THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

HERMAN E. SCHROEDER

Transcript of Interviews
Conducted by

Raymond C. Ferguson

in

Greenville, Delaware

on

30 December 1986 and 12 January 1987

Herman E. Schroeder
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Oral History Program

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(Date) December 21, 1989

(Revised 24 February 1988)

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

HERMAN E. SCHROEDER

1915 Born in Brooklyn, New York on 6 July

Education

1936 A.B., chemistry, Harvard University
1937 A.M., chemistry, Harvard University
1939 Ph.D., organic chemistry, Harvard University

Professional Experience

E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., Inc.
Chemical Department
1938-1945 Research Chemist
Organic Chemicals Department, Jackson Laboratory
1945-1946 Research Chemist
1946-1948 Research Supervisor
1949-1950 Research Division Head
1951-1956 Assistant Laboratory Director
Elastomer Chemicals Department
1957-1963 Assistant Director of Research
1963-1965 Director of Research
1965-1980 Director of Research and Development

1980- President, Schroeder Scientific Services, Inc.

Honors

1936 summa cum laude, Harvard University
1936 Phi Beta Kappa
1979 General Award, International Institute of Synthetic Rubber Producers
1984 Goodyear Medal, American Chemical Society, Rubber Division

ABSTRACT

Herman Schroeder starts the interview by telling of his family background and growing up in Brooklyn. An early learner, Schroeder attended public and private high schools where his scientific interests were first aroused. After an early graduation he entered Harvard, where he initially planned for a career in medicine but soon changed towards chemistry, in part influenced by his tutor, John Edsall. Staying on at Harvard for graduate study in the physical aspects of organic chemistry, Herman Schroeder investigated the rates and mechanism of the closure of large rings. He discusses the choice between industrial and academic careers and the advice of the Harvard faculty. Arriving at the Du Pont Experimental Station in 1938, Schroeder outlines his initial assignments and his important wartime research on tire cord adhesives. Transferring to the Jackson Laboratories, he worked on both dyestuff synthesis and the mechanisms of dyeing synthetic fibers, as well as obtaining experience in production control. Moving to greater research responsibilities, Schroeder played an important role in the development of several polymers, which is described towards the end of the first interview. In a second interview, Ferguson asks Schroeder to comment on some of his Du Pont colleagues and on some of the academic consultants to the company. The interview concludes with some of Schroeder's retirement activities and a full account of the Louisville plant explosion.

INTERVIEWER

Raymond C. Ferguson obtained his degrees in chemistry from Iowa State University (B.S., M.S.) and his Ph.D. from Harvard University. He worked in research divisions of the Organic Chemicals, Elastomer Chemicals, and Central Research Departments of Du Pont, principally in molecular spectroscopy, organic structure analysis, and polymer characterization. Currently he is affiliated with CONDUX, Inc., a consulting association of ex-Du Pont professionals.

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