



## The Division of the History of Chemistry American Chemical Society

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Press Release for 2013 HIST Award

The recipient of the 2013 HIST Award of the Division of the History of Chemistry of the American Chemical Society is Professor William R. Newman, Distinguished Professor and Ruth Halls Professor of History and Philosophy of Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. This award is the successor to the Dexter Award (1956-2001) and the Sydney M. Edelstein Award (2002-2009), also administered by the Division of the History of Chemistry.

William Newman was introduced to the history of chemistry by Otto T. Benfey in the 1970s as a student at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. He did his graduate work at Harvard with the medievalist John Murdoch, also working with the classicist and historian Robert Halleux at the Université de Liège. Newman's doctoral dissertation, finished in 1986, was later published as *The Summa Perfectionis of Pseudo-Geber* (1991), which consisted of an edition, translation, and study of one of the most famous alchemical works of the Middle Ages. Newman demonstrated that this early 14th century Latin alchemical treatise, attributed to Pseudo-Geber, was not a translation of a work of the 8th century Arabic writer, Jabir ibn Hayyan, but an original work by Paul of Taranto. Thus in his doctoral dissertation, Newman laid to rest the Jabir-Geber problem.

Much of Newman's subsequent work has focused on the continuity between alchemy and chemistry in the seventeenth century. Two books, *Gehennical Fire* (1994) and *Alchemy Tried in the Fire* (2002, with L.M. Principe) deal with George Starkey. Newman identified the alchemical writer Eirenaeus Philalethes ("peaceful lover of truth") to be the Harvard-educated chemist George Starkey (1628-1665). Sometimes considered to be America's first scientist, Starkey became Robert Boyle's tutor, Isaac Newton's favorite alchemical author, and a possible influence on the works of John Locke and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Newman and Principe have advocated the use of the terms "chymistry" and "chymist" to apply to the chemically related work of people such as Newton. Newman's 2004 *Promethean Ambitions* deals with the division between natural and artificial products that has been a problem for chemistry since its origin. His most recent book, *Atoms and Alchemy* (2006), argues that the atomic theories of the nineteenth century were decisively prefigured by a form of chymical atomism that displaced the dominant early modern scholastic matter theory. Newman's novel thesis is that later alchemists were concerned with chemical change in general, not just on the narrowly focused and futile searches for means to transform natural materials into gold. For the last seven years, Newman has devoted most of his time to the Chymistry of Isaac Newton Project ([www.chymistry.org](http://www.chymistry.org)), an on-line edition of Newton's

alchemical writings hosted by Indiana University. In addition to his appointment in the Indiana University Department of History and Philosophy of Science, he is Director of the Catapult Center for Digital Humanities and Computational Analysis of Texts, also at Indiana University.

The HIST Award consists of an engraved plaque and a check for \$1500 and will be presented to Newman at the fall national meeting of the American Chemical Society in Indianapolis in September 2013. Additional information about the award can be found on the HIST website at [http://www.scs.illinois.edu/~mainzv/HIST/awards/hist\\_award.php](http://www.scs.illinois.edu/~mainzv/HIST/awards/hist_award.php).