

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

ALFRED R. BADER

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Arnold Thackray

in

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

on

31 July 1987

CENTER FOR HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

Oral History Program

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Alfred R.

Bader

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(Signature)

Alfred R. Bader
Dr. Alfred R. Bader

(Date)

October 18 91

ALFRED R. BADER

1924 Born in Vienna, Austria on 28 April

Education

1939-1940 Brighton Technical College
1945 B.Sc., engineering chemistry, Queen's
University
1946 B.A., history, Queen's University
1947 M.S., chemistry, Queen's University
1949 Ph.D., organic chemistry, Harvard University

Professional Experience

1943-1947 Chemist, Murphy Paint Company
1950-1954 Research Chemist and Organic Group Leader,
Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company
1951 Co-founder, Aldrich Chemical Company
1954-1955 Chief Chemist, Aldrich Chemical Company
1955-1975 President, Aldrich Chemical Company
1975-1980 President, Sigma-Aldrich Corporation
1980- Chairman, Sigma-Aldrich Corporation

Honors

1980 Honorary Sc.D. degree, University of Wisconsin-
Milwaukee
1983 Engineer-of-the-Year Award, Engineers and
Scientists of Milwaukee, Inc.
1984 Honorary Sc.D. degree, University of Wisconsin-
Madison
1984 Honorary Sc.D. degree, Purdue University
1986 Honorary LL.D. degree, Queen's University

ABSTRACT

Alfred Bader begins this interview with a discussion of his early years in Vienna, including his family background and Gymnasium education. This is followed by additional education in England, living in Canada as a refugee, and his undergraduate education at Queen's University. Bader then describes his graduate education with Louis F. Fieser at Harvard, and discusses the faculty and friends during his tenure there. The interview continues with Bader's move to Milwaukee, his research with PPG, and the origin and growth of the Aldrich Chemical Company, including the merger with Sigma Chemical Company and the decision to go public. The interview concludes with Bader's comments on his art collection and family matters.

INTERVIEWER

Arnold Thackray majored in the physical sciences before turning to the history of science, receiving a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in 1966. He has held appointments at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, the Institute for Advanced Study, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 1983 he received the Dexter Award from the American Chemical Society for outstanding contributions to the history of chemistry. He is Director of the Beckman Center for the History of Chemistry.

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1 Childhood and Early Education

Parents and family situation in Vienna. "Adopted" mother. Gymnasium education in Vienna. Professor Sedlmayer. Forced to leave school. Stamp collecting. The move to England.

4 Education in England

The East Hove Senior School for Boys. Support from Mrs. Wolff. Living as a refugee with the Scharff family. Brighton Technical College. The move to Canada. Living in a refugee internment camp.

9 Undergraduate Education in Canada

Sponsorship by Martin Wolff. The International Student Service (ISS). Junior and senior matriculation at McGill University. Late registration at Queen's University. Engineering chemistry. Summer job with Murphy Paint Company. Bachelor's degree in engineering chemistry. Bachelor's degree in history. Interest in commercial part of paint chemistry. Laboratory work with Professor McKay. Incident with McKay leading to first publication.

15 Graduate Education at Harvard

Applications to Harvard and the ETH in Zu"rich. Interest in making compounds. Fellowship from Louis Fieser. Courses at Harvard. Comparison of Harvard and Queen's. Work on the Hooker Oxidation. Making diazomethane from MNNG. Friends and faculty at Harvard. Ph.D. degree. Showing work by Mary Fieser to be incorrect.

23 The move to Milwaukee and Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co. Conditions at PPG. Noncatalytic transesterification of beta-keto esters. Preparation of conjugated unsaturated phenols for phenolic resins. Preparation of diphenolic acid. Reaction of diketene with acetone.

26 Early History of Aldrich Chemical Company

Decision to remain in Milwaukee when PPG moves to Pittsburgh. Full-time with Aldrich. Partnership with Jack Eisendrath. Financial support from Bill Kesselman. Gaining full control of the company. Du Pont order for suberic acid. Earlier formation of Aldrich. First catalogs and products.

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NOTES

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"Unsaturated Phenols. II. Attempted Syntheses of o-Vinylphenol," Journal of the American Chemical Society, 77 (1955): 4155; Bader, "Unsaturated Phenols. III. Alkali Isomerization," Journal of the American Chemical Society, 78 (1956): 1709-1713.

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