

A Tribute to Joseph G. Cannon, 1926–2011



Joseph G. Cannon was born on September 30, 1926, in Decatur, Illinois, and died in Iowa City, Iowa, on December 17, 2011. He received his B.S. (with high honors) in Pharmacy in 1951, M.S. in Chemistry in 1953, and Ph.D. in Chemistry (with G. L. Webster), minoring in Pharmacology in 1956, all from the University of Illinois.

In 1956, he was appointed Assistant Professor in the School of Pharmacy at the University of Wisconsin and became Associate Professor in 1960. He joined the faculty of the College of Pharmacy at the University of Iowa in 1962 and was named Professor of Medicinal Chemistry at that institution in 1965. He remained at the University of Iowa, taking Professor Emeritus status in 1996.

Professor Cannon's early research focused on the conformational chemistry of depolarizing myoneural blocking agents related to succinyl dicholine and the three-dimensional geometry of acetylcholine. A molecule synthesized in his laboratory, *trans*-ACTM, is perhaps the only known synthetic acetylcholine congener that is considered as good a substrate for acetylcholinesterase as acetylcholine. Cannon and his pharmacology collaborator at the University of Iowa, Professor J. P. Long, investigated structure–activity relationships of dopamine and its analogues and congeners and conducted pharmacological studies of hemicholinium as part of an overall search for prophylactic agents against phosphorus-containing “nerve gasses” and insecticides.

In 1984 he was named the Dale E. Wurster Fellow at the College of Pharmacy, and in 1994 he received the Iowa Regents Award for Faculty Excellence. In 1997 he was named the recipient of The Smissman Bristol-Meyers-Squibb Award in Medicinal Chemistry, thus including him in the Division of Medicinal Chemistry Hall of Fame.

He taught an American Chemical Society short course entitled “Pharmacology for Chemists” for 27 years, earning him the ACS Outstanding Teacher Award in 2006. Professor Cannon also served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry*, *Chirality*, *Annual Reports in Medicinal Chemistry*, and the sixth edition of Burger's *Medicinal Chemistry and Drug Discovery*. Since 1998, he also served as Book Review Editor for the *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry*. Dr. Cannon was Chairman of the Division of Medicinal Chemistry in 1971–

1972 and local chairman of the National Medicinal Chemistry Symposium in Iowa City in 1972.

During Professor Cannon's career at the Universities of Wisconsin and Iowa he served as mentor to 22 M.S. candidates, 55 Ph.D. candidates, and 20 postdoctoral fellows.

Joe will be remembered as a wonderful raconteur. He would elaborate on events that occurred in his life and kept his audiences enthralled and laughing. I recall the story of one of his students working in the laboratory on a Saturday afternoon when Joe suddenly made a surprise appearance. The student was distilling a colorless liquid in a 3 L flask containing a number of slices of lemon and berries. Joe asked his student what he was doing. The student replied that he was purifying some alcohol for a reaction. When Joe asked why the student was purifying the alcohol, the student told him that a lemon and some berries had fallen into the alcohol. After a brief pause Joe smiled and said, “You s.o.b., I know what you're up to!” This story does not end there. When Joe married Lynne a few months later, he received an anonymous 4-ounce bottle labeled, “s.o.b. gin” as a wedding gift. As the years progressed, this story was embellished a number of times and was enjoyed by all.

Joe is survived by his wife, Lynne Cannon, whom he married in 1960, his four children, Huldah, Douglas, Barbara, and Steven, and four grandchildren, Sophia, Laine, Rocco, and Avery.

John L. Neumeyer, Matthews Distinguished
Professor of Medicinal Chemistry and Chemistry,
Emeritus
Northeastern University

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