

Reminiscence: Leyell C. Behr

Ph.D. 1941 (R. C. Fuson)

There are doubtless many tales to be told about "Preps", a summer enterprise which involved organic graduate students who prepared compounds on a custom basis for other laboratories, some at Illinois, some elsewhere, even, it was rumored, for Eastman. An example was cystine, which was isolated from hair protein hydrolysate. The raw material was obtained from barber shops, and after removal of cigar butts and other undesirable contaminants, it was cleaned finally by a solvent to remove oil and grease. The result was very bulky and it was difficult to get an appreciable amount into the 12-L or 22-L flasks used for hydrolysis. The technique employed was to hold down the hair already in the flask with a heavy stirring rod while stuffing in an additional amount. Not infrequently disaster struck and a "star" appeared on the bottom of the flask. Those that could not be repaired were saved. Preps labs were on the second floor and some windows overlooked a sidewalk. Advantage was taken of this circumstance by dropping them behind pedestrians.

Joe Corse, a graduate student of Bob Fuson, became infuriated with a radio program generated in Mexico and aimed to the USA.. It featured a Dr. Brinkley who claimed the ability to cure male sexual insufficiency with goat glands. His clinic was in Arkansas. Dr. Brinkley offered a radio for the best letter. Joe wrote one with a few deliberate misspellings and some grammatical outrages, and won the radio. It was housed in white plastic and worked well. It occupied a place of honor in 260A and the story became well-known in the department. Roger Adams knew about it, of course, and he would bring visitors up to see it. Dr. Brinkley wrote Joe letters, the gist being that Joe had better do something before it becomes too late. The other denizens of 260A kept telling Joe that someone had come by looking for him. Finally Joe got his landlady to write Dr. Brinkley that Joe had departed and left no forwarding address.

Speed Marvel was an extreme bird watcher. He was also a consultant to a number of chemical companies. When he visited these companies, the Illini there would arrange a bird watching expedition. The same would also happen at ACS meetings. Speed's office was on the ground floor of Noyes lab and on an occasion a bird (species unknown) got caught in the first floor hallway. Somebody alerted Speed and suggested that the birds were beginning to watch him. He was not amused.

"The Farwell" was located across the street from Noyes Lab. You could get breakfast and plate lunches but its chief business was drop in. The organic faculty commonly met there on school days at 10 AM and sometimes at 3 PM. A great deal of departmental and chemical business was transacted there. Who paid was determined by a complex series of coin flips. Visitors were invited to these meetings and usually ended up paying.

In 1940, graduate assistants were paid \$600 per annum in ten installments. Nobody starved. You could get a small orange juice, and egg, two strips of bacon, toast, and coffee for \$.25. One year the Illinois legislature was tardy in appropriating, and the department was unable to make offers to new graduate students until Bob Fuson guaranteed the stipends. Happily, the legislature ultimately came through.