

## FOURTEEN MILESTONES IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY OF ORGANIC GEOCHEMISTRY

Keith A. KVENVOLDEN

*2433 Emerson Street  
Palo Alto, California 94301*

The scientific disciplines of Geology and Organic Chemistry originated and developed in parallel starting in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These disciplines continued to evolve independently, but in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, geologists realized the scientific and practical importance of the compositions of organic matter in sediment and rock, and organic chemists discovered that sediment and rock contain an abundance of organic compounds of fundamental and applied interest. By 1930 the amalgamation of geology and organic chemistry had clearly started, and this year serves as the first temporal milestone marking the beginning of organic geochemistry, although it was not called such at that time. From 1930 to 1936 organic compounds such as hydrocarbon waxes, fatty acids, sterols, and porphyrin pigments had been extracted from geological materials and chemically identified. Source sediments of petroleum were being actively investigated. From 1930 to 1960 the ideas and concepts of organic geochemistry evolved with a major focus being on the geochemistry of petroleum.

The following are 14 temporal milestones in the organization of organic geochemistry:

- 1930:** Merging of geology and organic chemistry and the beginning of organic geochemistry.
- 1936:** Publication by A.E. Treibs demonstrating the power of molecular organic geochemistry.
- 1959:** Organization by B. Nagy of the Organic Geochemistry Division (OGD) of The Geochemical Society, holding its first formal meeting with the Geological Society of America in 1960.
- 1962:** 1<sup>st</sup> International Meeting on Organic Geochemistry (IMOG); these international meetings continue to be held every other year.
- 1963:** First reference text *Organic Geochemistry*, edited by I.A. Breger (reference texts are collections of papers by different authors and assembled by one or more editors); approximately 20 other reference texts on organic geochemistry have now been published.
- 1968:** Gordon Research Conferences specifically devoted to organic geochemistry; these conferences continue to meet on alternate years to IMOG.

- 1970:** First textbook *Non-Marine Organic Geochemistry* written by F.M. Swain (the entire contents of textbooks are prepared by the author or authors); about 13 textbooks on organic geochemistry have now been published.
- 1978:** Publication of the journal *Organic Geochemistry*, with I.A. Breger as the first Editor; volume 40 of this journal is appearing in 2007.
- 1979:** Presentation of the first Treibs Award for “outstanding contributions to Organic Geochemistry” to A.E. Treibs (honorary) and G.T. Philippi (first designated recipient); by 2007 this award has been given 21 times.
- 1981:** Organization by P.A. Schenck of the European Association of Organic Geochemists (EAOG), which met formally for the first time in 1983 at the 11<sup>th</sup> IMOG in The Hague, The Netherlands.
- 1988:** The journal *Organic Geochemistry* became “the official Journal of EAOG” with co-editors E.W. Baker and P.A. Schenck; by 2007, seven individuals have served as Editors of the journal.
- 1991:** The Australian Organic Geochemistry Medal for lifetime achievement in organic geochemistry was first awarded to J.W. Smith; this award has now been given eight times.
- 1993:** P.A. Schenck Award to scientists under 35 years of age who have made major contributions to any specific area of organic geochemistry or related field; first awardee was J. Sinninghe-Damste, and the award has now been given six times.
- 2007:** 23<sup>rd</sup> IMOG, organized by EAOG—Current celebration of the recent advances in organic geochemistry.

Within this temporal framework the science of organic geochemistry has flourished, leading to numerous discoveries and a deeper understanding of the role of organic substances, from organic molecules to complex organic compounds, in terrestrial and extraterrestrial processes.