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Publisher *Taylor & Francis*

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Organic Preparations and Procedures International

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t902189982>

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To cite this Article (1980) 'Charles G. Ouerberger', *Organic Preparations and Procedures International*, 12: 5, ii – vi

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/00304948009356476

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00304948009356476>

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Charles G. Overberger

Charles Gilbert Overberger

This issue of OPPI is dedicated to Charles G. Overberger, educator, researcher, administrator, and servant to the Chemical Profession in its broadest aspects. His former students and associates have contributed the papers. It is particularly fitting that he be so honored because his commitment to organic synthesis stands in the vanguard of his contributions to science.

Of his 359 publications, 135 are in synthetic organic chemistry and reaction mechanisms. If papers solely dedicated to monomer syntheses are added, they total about 165. Many parts of other papers in physical organic and polymer studies are significantly based on synthetic methodology.

The series of some 30 papers on the synthesis of monomers contribute the syntheses of many substituted styrenes, optically active monomers, and their polymers, butadienes with large alkyl groups in the 2-position, vinyl sulfonates, vinyltriazines, -imidazole, -pyridines, -cyclohexane, -cyclopentene, -cyclopropane, -thiazolidone and other monomers potentially useful as antiradiation drugs, and, most recently, the syntheses of polyethylenimine containing nucleic acid base derivatives as pendant groups. A number of papers provide examples of the use of polymers as organic reagents. Eight monographs have appeared in Organic Syntheses and six in Macromolecular Syntheses. All together, these papers comprise nearly half of his published contributions.

There are also some 80-odd publications on the preparation of polymers and mechanisms of polymerization by free radical routes, about 30 papers on ionic polymerization, and 75 or so on physical organic chemistry. Highlighted here is a most important study of the synthesis of aliphatic and cyclic azo compounds and their mechanisms of decomposition to form initiators for radical polymerization.

This prodigious work reflects a number of personal qualities - his ability to elicit the best from his students and colleagues by being on the cutting edge of major problems, and

by his own enormous skill in the laboratory. To illustrate, it was he who verified the synthesis of cyclooctatetraene from pseudopelletierine, published in 1911 by R. Willstätter and E. Waser, but then "lost" to the chemical world until he repeated the synthesis [see A. C. Cope and C. G. Overberger, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 70, 1433 (1947)].

Simultaneously with his research, Overberger became known for his dedication to teaching. He has championed the importance of polymer science in all teaching in a department of chemistry and has published or spoken on "A Summer Research Participation Program for High School Students", "Macromolecules. An Area of Growth in Education and Research", and "A Faculty Aware of Macromolecular Science". He has participated in the Biennial Education Conference of the Division of Chemical Education. His counsel and guidance of over 100 Ph.D. students, an additional 100 B.S. and M.S. students, and numerous postdoctoral students has been a strong educational effort. His success can be measured by the many professors, and industrial and governmental leaders who have been in his groups.

Charles Overberger has given unselfishly to the Profession of Chemistry. Beginning with the New York Section in which he held virtually every position including Chairman, he eventually became President of the American Chemical Society and a member of its Board of Directors. Noteworthy is the formation of the International Meeting of Chemical Society Presidents, initiated during his presidency with seven countries represented and now with over forty. This group meets biennially to consider world wide problems which chemistry can alleviate. Increasingly, the governments of the countries represented are listening.

It is difficult to select an outstanding achievement which stands out from so many in which he has taken part. However, I am taken by his educational effort for Brazil. He has been instrumental in setting up and giving direction to the macromolecular research program at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. This program is now granting M.S. and Ph.D. degrees

in macromolecular science and engineering and is slowly beginning to have an impact on the Brazilian economy. In the new institute building, an office has been assigned to him.

The reader is directed to the lists of past and present professional efforts which are appended.

Each outstanding contributor to science not only adds to the literature of his field through investigative reports, but also in other ways to its literature. In this respect, too, he has been exceptional.

