

Profile: John Cowan

"Research is a fascinating business," says former AOCS President John Cowan. "Ideas are a dime a dozen; good ideas are more expensive, but the payoff lies in getting the work done."

John is one of the fellows who gets the work done. His name is most familiar to fats and oils researchers for his work on edible soy oil, but he also did pioneering work on dimer acids that led to commercial manufacture and use of polyamide resins derived from dimer acids, ethylene diamine and other diamines; he directed work on modifying linseed oil emulsion paints; and he helped discover the cause of toxicity in soy meal extracted with trichloroethylene.

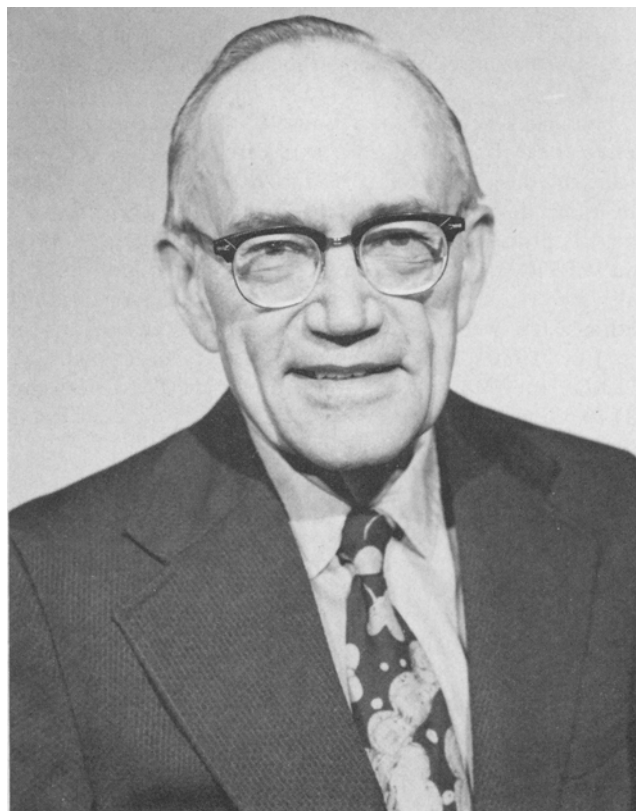
His research work has led to more than 250 publications and 46 patents. He has received numerous awards from industry and government. And he has been invited to speak on fats and oils processing throughout the world.

John tends to be a bit self-deprecating about his more than 30-year career at the USDA's Northern Regional Research Center. Some say he has mellowed a bit since retiring in 1973 as chief of the oilseed crops laboratory at the Peoria, Illinois, complex.

For instance, when he talks about his work on dimer acids—which helped spawn a host of new products—John is most apt to mention that the first commercial applications of the research was production of a low-temperature sealant for candy bar wrappers. The Wisconsin firm that received the first 100-pound test batch quickly asked for another 100 pounds, but was politely told to seek a supplier in private industry.

During World War II, the NRRC developed a synthetic rubber from soybeans that was tested successfully as a recap on tires that would last about 1,500 miles. The synthetic rubber project stopped, however, when Washington told the NRRC to concentrate on edible uses of soybean oil.

To the young John Cowan growing up in Danville, Illinois, however, all of this lay in the future. John's father had been a harness maker until his shop burned down two days after the insurance lapsed. John's father then went to work for the telephone company. John's older sister became a teacher; his older brother became a salesman. Both are now deceased. Young John, however, suffered from asthma and his family sent him to live with relatives in Denver. It was one of the turning points of his life, John says, for the academic challenges in junior high in Denver were far more stimulating and rewarding than what he had encountered previously. Returning to high school in Danville—where his sister was a teacher—was a letdown. After high school he enrolled at the University of Colorado



Cowan

to study chemical engineering.

College was the second challenging education experience of his life, John says. After four years at the University of Colorado, he returned to the University of Illinois where he received a degree in chemistry in 1934. Parental expectations were that John, like his sister, would become a teacher. With financial help from his sister, John enrolled in graduate school and received his doctorate in 1938 under C.S. Marvel. Graduate school with professors such as Marvel, Adams, Fixson and Shriner on the faculty was his third major educational challenge. The fourth would come many years later when he attended the Federal Executive Institute for eight weeks.

