



Blaine C. McKusick

March 22, 1918 – January 4, 2005

Blaine McKusick was born on March 22, 1918 to James Gillespie Blaine McKusick and Marjorie Chase McKusick in Minneapolis, MN. He went to the local public schools and then attended the University of Minnesota where he received a Bachelor degree in Chemical Engineering in 1940. He went on to the University of Illinois where he studied organic chemistry and obtained a Ph.D. degree under Professor Fuson in 1944. Subsequently he pursued postdoctoral research at Harvard University where he met his future wife, Marjorie Jane Kirk, who at the time was in medical school. They were married in 1952.

Blaine had a noteworthy career in hands-on chemistry. While at Illinois, his dissertation research involved a study of mustard gas derivatives as part of a war-related project. This was followed by a postdoctoral position at Harvard working on insect repellents, also connected with the war effort. In 1945 he joined the Central Research Department of the DuPont Company where he worked in the laboratory on many projects including high pressure polyethylene synthesis, the synthesis of gem-dithiols from hydrogen disulfide and aldehydes and ketones at high pressures, the synthesis and properties of tetracyanoethylene dyes, and pioneering research on finding uses for the van der Graaf electron accelerator in synthetic chemistry. During this part of his career, he applied for and was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1950 to pursue a year of postdoctoral research on the structure of alkaloids at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich under Professor Vladimir Prelog.

After his laboratory tenure, Blaine had an outstanding management career in DuPont's Central Research Department. In the late 1950's, he became a Research Supervisor overseeing research primarily in organic and organo-metallic chemistry. In the early 1960's, he assumed the position of a Laboratory Director directing several groups working in the same areas.

Following his tenure in the Central Research Department, Blaine became a Director of Research in DuPont's Agricultural Chemicals Department and then went on to become

a director of DuPont's Haskell Laboratory for Toxicological and Industrial Medicine. He retired from this position in 1982. Over his long and productive career with DuPont, McKusick authored 40 technical papers, received 20 U. S. patents, and was responsible for 3 National Research Council reports.

Blaine's professional activities extended far beyond his career with DuPont. Over many years he was very active in local (Wilmington, DE) professional organizations such as the ACS, and the Wilmington Organic Chemists Club. On the national and international levels, he was active in the AAAS, *Organic Reactions*, *Organic Syntheses*, IUPAC, and he served on several ACS committees. After his retirement, he was involved in the activities of the College of Marine Studies at the University of Delaware, and in 1992 was given a Medal of Distinction by the University.

McKusick served *Organic Syntheses* in several capacities over many years. In 1957 he was elected to the Board of Editors and was editor of Volume 43 in 1963. He also served on the Board of Directors for a long period ending in 1996, and was president of *Organic Syntheses, Inc.* from 1989 to 1992.

Blaine received numerous rewards for his achievements. In addition to the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Medal of Distinction mentioned above, he received the ACS Award in Chemical Health and Safety in 1986, and a DuPont Safety and Health Award in 1990. These awards reflect his active involvement in laboratory safety issues during his working career and long after.

Marjorie, a prominent pediatrician, and Blaine had three children - Kirk, a computer scientist residing in Berkeley, California; James, a professor of English at the Baltimore campus of the University of Maryland; and Kathleen McKusick, a computer specialist in biotechnology living in Redwood City, California. Kathleen's daughter, Marjorie Rose, is Blaine's only grandchild. Marjorie McKusick passed away in 1976. Blaine then married Virginia Walters, an artist and teacher, who died in 1997, and in 1999 he married Emily Morris. He is survived by his wife Emily, his three children, his granddaughter Marjorie Rose, a sister Laura Bell Berthold, and a brother Marshall.

Blaine was deeply involved in many local organizations not related to his employment. Among these were the local Unitarian Church, a Science Discussion Group, a Great Books Group which he led for many years, and the Delaware Adolescent Program, Inc. (D. A. P. I.), which his wife Marjorie had co-founded many years ago. Members of these organizations will sorely miss Blaine McKusick.

John F. Harris

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