Dr. Overberger is one of the editors of a review journal, FORTSCHRITTE DER HOCHPOLYMEREN-FORSCHUNG (ADVANCES IN POLYMER SCIENCE); an editor of the JOURNAL OF POLYMER SCIENCE; and the first editor of a series of volumes entitled MACROMOLECULAR SYNTHESSES; a member of the Honorary Editorial Advisory Board of a publication of selected, translated papers from the Russian journal VYSOKOMOLEKULIARNYE SOEDINENIYA; a member of the Advisory Board of ORGANIC PREPARATIONS AND PROCEDURES INTERNATIONAL; a member of the Advisory Board of POLYMER NEWS; and a member of the Advisory Board of MACROMOLECULES. He is a past member of the Advisory Board of the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY.

I could not end without a few random comments on the human aspects of C.G.O. His children were convinced for a long time that the national celebration of October 12 was in their father's honor. When a student died in an automobile accident, he completed the write-up of the thesis, saw to it that the degree was awarded posthumously, and presented the bound copy to the parents. Students have picked him up at the airport - or taken him to the airport - in order to enjoy a research discussion. Once a student said that a reaction would not work; C.G.O. went to the laboratory and carried out the synthesis. An avid tennis player, bowler, and expert at Chicago pool, he proved to be too much for unsuspecting students. At a Christmas party at which students lampooned the faculty, C.G.O. was represented by a large box with a flashing red light on top and an occasional voice from within saying "It's your turn, _____ (a student)!"

E. I. Becker
University of Massachusetts at Boston

Positons Held

- 1944-46 - Research Associate, University of Illinois, with Prof. Carl S. Marvel
- 1946-47 - DuPont Postdoctoral Fellowship, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with Prof. A. C. Cope
- 1947-50 - Assistant Professor of Chemistry, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn
- 1950-51 - Associate Professor of Chemistry, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn
- 1951-55 - Professor of Chemistry and Associate Director of Polymer Research Institute, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn
- 1955-63 - Head, Department of Chemistry, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn
- 1963-64 - Acting Vice President for Research, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn
- 1964-67 - Dean of Science and Director, Polymer Research Institute, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn
- 1967-72 - Chairman, Department of Chemistry, The University of Michigan
- 1969-present - Founder and Director, Macromolecular Research Center, The University of Michigan
- 1972-present - Vice President for Research, The University of Michigan

Honorary Degrees

- Doctor of Science, Holy Cross College, 1966
- Doctor of Science, Long Island University, 1968
- Doctor Honoris Causa, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, 197

Professional Affiliations

- Member, American Chemical Society
- Member, The Chemical Society
- Member, The American Institute of Chemists
- Member, American Association for the Advancement of Science
- Member, The Society of Chemical Industry
- Member, Alpha Chi Sigma, Phi Lambda Upsilon, Sigma Xi, Phi Ita Sigma, Phi Kappa Pi and Sigma Pi
- Fellow, New York Academy of Sciences

Consultant for several industrial concerns
Member, a number of advisory panels for the National Science
Foundation and the National Academy of Sciences

Previous Professional Activities

Past Member, Materials Advisory Board, National Research Council,
National Academy of Sciences

Past Member, Executive Committee, Div. of Chemistry & Chemical
Technology, National Research Council

Past Chairman, Board of Trustees, Gordon Research Conferences

Past Member, Council of the American Association for the Ad-
vancement of Science

Past President, Macromolecular Division, International Union
of Pure & Applied Chemistry

Past Chairman, U.S. National Committee of IUPAC, National Re-
search Council, National Academy of Sciences

Past Chairman, Executive Committee, Council on Research Policy
and Graduate Education, National Assn. of State Universi-
ties & Land Grant Colleges

Past Chairman, Polymer Division, American Chemical Society

Past Chairman, New York Section, American Chemical Society

Past Member, Board of Directors, American Chemical Society

Past President, American Chemical Society

Awards

New York Award, American Institute of Chemists, 1960

Witco Award in Polymer Chemistry, American Chemical Society,
1968

Distinguished Alumni Award, University of Pennsylvania, 1975

Charles Lathrop Parsons Award, American Chemical Society, 1978

International Award of the Society of Plastics Engineers, 1979