

ACS SYMPOSIUM NEW YORK

Organic chemists honour Woodward's memory

"We are here today to honour the memory of one of the greatest chemists the world has known." With that heartfelt invocation, Max Tishler of Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn., opened the Robert B. Woodward Memorial Symposium. The five-day symposium, the sole scientific program offered by the Organic Chemistry Division, served as tribute to Woodward, who died on July 8, 1979.

"Woodward made enormous contributions all across the face of organic chemistry," notes program chairman Peter Beak of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The division's executive committee decided to honor Woodward's memory with this unusual program because "he was really a unique individual," explains Beak.

The committee invited 28 speakers who comprise a veritable who's who of organic chemists. Many other chemistry luminaries also could be found in the audience which numbered roughly 2500.

After Tishler's introduction, Frank H. Westheimer of Harvard University took a warm, retrospective look at Woodward, whom he called "the hero of two generations and a role model for aspiring organic chemists everywhere." Woodward's accomplishments in structure determination and organic synthesis, Westheimer noted, derived from his brilliant intellect, elegant experimental style, and "fantastically hard" work.

One by one, many of Woodward's colleagues and former students climbed to the podium to offer their fond remembrances of the man and his achievements. Then putting the reminiscing aside and turning to look at current organic chemistry, most of the speakers presented new research results from their own laboratories. The topics covered were ones that Woodward himself would have delighted in hearing about: natural product synthesis, artificial enzymes, photochemistry, orbital symmetry, molecules of theoretical interest, organic metals, and asymmetric synthesis.

Several of these presentations were videotaped by ACS. In addition, some informal discussions about Woodward that were arranged with small groups of his friends and colleagues also were videotaped as a kind of instant history.

Woodward, in a way, was the most visible figure at the symposium. As conferees entered and left the great symposium hall, they were greeted with the electronic image and words of Woodward as television monitors in the lobby played back one of his videotaped lectures.