

AARON JOHN IHDE 1909 – 2000

INTRODUCTION

Aaron John Ihde, one of the major 20th-century figures in the history of chemistry, passed away on February 23, 2000 in Sarasota, Florida at the age of 90. Born on December 31, 1909, the son of second-generation immigrants, Aaron was raised on a farm near Neenah, Wisconsin. Following an elementary education in a typical one-room, "K through 8," rural school house and graduation from high school, he entered the University of Wisconsin as an undergraduate in 1927, from which he received his B.S. in chemistry in 1931.

Though his original intention was to be a teacher, the economic realities of the depression caused him to accept a job with the Blue Valley Creamery Company of Chicago after graduation. It was while working in Chicago that Aaron married Olive Tipler, a former high school classmate and a teacher of Latin and history. The marriage produced two children: a daughter (Gretchen) and a son (John). However, the intellectual limitations of industrial employment at a one-product company with no real research and development program soon became apparent, and in 1938 Aaron returned to the University of Wisconsin to pursue graduate work in chemistry. In 1941 he received a doctoral degree for research done in the field of food chemistry under the direction of Professor Henry Schuette, with a minor in biochemistry done under the direction of Professor Harry Steenbock.

After teaching at Butler University for a year, Aaron returned to the University of Wisconsin once again, this time as an instructor in freshman chemistry with a one-year, renewable contract. He proved to be an excellent teacher. Not only was his contract renewed twice, in

1945 he was moved to a tenure-track position within the Chemistry Department. Here he would remain until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1980.

Aaron's progressive involvement in the history of chemistry occurred in three stages. In 1946 he was granted permission to revive a long defunct history of chemistry course within the chemistry department. He not only revived it, he eventually expanded it to two semesters. Many of his most important books and papers evolved out of his teaching commitment to this course. Stage 2 occurred in 1948 when he was asked to participate in the newly founded Integrated Liberal Studies (ILS) Program, where he initiated an historically based approach to the teaching of physical science called "The Physical Universe." Further inspiration for the ILS program came in 1951-1952 when he was appointed as a Carnegie Intern at Harvard University. Here he was able to study first-hand the "Historical Case Studies Approach" to integrating the teaching of science and history initiated by James B. Conant, Leonard Nash, and Thomas Kuhn, and was also able to interact with such historians as George Sarton, I. B. Cohen, and Gerald Holton. The third and final stage came in 1957 when he officially received a joint appointment in the History of Science Department. Though Aaron had begun directing doctoral theses with a heavy history of chemistry component as early as 1952, the connection with the History of Science Department legitimized his involvement at the graduate level. Eventually he would direct the graduate studies of 21 students and would also interact with several postdoctoral fellows and visiting pro-

fessors seeking to extend their knowledge of the history of chemistry. This development, more than any other, provided him with the opportunity to pursue history of chemistry as a full-time professional commitment, rather than as a part-time hobby typical of so many chemists with historical interests.

A long-time member of HIST, Aaron served as divisional chair from 1962-1964. In 1968 he received the Division's Dexter Award for his work in the history of chemistry. Other honors included the University of Wisconsin Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Teaching in 1978, election to fellowship in the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and service as President of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters.

This special issue of the *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry* is dedicated to the memory of Aaron J. Ihde. The lead article by Jim Bohning, based on interviews

conducted in 1983, summarizes in Aaron's own words many of his early experiences at the University of Wisconsin and especially those related to his involvement in the ILS program. The article by Alan Rocke deals with Aaron as a teacher, not only of undergraduates but of doctoral students, and delineates his influence on a generation of chemical historians. The article by Bill Jensen summarizes Aaron's books and papers in the history of chemistry, while that by Robert Siegfried, Aaron's first doctoral student and fellow colleague in the History of Science Department at the University of Wisconsin, provides a more personal tribute. The special section on Ihde closes with a posthumous article by Aaron himself on the subject of chemical genealogies based on a paper that he contributed to a 1992 ACS symposium in San Francisco.

William B. Jensen, Guest Editor
Paul R. Jones, Editor

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The first portion of this issue is dedicated to the memory of Aaron J. Ihde (1909-2000), widely recognized historian of chemistry, recipient of the HIST Dexter Award, and devoted teacher. I want to express my gratitude to those who have contributed articles and, in particular, to William B. Jensen, Guest Editor and Founding Editor of the *Bulletin*, who coordinated the project. All photographs are courtesy of the Oesper Collection, University of Cincinnati.