Bolton Society lost its founding newsletter editor, **James (Jim) Bohning**, on September 2, 2011. Jim’s contributions to the newsletter and the Bolton Society are considerable. He planned, penned and published the first nine issues of *Boltonia* (one — eight in print and number 9 in electronic form only). All of these issues are available on the Bolton Society’s page on the Chemical Heritage Foundation’s website.

Jim organized three Bolton Society Symposia on Landmark/Classic Chemistry Books (I), V & VI. Despite his illness he continued to suggest new topics for upcoming symposia: Edgars Fahs Smith held in Philadelphia in August 2012, which was dedicated to Jim.

When the Bolton Society established an oral history program, Jim (an accomplished oral historian) volunteered to conduct the first oral histories for the society: Roy G. Neville and Alan Debus.

*Jim was my mentor and my friend and beginning with this issue, I take on the mantle as ‘editor’ to continue the Newsletter that Jim built.*

... and so it continues!

Contributions from the Bolton Society membership are welcome. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Upcoming Conferences or Meetings
- Publications
- Conference or Meeting Reports (these should not normally exceed 1,000 words)
- News Items or Announcements
- Grants, Fellowships or Awards
- Reviews of Websites, projects or blogs of interest (up to 500 words)

Cheers! Elsa Atson, Director of Library Services, Bolton Society Secretary

Questions regarding content submission, contact the editor.

The Editor retains the right to select those contributions that are most relevant to the interests of the Society’s members.
Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exposition played softly barely breaking the quiet of the office. It had been selected from two ranks of well-indexed classical music CDs, housed in a drawer at the left of his desk. It was one of Jim's favorites, but a backup selection of Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos was poised to replace it in the disk drive. A battered wooden walking cane hung from the top pull handle of the adjacent file cabinet. A rusty five-inch mailing tube containing 50 mg of white crystalline disodium squarate stood balanced on the top shelf. Its red and white mailing label proclaimed it was an August 1980 gift synthesized by Professor Robert West of the University of Wisconsin. Long ago Jim had thought of incorporating the unusual substance in a p-chem experiment, but it now sat awaiting an uncertain future. Today's mail had brought in a small cardboard box with bubble wrap packing -- Jim's latest EBay purchase: an ancient handsome brass pecan nut cracker intended for addition to his substantial collection of that artifact type.

His window sill sported a 4 x 12” Plexiglas case on a polished oak base protecting an inscribed maroon-colored Lionel caboose. Precision white lettering down the length of the car proclaimed not only that it was an authentic Lehigh Valley Railroad model but also that it was a special departure gift from his friends on the National Historic Chemical Landmarks Committee for Jim's 15 years of service (1992-2007). Jim – an avid collector of model railroad cars – highly treasured this special personal gift.

Six densely packed oak shelves threatening imminent collapse towered above and behind his work desk and sported books on history, chemistry, railroading, coal mining, and ACS. A collection of the first 35 years of the Journal of the American Chemical Society and its Transactions limited the opening of his office door because they were stacked six feet high behind the door. Jim's right foot repeatedly banged against an old Beckman DU spectrometer shoved underhis desk, while its supplemental power supply rested atop a nearby file cabinet. An electric space heater's rosy glow warmed Jim's feet in an otherwise chilly office.
Jim Bohning – chemist, academic, historian, author, oral history specialist, collector, and multi-focused scholar – was at work bent over his keyboard. Today’s research was on mining accidents from 1860 to 1900 in the anthracite coal mines owned by Eckley Brinton Coxe (1838-1895) in northeastern Pennsylvania. Jim’s raw research material was several dozen rolls of microfilm he had unearthed from the Hazelton (PA) Standard Speaker and the White Haven (PA) Journal Herald newspapers. The study was to be a chapter in Jim’s projected biography of Coxe. Slogging issue-by-issue for reports of accidents would take weeks, but it was typical of Jim’s dogged search for documented details which enriched his writing. Accuracy, specifics, hitherto unknown tidbits, and comprehensive coverage marked each paper, seminar, or meeting presentation on which he worked. Jim had won the HIST Division’s Outstanding Paper Award in 1989, and he created (and disseminated) a popular tutorial on how to conduct oral history interviews which stressed his philosophy of attention to detail.

This office, room 494 of Lehigh University’s Seeley G. Mudd Building (Bethlehem, PA), was to be Jim’s last scholarly home. He’d moved in after retirement as a Staff Writer in the ACS News Service. He had returned to the Lehigh Valley where he had friends and relatives and became a Visiting Research Scientist at Lehigh. Here Jim prepared papers on his wide interests in chemical history, on the ACS and its founders and presidents, on historic landmarks, on international chemistry organizations, on coal, on Joseph Priestley, and on the winners of the Dexter-Edelstein awards. For several semesters Jim taught a Lehigh course on Scientific Writing, and he served as advisor to generations of graduate students preparing their PowerPoints for seminars. His red pencil suggestions for improvement of their seminar documents rescued many a student from the dreaded C.