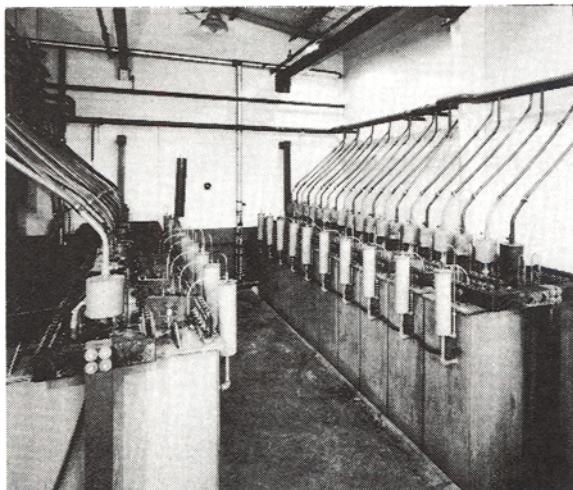
It was also in 1938 that John married Lucile Chenoweth, a young lady he met in a Colorado classroom where seating was alphabetical.

After a postdoctorate fellowship at the University of

Continued on page 330A.



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Illinois and one year as a chemistry instructor at De Pauw University, John accepted a post with the newly organized USDA research group in Peoria. He arrived before the new group's building was completed and was assigned to temporary work space at Bradley University. Since leaving the NRRC in 1973, he has returned to Bradley as an adjunct professor of chemistry, teaching qualitative organic chemistry.

His major World War II and postwar project was development of ways to improve soy oil for edible use. Soy oil was being used in shortening and, to some extent, in salad dressings when John began his project. It was the NRRC team, led by John Cowan, that pinpointed the harmful effects of trace metals, conducted extensive research on hydrogenation of soybean oil and developed taste panel methods to provide relatively "objective" evaluations of the effect of different processing techniques on soy oil's organoleptic qualities.

He received the Chevreul Medal in France in 1975, an American Soybean Association award for research and education in 1970, the A.E. Bailey Award from the AOCs North Central Section in 1961, as well as individual and group USDA Superior Service Awards in 1948, 1952 and 1963. John is a member of Sigma Xi and Phi Lambda Upsilon.

John originally joined AOCs in 1941, becoming active in the mid-1950s. He served on numerous AOCs administrative committees and was elected a member of the Governing Board in 1963. After two terms as secretary, he was elected vice president in 1967 and served as president in 1968. Various changes in society administrative procedures were implemented during his term and educational activities were increased.

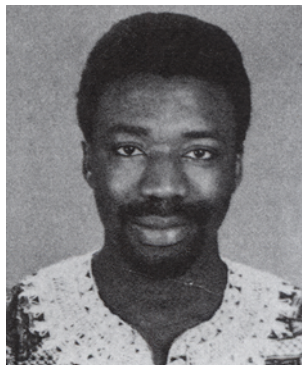
At the ISF/AOCs World Congress in New York this spring, John will present a paper on an extensive bibliography on soy that he has been preparing as a consultant to the American Soybean Association. Lucile undoubtedly will be with him. A former Girl Scout administrator, Lucile is a constant companion to John on his travels, sharing driving chores and generally frequently taking charge of getting things done. John says they've been almost everywhere together except Russia, Africa and South America. Lucile also helps John watch his diet and health—John is a self-diagnosed diabetic, having compared his symptoms with a coworker who was diabetic. Lucile and John have two married daughters and four grandchildren.

Having spent his career in a chemistry lab, John is now interested in computers. Just before Christmas 1979, he was noting that a household computer at a local electronics store was selling for about \$500, while the NRRC had paid about \$75,000 for a computer with similar capacity not too many years previously. He was considering buying the computer as a Christmas present for one of the four grandchildren, and then giving it a careful tryout before delivery. Computers will have to compete for John's spare time with lapidary and silversmithing. He usually wears some example of his lapidary and silversmith work, perhaps a belt buckle or string tie slide (John has sworn off conventional ties.).

Challenges still remain for fats and oils researchers, John says, and it's those challenges that make research a fascinating business. □



Jungermann



Odumosu

Jungermann elected to ASE board

Dr. Eric Jungermann has been elected to the board of directors of Lee Pharmaceuticals, headquartered in South El Monte, California. Jungermann is president of Jungermann Associates, a Chicago-based technical consulting firm specializing in soaps and cosmetics. He holds over 100 patents and has written numerous articles and several books on surfactants.

Lee Pharmaceuticals develops, manufactures and markets sophisticated biomedical polymer adhesives for use in dentistry, as well as a line of cosmetic products. □

Odumosu joins Lever affiliate

Dr. Olutosin T. Odumosu has joined Lever Brothers Nigeria Ltd. as an edible and toilet preparations development manager. He recently completed postdoctoral work at the ARC Food Research Institute in England. □

