Potts Receives Bailey Medal

BEFORE 114 dinner guests, including one from West Germany, the annual Bailey award, which is a bronze medal, was given to R. H. Potts of Armour and Company, Chicago, Ill., at the March 23, 1960, meeting of the North Central Section of the American Oil Chemists' Society in the Builders' club, Chicago. This was the second annual award; last year the winner was V. C. Mehlenbacher of Swift and Company, Chicago. A. A. Rodeghier, president, presided.

Four national past presidents of the Society were present: H. C. Black, Mr. Mehlenbacher, C. E. Morris, and M. L. Sheely, also Mrs. Potts and son Jack Potts. The Russell H. Rogers Jr. memorial fund was announced, and contributions for the education of the Rogers children may be sent to J. V. Landis at Wesson Oil and Snowdrift Inc., Chicago.

The Nominating Committee, comprising S. S. Fein, chairman, R. A. Reiners, and D. V. Stingley, presented a slate of officers, all of whom were elected: L. R. Dugan Jr., president; Decatur B. Campbell, vice president; Mr. Landis, secretary; A. V. Graci Jr., treasurer; and S. C. Mikszta and Cecelia Gilmore, members-at-large. Continuing as members-at-large are R. J. Buswell and T. W. Findley.

MR. SHEELY, in introducing Mr. Potts, paid tribute to the late A. E. Bailey, author of two standard reference works in fats and oils and past president of the Society, for whom the award has been named. It is given for outstanding achievements in fat and oil technology.

He then described Mr. Potts' career, beginning with his graduation as a chemical engineer from Lehigh university in 1922 and his first job with Armour that year. After marrying Nancy Anne Gray, he went to the Sinclair Oil Company in Gary, Ind., but returned to Armour in the fall of 1923 as general supervisor of the glycerine and fatty acid plants.

Fatty acid distillation at that time, Mr. Sheely recalled, was done in large circular pots having cast iron bottoms, heated with open coal fires. Copper tube condensers, a partial vacuum, and plenty of injected steam completed the crude operation. Potts had learned about petroleum industry methods, especially in the use of pipe stills for continuous distillation. One day they visited Gary as observers. Potts had the thought that if a unit using metals which would withstand the corrosive effect of fatty acid vapors could be built, he could not only distill the crude fatty acids but could also make an effective separation of the fatty acids at different boiling points.

By 1933, Mr. Sheely continued, Mr. Potts had designed and constructed a small pilot-plant unit and applied for patents and Armour had constructed the first continuous fractionating unit for fatty acids which was built with solid stainless steel. One of the problems which arose was that of corrosion, but this was eventually solved too.

IN 1928 Mr. Potts had become assistant superintendent of the Soap, Glycerine, and Fatty Acid Division, initiating many improvements, according to Mr. Sheely. In 1934 he started the first process and product development group at the Auxiliaries plant. In 1937 he was transferred to the central research division to head up the development section for edible and inedible oils, designing and building two pilot plants. One was for edible products involving processes for the continuous hydrogenation and deodorization of tallows and shortening oils; the other was for the development of processes to manufacture chemical derivatives from fats and oils.

In 1940 he designed and built the first commercial unit at the 31st Street Auxiliaries to produce fatty nitriles and amines. From 1943 on he has had various assignments in the Chemical Division, and "it can be truthfully said that each and every unit of the Armour chemical plant at McCook, Ill., and its composite structure is a monumental reflection of the genius and chemical engineering ability of Mr. Potts," Mr. Sheely commented.

Over the years Mr. Potts has been the author of 14 papers, many of which have appeared in the A.O.C.S. Journal, Mr. Sheely added. He has also been the inventor or co-inventor of about 25 U. S. patents. Included in the licenses are operations in England, Norway, and France. In connection with the licensing Mr. Potts is right at home designing, engineering, and supervising initial start-up operations. A slide rule is ever present in his hand.

Mr. Potts likes to travel, was in Palestine a year ago and took many color slides and filled a notebook, is active in civic affairs in La Grange, Ill., and is an ardent photographer, rose grower, fisherman, and miniature railroad engineer, revealed Mr. Sheely. The Potts family numbers two sons, Jack who is a graduate in chemical engineering from the University of Wisconsin, now with the Pure Oil Company at Lemont, Ill., and Bob who is a graduate of Lehigh in chemical engineering, now with Du Pont in Flint, Mich.

BAILEY AWARD—M. L. Sheely (*left*) and A. A. Rodeghier chat with R. H. Potts (*center*), winner of the Bailey award, at the Builders' club, Chicago, March 23, 1960. Mr. Potts is technical advisor, chemical division, Armour and Company, Chicago, Ill.