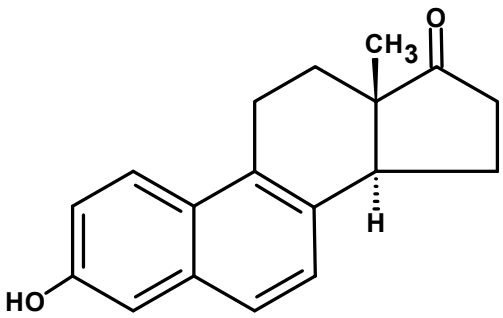
MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS ALFRED L. WILDS

Alfred L. Wilds, professor emeritus of chemistry, was born in Kansas City, Missouri on March 1, 1915. He completed all of his advanced education at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where he received his BS in 1936, his MS in 1937 and his PhD in organic chemistry in 1939. He married his wife Carolyn in 1937. His doctoral research was done under the guidance of Professor Werner E. Bachman at Michigan at a time (mid thirties) when modern organic chemistry and synthesis was just starting to emerge. His thesis work is hailed even today as a major and revolutionary break with the past. The total synthesis of the steroidal sex hormone Equilenin, published in the Journal of the American Chemical Society in 1940, was the first successful total synthesis of a complex natural product. We must not forget that in the context of the time it was not a widely disseminated view that chemical structures of this degree of structural and stereochemical complexity could indeed be made from common starting chemicals. The holdover of the old vitalism theory still distorted many people's views as to the relationship between "ordinary" chemicals and such esoterica as animal-isolated sex hormones. So the "Bachmann, Cole and Wilds" paper is widely recognized as inaugurating the modern era of chemical synthesis of complex medicinally important structures. This modern era still goes on after some 60 years as we struggle with the synthesis of such complex targets as HIV protease inhibitors. It all started with the Equilenin synthesis by Al Wilds.



Equilenin

In 1940, the Department of Chemistry at Madison faced a major crisis in the form of a wave of retirements coupled with a continuing growth in numbers of undergraduate students served. At this time Al was hired as an instructor together with Bill Johnson from Louis Fieser's labs at Harvard. Interestingly they were both deeply involved in the chemistry of steroids but the possible conflicts never materialized. Together with Johnson, Al brought a true renaissance to organic chemistry at Wisconsin. They were quickly recognized as budding leaders in the area. Both were popular and effective teachers, and built their organic research programs in an aggressive and effective manner. Al produced his first PhD student, Lloyd Beck, in 1944, and had directed some fifteen doctorates by 1950. He was promoted regularly, becoming full professor in 1948. The modern era of organic chemistry at Wisconsin thus started, the two young stars Al Wilds and Bill Johnson, and the two older members, Homer Adkins and Sam McElvain.

It is a testimony to Al's ability as a researcher and mentor of graduate researchers that he produced a series of steroid chemists who went on to play pivotal roles in developing the area in the postwar period. Particularly noteworthy is Carl Djerassi, one of the founders of Syntex SA, and widely recognized as the "father of the pill." Carl earned his PhD with Al in 1945. His thesis again dealt with steroid synthesis, an expeditious construction of the female sex hormone estradiol from the commonly available steroid cholesterol. This was published in the Journal of the American Chemical Society in 1946. Al was a "hands-on" mentor of graduate students. Many stories relate that when a graduate student ran into experimental difficulties toward the end of his PhD work, Al Wilds would join him in lab and directly help with the synthetic work.

Al Wilds was an effective and popular teacher of undergraduates in the subject of organic chemistry. Many of us who started at Wisconsin remember the always-crowded office hours for his undergraduate

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organic course, and the uniformly enthusiastic comments of students about its content. We were honored by a gift of $100000 in 1985 from one of his grateful ex-students, Chester Davis. This was used for undergraduate chemistry majors in need, and is a comment on Al Wilds' impact as a teacher. He also contributed effectively to the graduate chemical lectures wherein his encyclopedic knowledge of chemistry served many of the beginning graduate students well.

Lastly, Al Wilds was a warm and brilliant colleague that many of us remember with great fondness. His welcoming of us as beginning assistant professors was so important in getting us off on the right track. In his later years he was a delightfully eccentric colleague. He was a firm advocate of Karo syrup as brain food and would be seen with his ever-present bottle when launched on periods of intense work. His dismantling of a blaring speaker in Paisan's pizzeria with a pocketknife earned him much gratitude.

He passed away on July 4, 2002 in Sun City West, Arizona; we remember him well, and miss him deeply.

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