler before becoming marketing director in 1952. In 1957, Wilks left Perkin-Elmer and, with Charles W. Warren, founded the Connecticut Instrument Company, a company that manufactured accessories for the infrared industry. Wilks and Warren sold their company to R. Bowling Barnes in 1962. After working for the Barnes Engineering Company for a year as commercial products manager, Wilks left to form the Wilks Scientific Corporation. This company manufactured a variety of spectroscopy products, from accessories to instruments. Wilks hired Anthony C. Gilby, an infrared spectroscopist from England, who helped in the development of these products. This company was sold to the Foxboro Company in the 1970s and Wilks managed the Wilks division of the company until 1979. After leaving Foxboro, Wilks founded the General Analysis Corporation to market products that monitored workspace environments. The company was unable to create a market in this area and changed its focus towards producing products for other industries, such as the beverage industry. Wilks decided to retire in 1993 and General Analysis was eventually sold to OI Corporation. Although theoretically retired, Wilks started another company in the 1990s, Wilks Enterprise, Inc. This company continues Wilks' efforts to produce applicable products based on infrared spectroscopy and other technologies. Wilks concludes the interview with reflections on the state of infrared technology and thoughts about his career.

INTERVIEWERS

David C. Brock is Program Manager for Educational and Historical Services at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the History Department, Program in the History of Science at Princeton University. In 1995, Mr. Brock received his M.A. in the History of Science from Princeton University and in 1992, he earned a M.Sc. in the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge from the University of Edinburgh.

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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