

# Milton Orchin

(1914-2013)

William B. Jensen

*Department of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati  
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0172*

The University of Cincinnati Department of Chemistry must sadly report the death of its most senior faculty member, Milton Orchin, on 14 February 2013 at age 98. Orchin was born in the small town of Barnesboro, Pennsylvania, on 4 June 1914, roughly two months before the outbreak of World War I in Europe. His life would span all but the first decade of the 20th century and would continue well into the second decade of the 21st century.

Following the early death of their mother, Orchin and his siblings spent their childhood and adolescence in the Jewish Orphan Home in Cleveland, Ohio. After leaving the home at age sixteen, Orchin was able to obtain a scholarship sponsored by the Lazarus Department Store which allowed him to attend the Ohio State University in Columbus, from which he obtained his B.S., M.S. and Ph.D degrees – the latter in 1939 for work in the field of organic chemistry done under the supervision of Melvin S. Newman.

Following graduation on the eve of World War II, Orchin was unable to obtain a job in academia and so became a chemist in the employ of the federal government instead – first with the Food and Drug Administration in both Cincinnati and Chicago, then with the Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, Maryland, and finally with the Bureau of Mines in Bruceton, Pennsylvania. In 1953, at age 39, he decided to once again pursue his unfulfilled dream of an academic career and succeeded in obtaining a position with the University of Cincinnati Applied Science Laboratory and, soon after, as a Professor in the Department of Chemistry.

Despite his late start, Orchin's academic career was highly successful. By the time of his retirement in 1981 at age 67, he had published seven books, 15 reviews, and 198 research papers, as well as supervising the thesis work of nine M.S. candidates and 43 Ph.D. candidates. In addition, he served as Department Chair from 1956-1962 and, as a result of his industrial consultancy work, largely in the field of organometallic catalysis, he was also the holder of more than 20 patents.

Retirement, however, hardly affected Orchin's



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productivity. During the next 25 years, as Professor Emeritus and Director of the Hoke S. Greene Laboratory of Catalysis, Orchin would publish, in collaboration with several postdoctoral fellows, yet another 47 research papers and in 2006, after finally closing his laboratory, he embarked, at age 92, on the writing of his eighth book – a biography of the Israeli chemist, Ernst David Bergmann, in collaboration with William B. Jensen of the UC Department of Chemistry and Henry Fenichel of the UC Department of Physics. The book was finally published in December of 2011, six months after Orchin's 97th birthday.

In 1957 Orchin received the Eminent Chemist Award of the Cincinnati Section of the ACS and in 1980 the Morley Medal of the Cleveland Section of the ACS. He was also recipient of the Rieveschl Award for Distinguished Research in Science of the University of Cincinnati in 1975, the Distinguished Scientist Award of the Technical Societies of Cincinnati in 1976, and served for many years as a member of the Nomenclature Committee of the National ACS – an interest reflected in his book, *The Vocabulary of Organic Chemistry*, first published in 1980.

Readers interested in a more detailed account of Orchin's life and work may request a copy of the book-

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let, *What a Privilege!*, which was published by the Department of Chemistry in 1999 in celebration of his 85th birthday.

**Publication History**

Based on an oral presentation given at memorial services held by both the Wise Temple of Cincinnati on 03 March 2013 and by the University of Cincinnati Department of Judaic Studies on 15 April 2013.