HIST Award Biography for Seth C. Rasmussen (1966-)

The winner of the Joseph B. Lambert HIST Award for Outstanding Achievement in the History of Chemistry for 2025 is Seth C. Rasmussen for his historical scholarship and revolutionary efforts to create a vibrant worldwide community of historians of chemistry.

A casual perusal of Professor Rasmussen's CV would reveal a typical academic chemical trajectory. He was raised in Washington State and received his B.S. in Chemistry from Washington State University in 1990. He ventured East to Clemson University to further advance his craft of synthetic chemistry with John Peterson and obtained his Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry in 1994. He returned to the West at the University of Oregon as a Postdoctoral Fellow with James Hutchinson, where he developed expertise in semiconducting organic polymers and stayed on at Oregon as an Instructor of organic chemistry. He joined North Dakota State University at Fargo in 1999 and is now Professor of Chemistry (2012). He spent his first sabbatical leave (2018) in Australia as a Fulbright Senior Scholar with the

Centre for Organic Electronics in Newcastle. He is very active in the Divisions of the ACS that deal with polymers, and with his local Section.

Seth became active in HIST sometime around 2001, particularly after a chance meeting during a graduate school recruiting visit at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. His Host was David Lewis (the 2018 winner of the HIST Award), and after spending most of dinner discussing the history of chemistry, they became fast friends and have blessed HIST ever since. After a flurry of both individual talks and the organization of symposia, Seth was recruited to be the Program Chair of HIST (2008-2017). In this role, he stimulated great symposia, recruited an international array of speakers, and placed HIST firmly in the international community of the history of chemistry. Naturally, he went on to serve as HIST Chair for 2021-2022.

Another fortuitous event occurred in 2010 at the San Francisco ACS Meeting. Springer was hosting a social event at a local microbrewery, where Seth met Springer Editor Elizabeth Hawkins. While discussing the publication of books and journals in chemistry, the topic turned to history. This ultimately led to an invitation to help launch a new series, *Springer Briefs in the History of Chemistry*. In addition to his own three contributions to this series, he has edited 21 others from its inception in 2011 to 2025. Based on the success of this series, a second longer-form series, *Perspectives on the History of Chemistry,* was founded in 2019; 8 titles have since been published or are in press. Seth continues to serve as Series Editor for both series and these additions to the venues for publications in the history of chemistry are entirely due to his efforts.

Seth Rasmussen is now uniformly respected in the worldwide community of the history of chemistry. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry, the American Chemical Society, and was one of the second cohort of HIST Fellows. He serves on editorial and advisory boards of journals and represents HIST on various international bodies in the history of chemistry.

In addition to all Seth's "administrative" accomplishments, he has made major contributions to the understanding of the history of chemistry. One of his areas of specialization is the history of glass. There were glasses on earth long before there were humans. Some of this material arrived from other regions of the universe. Seth presented the early history of these materials in his highly popular monograph: *How Glass Changed the World* (2012). The success of this work has

led to an expanded and revised edition to be released later this year. He is now recognized worldwide as an important scholar of early silica glass.

Another of Seth's areas of personal interest is ethanol. It has been a part of human culture for thousands of years. His wide-ranging monograph, *The Quest for Aqua Vitae* (2014), can be viewed as required reading for anyone interested in this subject and was recognized with a Gourmand Award for the Best Drinks History Book published in Germany for 2014.

In addition to his work in the history of chemistry, Seth is a scientific leader in the field of conjugated organic polymers (semiconducting polymers capable of conductivities rivaling metals). Thus, it is no surprise that he began contributing to the history of this field as well, becoming the first to fully document the history of these materials back to 1834. This combination of technical expertise and historical analysis characterizes all of Seth's work. His first monograph in this area is *Acetylene and its Polymers: 150+ Years of History* (2018). This was followed with a technical book on the chemistry of these materials in 2013 (which also included a bit of history) and a much more substantial history monograph *The Origins and Early History of Conjugated Organic Polymers: Organic Semiconductors, Synthetic Metals, and the Prehistory of Organic Electronics* (2025) is currently in production at Oxford University Press.

HIST is proud to award its Joseph B. Lambert HIST Award for Outstanding Achievement in the History of Chemistry to one of its own rising stars, Seth C. Rasmussen.