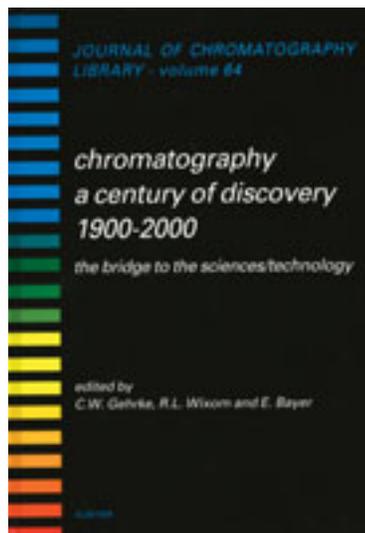


Chromatography Chronicles



Chromatography: A Century of Discovery, 1900–2000

C. W. Gehrke, R. L. Wixom, and E. Bayer, Eds.

Elsevier, New York, 2001
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As it was in so many other facets of life, the years immediately following the turn of the millennium were seemingly a time of reflection for scientists and science historians. And for some inexplicable reason, this fact holds most true for chromatography. The period saw the publication of several volumes dedicated to this pillar of the chemical and biological sciences, not the least of which was *Chromatography: Creating a Central Science*, produced by the staff of *Today's Chemist at Work* (see box, "More for the Shelf"). But unlike these other volumes, which mainly focus on the technological innovations of the last century, *Chromatography: A Century of Discovery* puts the emphasis on the faces and voices that made the innovations.

In the preface, the editors call the book "a documentary of seminal events, developments, discovery, and history of chromatography in the 20th century." But what gives this volume its special charm is the fact that it was largely written by the people who actually made things happen. As a

spin-off to the *Journal of Chromatography*, the book has access to chromatography award winners, selected by their peers as making pivotal contributions to the science. Thus, the reader is presented with the remembrances and views of people such as Hamish Small, Csaba Horvath, Stellan Hjerten, and J. Calvin Giddings.

The book starts with a chapter dedicated to the first half of the century, when many of the key steps were being taken in the creation of the field. Editor Robert Wixom takes the reader through the initial efforts of Mikhail Tswett to separate the components of chlorophyll, and how these achievements were expanded on by the efforts of Leroy Palmer to create the concept of adsorption chromatography. Wixom then takes the reader on a whirlwind tour of the seminal moments in the development of the various forms of chromatography, stopping along the way to recite the résumés of the contributors who are no longer among us.

But just as the narrative is building, there is an abrupt shift in the book's next two chapters, which focus on the major chromatography awards and award winners and the major international symposia supporting chromatographic endeavors. Seasoned chromatographer and historian Leslie Ettre, whose encyclopedic knowledge

of all events chromatographic borders on the Homeric, wrote these chapters.

In Chapter 4, however, editor Charles Gehrke brings us back to the narrative fold with a discussion of GC and LC applications in environmental analysis, amino acid analysis, and space science. And it is in Chapter 5 that this book really hits its stride, with the personal recollections of the pioneers. Each essay in this 500-page section is preceded by a brief résumé of achievements, allowing the reader to put some of the personal events into scientific context.

After this point, unfortunately, the appeal of the book fades. The next chapter is little more than a telephone directory of chromatographers in China, Russia, Japan, Latin America, and the Netherlands (of all places). What about those long-neglected Australians or Tanzanians?

To read much beyond this point, however, you have to go online to the ChemWeb preprint server where Chapters S-7 to S-15 reside, covering everything from chromatography publishing to milestones and paradigm shifts to the evolution of the instrumentation. Why the publishers didn't just decide to publish a second volume is anyone's guess. Aside from this strange treatment, the publishers and editors have introduced several layout oddities that throw the reader off. At several points in the text, the editors have boldfaced specific passages, apparently with the goal of **highlighting their importance, like this**. Unfortunately, the selection of where to start and stop the type treatment seems to be random. Note: *The text is also littered with italicized notes like this that likewise disrupt the flow of the narrative and would have been better used as footnotes or at the end of the chapters.*

In the preface, the editors recommend this book for both students and researchers. I disagree. As a science history book, *Chromatography: A Century of Discovery* is a lot like reading the CRC manual of chemistry and physics; it is full of very useful information, but you really have to want to know it. As a reference book for future science historians, however, this book is a gem that should be treasured.

Randall C. Willis ◆

More for the Shelf

A Century of Separation Science *Haleem J. Issaq (Ed.)*. Marcel Dekker, 2002.

Chromatography: Creating a Central Science A supplement to *Today's Chemist at Work*. American Chemical Society, 2001; <http://pubs.acs.org/journals/chromatography/index.html>.

Modern Practice of Gas Chromatography; 3rd Ed. *Robert L. Grob and Eugene F. Barry*. Wiley-Interscience, 1995.

75 Years of Chromatography—A Historical Dialogue *Leslie Ettre and Albert Zlatkis (Eds.)*. Elsevier, 1975.