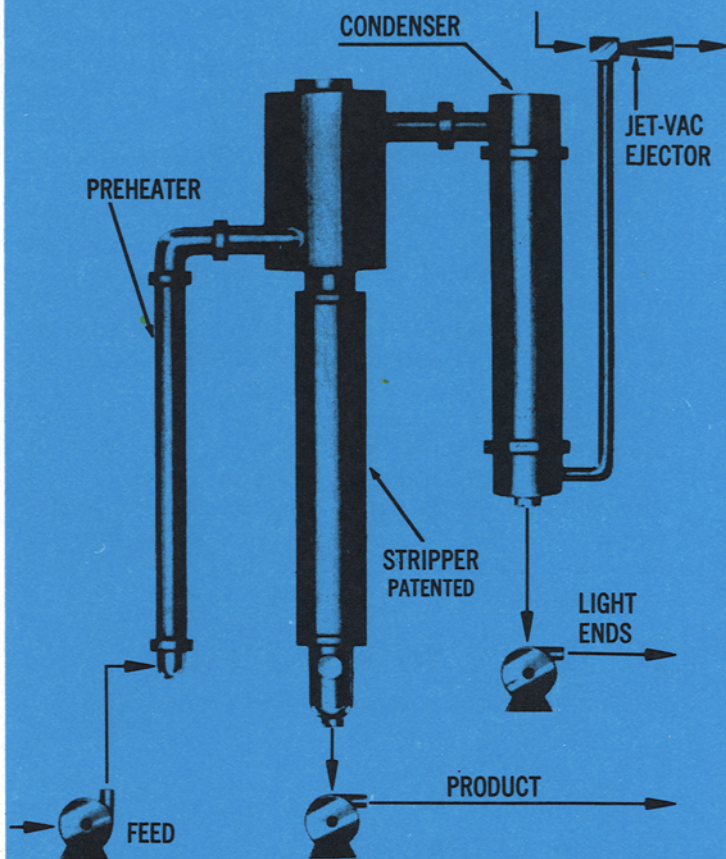
Postdoc training at Hormel offered

Postdoctoral fellowships are available for training in lipid and atherosclerosis-related research under a grant from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. The research training will be for one to three years, beginning July 1, 1980, and supplemented with lectures by faculty and invited speakers. Minimum stipend is \$14,000. Trainees must be U.S. citizens, noncitizen nationals or permanent residents and hold an M.D. or Ph.D. degree. Further details are available from Dr. Ralph Holman, Professor and Director, The Hormel Institute, University of Minnesota, 801 16th Ave. N.E., Austin, Minnesota 55912. □

Appointments

Amerchol Corporation of Edison, NJ, an affiliate of CPC International, Inc., has named Robert J. Wisniewski vice president of sales and marketing . . . Duncan M. Moir has

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People

been elected president of Emery Industries, Ltd., succeeding **R.H. Ruebottom**, who has retired; **Anthony J. Kaufman** has been appointed vice president and general manager . . . **Henry F. Maso** has been promoted to the position of senior vice president at Amerchol Corporation . . . Celanese Corporation has named **Brian M. Rushton** corporate vice president of technology . . . **Luis Olavarrieta** has been appointed regional manager for Central America and Mexico at Hodag Chemical Corporation . . . Glyco Chemicals, Inc., has promoted **Leonard Appele** to cosmetic industry manager . . . **Kent N. Mittelberg** has been elected chairman of the Food Protein Council and its executive committee; Mittelberg is director of proteins and specialty feeds for the AgriProducts Group of A.E. Staley Mfg. Co., in Decatur, IL . . . Durkee Industrial Food Group/SCM Corporation has announced the appointment of **Sharrann E. Simmons** to the position of National Technical Service Representative-Confectionary and Hard Butters . . . The Harshaw Chemical Company has named three new assignments at their Cleveland area operations: **Ralph W. Cook** has been appointed plant manager of the Cleveland Plant, succeeding **Charles J. Slany**; Slany has been appointed director of special projects; and **Robert E. McCarthy** has been named director of manufacturing for the firm's catalyst department. □

Dr. Berry to head AIC

Dr. E. Janet Berry, a patent attorney in New York, has

assumed office as president of the American Institute of Chemists, a post she will hold through 1981. Dr. Berry received her doctorate in organic chemistry from Purdue and worked as a research chemist before moving into the patent field after receiving her law degree in 1952. She is a fellow of the American Institute of Chemists and a member of Sigma Xi and numerous chemical and legal societies. She is the first woman president of the 5,500-member AIC.

Deaths

AOCS was recently notified of the June 15, 1979, death of Maurice C. Juge, president of Southern Testing Labs, Inc. in New Orleans, LA. He had been a member of AOCS since 1959.

Edward E. Alt, Jr., Assistant Director Industrial Development and Research Applications at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Eastern Regional Research Center, Wyndmoor, PA, died Jan. 26, 1980.

AOCS has been informed of the death last fall of Robert Carrigan of Charlotte, NC. Mr. Carrigan joined AOCS approximately two years ago at age 79. Mr. Carrigan operated his own consulting firm, providing guidance and opportunity to younger analytical chemists beginning their careers. □

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