

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

J. LAWRENCE WILSON

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

James G. Traynham

at

Rohm and Haas Company  
Philadelphia, PA

on

30 August 1999

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Chemical Heritage Foundation  
Oral History Program  
315 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106



J. LAWRENCE WILSON

1936 Born in Rosedale, Mississippi, on March 2

Education

1958 B.S., mechanical engineering, Vanderbilt University  
1963 M.B.A., finance, Harvard University

Professional Experience

1958-1961 Officer, U.S. Navy

1963-1965 Vice President, Nyala Properties, Inc.

Warren-Teed Pharmaceuticals

1967-1968 Treasurer  
1968-1969 Vice President

1970-1971 President, Consolidated Biomedical Laboratories, Inc.

Rohm and Haas Company

1965-1967 Staff Associate  
1971-1972 Executive Assistant to the President  
1972-1974 Treasurer  
1974-1977 Regional Director, Rohm and Haas, Europe  
1977-1986 Group Vice President and Director  
1986-1988 Vice Chairman  
1988-1999 Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer

Honors

1999 Chemical Industry Medal, Society of Chemical Industry, American Section

## ABSTRACT

J. Lawrence Wilson begins the interview with a discussion of his childhood and early education. Wilson grew up in Rosedale, Mississippi, and attended Culver Military Academy in Culver, Indiana. After high school, he received a Naval Reserves Officer Training Corps scholarship to attend Vanderbilt University, where he majored in mechanical engineering. Wilson graduated in 1958, and then served in the Navy for several years as a member of the SEABEES, stationed in Bermuda. When he returned, Wilson attended Harvard Business School, receiving his M.B.A. in 1963. After graduate school, Wilson came to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with a friend to start a private equity firm. Two years later, he joined Rohm and Haas Company. Wilson discusses his experiences in operations research and as treasurer for Rohm and Haas subsidiary Warren-Teed, as well as his views on scientific innovation. He further addresses the company's electronics business, his time in Europe, and the changes in Rohm and Haas, and the chemical industry, generally, over the past three decades. Wilson concludes the interview with a discussion of the chemical industry's environmental concerns, Rohm and Haas' acquisition of Morton International, his work with the Chemical Manufacturers Association, and his family.

## INTERVIEWER

James G. Traynham is a Professor of Chemistry at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. He holds a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from Northwestern University. He joined Louisiana State University in 1963 and served as chemistry department chairperson from 1968 to 1973. He was chairman of the American Chemical Society's Division of the History of Chemistry in 1988 and is currently councilor of the Baton Rouge section of the American Chemical Society. He was a member of the American Chemical Society's Joint-Board Council on Chemistry and Public Affairs, as well as a member of the Society's Committees on Science, Chemical Education, and Organic Chemistry Nomenclature. He has written over ninety publications, including a book on organic nomenclature and a book on the history of organic chemistry.

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## NOTES

1. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, 1962).



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