

*Imperiale des Sciences de St. Petersburg, tome ii., p. 476."*

Most modern textbooks on chemistry take us no further back than Priestley; so that if there be any truth in the above statement it is only fair that it should be noted. Possibly others beside myself may be interested in the matter.

*Charles W. Duckworth, Clayton, Manchester, 8 May 1886*

## THE HISTORY OF THE DEXTER AWARD

### Part I: Origins

At the beginning of the twentieth century numerous history of chemistry courses were taught in American colleges and universities. The course was considered a necessary part of the education of chemists and such courses remained popular until World War I. They were nearly always taught by professors whose major obligations lay in one of the other areas of chemistry. Following World War I, increased emphasis on education of chemists began to crowd history of chemistry courses out of the curriculum. Although a number of schools continued to offer the course, it was largely a labor of love on the part of an overworked professor and these courses were generally offered as electives rather than required courses.

There was, nevertheless, a certain amount of professional interest in history of chemistry. In 1922, Edgar Fahs Smith, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania and a longtime leader in chemical education, announced an unscheduled meeting at the ACS convention for any chemists interested in seeing a few historical selections from his library and in discussing history of chemistry. Charles Albert Browne of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Tenny L. Davis of MIT were cosponsors of the informal meeting which revealed considerable interest in such a session. It was determined to continue such meetings of chemists interested in history at future meetings. The group was soon formalized as a probationary section which began holding regular meetings. In 1927, the section was voted divisional status and has functioned as a small division of the ACS since that time.

The division did not grow to large size but contained a nucleus of enthusiasts who read historical papers, exhibited favorite books and pieces of apparatus, and talked shop in the corridors. No one thought of history of chemistry as a formal profession but as an avocation pursued by enthusiasts.

Sidney M. Edelstein became associated with the group sometime during the 1940's and in 1948 volunteered to take over the secretary-treasurership from Ralph Oesper. He continued to serve as secretary-treasurer until late 1965,



Edgar Fahs Smith

when the position was passed on to Sister Saint John Nepumocene. In many respects, Edelstein was the officer who held the section together during a period after the original founders were no longer around and a new group of enthusiasts had not firmly congealed.

Edelstein was born on 22 January 1912 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He was educated at Baylor School in Chattanooga until he entered MIT. He received a bachelor's degree in chemistry in 1932. Returning to Chattanooga, he took a position as textile microscopist and research chemist at Dixie Mercerizing Company. After three years he became Research Associate with the American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists. In 1938, he became Vice President and director of Research with Lamede, Inc. in Rossville, Georgia, and in 1939 took a similar position at Hart Products Corporation in Woodbridge, New Jersey. He held this position until 1945, when he founded the Dexter Chemical Corporation and began his long service as its President. The corporation grew to worldwide status and the related Dexter International has headquarters in Israel.

After graduation from college, Edelstein began building up a splendid library dealing with the history of science. The library concentrated particularly in three areas - early chemistry, alchemy, and dyeing. Besides his many books, the library contains autographed letters, engravings, etchings, medals, and presentation copies of books. Several years ago this collection was transferred to the National Library at Hebrew University in recognition of the deep feelings held by Edelstein and his wife, Mildred, for the nation of Israel. Through the Israel Educational Fund, the Edelsteins also built "Beit Edelstein", the library and community center at Kiryat Shemona, and they have also built several day-care centers in the country. Dr. Edelstein is an honorary chairman of the United Jewish Appeal and a

member of the board of governors of Haifa University and of the American Friends of the Hebrew University.

In the field of textile chemistry and dyes he has carried on extensive work on the history of dyeing and finishing. In 1960, he studied the fabrics from the Bar Kochba caves in the Dead Sea area. With associates at Dexter, he developed new techniques for separation of individual dyes and the



Sidney Milton Edelstein

utilization of IR spectra for identification purposes. His research has included a reexamination of the chemistry of Tyrian Purple.

In the field of dye technology, Edelstein has been granted 12 American and 26 foreign patents on textile chemicals and textile finishing. He has contributed important tests and practical methods to the mercerizing industry. His Barium Number is now an official method of the A.A.T.C.C. He also pioneered the development and application of alkali soluble cellulose solutions. His research of cellulose zincate solutions (kopan, celfon) and their applications was a factor in expansion of production of military netting during World War II. His work on phosphate co-esters has placed versatile chemicals in the hands of the wet processing industries. His work on uron structure played an important role in the development of wash-and-wear and permanent press technology.

By the mid-fifties, Edelstein was convinced that history of chemistry lacked broad visibility at a time when important work was still being done by older enthusiasts while a new generation of enthusiasts was entering the field. It was his decision to give recognition to workers in the history of chemistry by creating an award in the field. The

result was the Dexter Award, to be administered by the History of Chemistry Division of the American Chemical Society. The award was to be given annually and carried an honorarium and plaque for the recipient. The machinery for issuance of the Dexter Award was set up in time for granting of the first award to Ralph Oesper in September 1956.

The award was to be given for recognition of longtime contributions to the field, publication of a significant book or paper, preparation of a bibliography, or of other services of significance to the development of the history of chemistry. The history division set up an awards committee consisting of three members with staggered three-year appointments. Members of the selection committee are appointed by the chairman of HIST and serve anonymously. The secretary of HIST announces a call for nominations for the next award and receives nominations until the deadline has been reached. The nominations are passed on to members of the awards committee and the selection is announced in the Spring - with the award being given at the Fall ACS meeting.

Part II of the series, dealing with the first decade of the Dexter Award, will appear in the next issue.

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## BOOK NOTES

*Essays on the History of Organic Chemistry*, James G. Traynham (Editor), Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London, 1987. ix + 145 pp. Cloth. \$25.00

At their worst the published proceedings for special symposia consist of camera-ready copy done in at least five type styles, cheaply bound and outrageously overpriced for the library market. Editing is minimal and about a fourth of the papers are usually unrelated, save in the most charitable sense of the word, to the central theme of the symposium. If this caricature represents one end of the spectrum, then the book under review represents the other extreme, as it is an example *par excellence* of what books of this type can and should be.

Based on the 1984 Mardi Gras Symposium in Organic