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John R. Johnson

August 9, 1900 - May 25, 1983

John Raven Johnson, known as Jack Johnson to all his friends, was a member of the first Board of Directors of *Organic Syntheses* when it was incorporated in the state of New York, December 11, 1939. He continued membership for about 20 years. Prior to this, Jack served for about 8 years on the Active Board of Editors, soliciting preparations and checking them. He was Editor-in-Chief of two annual volumes, Vol. XVI (1936) and Vol. XIX (1939). He also served on the Advisory Board of Editors until his death.

Jack Johnson was born in Chicago, August 9, 1900. He attended Lincoln School, Lane Technical High School and Lane Junior College and entered the University of Illinois (Urbana) in 1917. He received a B.S. in Chemistry in 1919; an M.S. in 1920 and the Ph.D. in 1922 just prior to his 22nd birthday. His Ph.D. research and thesis were carried out under the direction of Roger Adams. He received an American Field Fellowship for study abroad and spent two years at the College de France, working with Charles Maureau and Charles Dufraisse, two outstanding French organic chemists. Jack learned many new laboratory techniques, which he taught his research students and colleagues on his return to the states.

From 1924 to 1927, Jack Johnson served as instructor in organic chemistry at the University of Illinois (Urbana). Besides teaching and directing research problems for seniors and graduate students he collaborated with Roger Adams in publishing *Elementary Laboratory Experiments in Organic Chemistry*. It was first published in 1928 and had many revisions. This book, now in its 7th edition, has been edited in recent years by Charles F. Wilcox, one of Johnson's colleagues at Cornell University; *Adams and Johnson* was as well known in the U.S.A. as the classic *Gatterman-Wieland*,

In 1927, Jack Johnson became assistant professor at Cornell University thus starting a

career which extended almost 40 years at that school. He restructured the courses in organic chemistry and developed a broad program of research. His enthusiasm and personal contributions led to his promotion to full professor in 1930 when he was barely 30 years old.

He was elected to the National Academy of Science in 1948 and was appointed to the endowed Todd Professorship at Cornell in 1952, a position he held until his retirement in 1965. In addition to his service on the Editorial Boards of *Organic Syntheses* and *Organic Reactions*, Jack and his students published research papers on organo-boron compounds, furan derivatives, dimes, ketene derivatives, the structure of gliotoxin, and biosynthesis of isoprene derivatives.

As an outgrowth of an advanced Organic Chemistry course which Jack developed at Cornell, he prepared a 117 page chapter on *Modern Electronic Concepts of Valence*, which was published in Gilman's *Advanced Treatise on Organic Chemistry*, Volume II, 1938.

Jack was a consultant to the research division of duPont from 1937 to 1967 and encouraged the development of the great advances in polymer chemistry by Carothers, a friend from his Illinois days, and his co-workers at duPont.

During the period 1941-1945, Jack served on the NDRC and OSRD research projects connected with the war effort. He, with his collaborators at Cornell, contributed to the anti-malarial program and was a consultant to the penicillin program. He was a co-author with H. T. Clark and Sir Robert Robinson of the monograph *The Chemistry of Penicillin*. This volume summarized the work in the British and American Laboratories. In 1951 Jack served for a year in West Germany as special consultant to the U.S. State Department. For his wartime services he received the U.S. Medal of Merit and the *Medaille d'Honneur* of France. After his war service, Jack again took up his teaching and research at Cornell until he retired in 1965. A special symposium was held at Cornell in May of 1965 in honor of Jack Johnson's achievements.

Shortly after Jack moved to Cornell, he met Hope Anderson, A.B. Mt. Holyoke, 1923. They were married in 1929 and had a happy home, raising two sons, Keith and Leonard, in spite of the depression and war years. After retirement in 1965 Hope and Jack moved to their farm in Deer Valley, Townshend, Vermont. They enjoyed gardening and travel on passenger-carrying freighters to many parts of the world. In recent years, Jack developed emphysema and this ultimately led to his death on May 28, 1983. Jack Johnson played an important role in the growth of organic chemistry from 1922 to 1965. His many friends, students and colleagues remember him and honor him for his achievements.

Ralph L. Shriner
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