

Jay Eldred Hedrick

July 17, 1909 — June 10, 1981

Jay Hedrick, professor emeritus of chemical engineering, died on June 10, 1981. He was born in 1909 in Meredosia, Illinois; he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in chemistry from Illinois College, and his Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in chemical engineering from the State University of Iowa at Ames. Jobs were scarce in 1934, even for a Ph.D. chemical engineer, but Jay found employment with the Iowa Coal Laboratory, with the Iowa Public Health Department, and then, for five years, as instructor in chemical engineering at Kansas State College, where he directed research projects on petroleum and coal. Many of the present-day proposals for coal utilization were studied and evaluated by Jay in the late 1930s.

A few months before Pearl Harbor, Jay left Kansas to join Shell Oil in San Francisco as technical supervisor (and later as senior engineer and senior technologist). For eight months in 1944-45 he was on leave from Shell to work at the War Production Board in Washington. At the end of the war he was very happy to return to San Francisco; so when Shell moved its offices to New York City in 1949, Jay reluctantly went along but began to look for something new—preferably an academic position in a semirural area.

At this time, Fred H. “Dusty” Rhodes, director of the School of Chemical Engineering, was looking for a senior professor with industrial experience. Once Jay learned of this, things moved quickly. In September 1949 he joined the chemical engineering faculty, bought a house in Cayuga Heights, and became an Ithacan for the rest of his life. Jay claimed that what Dusty really wanted was someone to join (and be fleeced at) his weekly poker sessions: “I fitted right in,” said Jay. “I was a lousy poker player.”

Jay taught a variety of chemical engineering courses during his twenty-six years at Cornell, mostly in process economics, commercial development, and chemical product marketing. He served on numerous committees of the school, college, and University, among them the Centennial Planning Committee, the University Council, and the University Lectures Committee. For some years he was faculty adviser to the student chapter of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. From 1953 to 1956 he was assistant dean of the College of Engineering (“I was a mouse,” he said, “learning to be a rat.”); but when Dean S. C. Hollister retired, Jay elected to leave administration and return full-time to the less rodentlike world of teaching.

For many years Jay was a consultant to Shell Oil and other organizations, chiefly on matters of product development, commercialization, and marketing. He retired in July 1975 and was named professor emeritus, but he continued to

come to his office in Olin Hall nearly every day and kept up an active program of consulting and research. He was a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, the American Chemical Society (chairman, Cornell Section, 1952), Alpha Chi Sigma, Phi Lambda Upsilon, Sigma Xi, and Tau Beta Pi; and a fellow of the American Institute of Chemists. He is listed in *Who's Who in America*.

His first wife, Mary Ellen, died in 1957, leaving him with four children— a boy and three girls. A few years later he married Betty Cook and had another daughter when he was fifty-five. He once threatened to write a book called “My Fifty Years in the PTA.” When he died he had eleven grandchildren, all girls.

Phrases that come to mind in describing Jay are warm-hearted, friendly, informal, helpful, knowledgeable, and keenly interested in current affairs. He went out of his way to help young professors get started. He always tore up his lecture notes when a course was over, to insure that next year's would be up to date. He never lost interest, even after retirement, in the condition and potential developments of chemical commodity markets. Toward the end of his life he assembled detailed genealogical information about his family for presentation to his children. He was an excellent conversationalist; he loved to talk, and did so with authority, on a wide range of subjects. He was also noted for his delightful sense of humor.

But most outstanding of Jay's qualities was his courage. Beset by cancer even before he retired, he endured four major operations and recovered remarkably from them all. He was always cheerful and forward-looking, never gloomy; he exercised faithfully and, with his wife Betty, rode his bicycle several miles a day around the streets of Cayuga Heights. His attitude toward his illness was extraordinary.

Jay Hedrick was an effective teacher, a knowledgeable researcher and consultant, a respected colleague, a truly good neighbor, and a beloved and loving husband and father. We will all miss him greatly.

Blanchard L. Rideout, Charles C. Winding, Julian C. Smith