Jim Bohning the historian was really the second Jim. First came Jim the professor who in 1959, fresh from his M.S. at NYU, began an academic career as an instructor at Wilkes College (now University, Wilkes-Barre, PA). He took leave from 1962 to 1964 to complete his doctorate in physical chemistry at Northeastern (PhD 1965) and returned to Wilkes as Assistant Professor. Jim rose through the ranks, served for twenty years as chair, and retired as emeritus professor in 1990. He supervised two M.S. students, served on many M.S. committees, and published several papers on photolysis of heterocyclics. Jim’s interest in history had been whetted when in April 1974, he chaired the 9th Middle Atlantic Regional Meeting (MARM) in Wilkes-Barre. Jim focused that MARM on history, especially on the Centennial of Oxygen, which in 1874 had gathered America’s chemists to Priestley’s home in nearby Northumberland. That meeting was a contributing factor in the subsequent organization of the ACS.
Jim served as Chair (1971) and long-time archivist for the Susquehanna Valley ACS Section and became an active member of the History of Chemistry Division (HIST) which he also chaired (1985). He became the division’s historian from 1988 to 2011 and its archivist from 1988 to 2009. As divisional archivist Jim, with the help of Jeff Seeman, arranged for HIST’s records to be moved to a permanent home at CHF. Jim also served on the division’s Cachet Committee, the editorial staff (associate editor) of its Bulletin for the History of Chemistry, and the National Historic Chemical Landmarks Committee.

While still a professor at Wilkes, Jim had begun working as a part-time oral historian at the Beckman Center for the History of Chemistry (now the Chemical Heritage Foundation or CHF). After retirement from Wilkes Jim joined the CHF staff then departing in 1995 as Director of Oral History for a post as Staff Writer at ACS headquarters in DC (1995-1998). His subsequent retirement from ACS brought him to Lehigh University where he conducted his most extensive research in the history of chemistry and continued to do oral histories for CHF, for the Dow Foundation, for Lehigh University, and for the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society.

Blending his long standing interests in steam railroads, anthracite mining, and the 19th century industrial revolution, Jim commenced a history of the Coxe family, coal tycoons and philanthropists of Drifton (PA). He had completed the interviews and the research and authored two of the chapters. One of these he published as a free standing article, “Angel of the Anthracite: The Philanthropic Legacy of Sophia Georgina Coxe” (Canal History and Technology Proceedings, Vol. XXIV, 2005) and another was read as a paper before a reunion of the Coxe family. Alas, the complete Coxe story will never be finished.

Through 2010, severe eye disease and cancer slowed Jim’s pace, although he continued to edit the newsletters he had founded: Boltonia (Bolton Society of CHF), Mudd in your Eye (Lehigh University Chemistry Department), and Metzger Times (a family genealogy). He laid out one last symposium on Edgar Fahs Smith for the Fall 2012 ACS National Meeting. Several brief hospital stays became longer as he received more extensive treatment for his malignancies. In July 2011, Jim signaled with a hint of humorous irony in his message because of the name’s link to ACS history, that he had been admitted to a Newtown (PA) hospice known as Chandler Hall. Jim became part of the history he loved on 2 September 2011. He was 77-years old.

Jim’s historical notes and files on chemistry have been transferred to CHF. His notes and documents on Eckley Coxe, a long time university trustee and benefactor, were filed in the Lehigh Archives. Jim’s books were accessioned into the Lehigh University Library. Three of his antique chemistry instruments were incorporated into CHF’s museum, five others are awaiting homes. Jim’s many collections – pocket watches, license plates, silver christening spoons, nut crackers, blow torches, train sets, patent medicine bottles, mantle clocks, and carved wooden gears – were placed at public auction. Jim was one of a kind. He worked hard at his craft, and in so doing he built a network of friends, colleagues, and collaborators who will never forget this soft-spoken, kindly Renaissance man of Chemistry. Through his contributory service and caring camaraderie Jim inspired many other chemists to develop their own interests in history of chemistry. Wilkes, the Susquehanna Valley Section, HIST, CHF, ACS, and Lehigh are better places for his having passed their way.

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Herb Pratt died at age 88 on January 23, 2014 after a short illness. Herb touched the lives of many friends, and has a special connection with the Bolton Society, which he founded in 1999 as a way for chemistry bibliophiles to share their common interests.

I first met Herb in 1970 when I was a relatively new Research Chemist with DuPont at their Dacron Research Lab in Kinston, North Carolina. Herb was in Dacron Dyeing and Finishing Technical Service, and he visited Kinston with several colleagues to explain how important manufacturing quality was to customers. I immediately liked this happy man with a good sense of humor. When I moved to Wilmington two years later, our paths crossed shortly afterward and we remembered each other. By that time, I was starting to collect books in a serious way. Initially it was the appeal of older books just because they were old, then I shifted my focus to technology, and especially physics and chemistry. When Herb found out we had a mutual interest in chemistry books, he shared with me his favorite bookstores in New York City and the South, as my job took me to these locations.

Herb was on a number of book dealers’ catalog mailing lists, and he began to give me his old catalogs when he finished reading them, noting which books he ordered as well as books he already had. I ordered far fewer chemistry books than Herb, but enjoyed seeing prices asked for books of interest. I began subscribing to Antiquarian Bookman’s Weekly, as I found that was a good outlet to sell unwanted books I had picked up on frequent visits to New England bookstores, as well as to purchase books of interest. I would often call Herb and alert him to a book advertised in AB I knew he would be interested in. We would talk on the phone frequently about our latest finds, and often saw each other socially.

Herb never received formal training as an historian, but as a chemical engineer at Tri-State College of Engineering, for which he wrote an extensive class history. However, his love of history and eagerness to dig out primary sources gave him all the necessary training he needed.

His job at DuPont starting in 1952 as a Technical Service Representative in Dyeing and Finishing of the new Dacron polyester fiber required extensive travel. He would often leave for the southern mills on Sunday night, and return Friday night. Much of the distant travel was by train, then car rental when he arrived in the area. Plane travel came much later in his career. He told me that there was a uniform he and his colleagues were required to wear on customer visits: Gray suit, white shirt, tie, and a fedora. Having joined DuPont only 17 years later, I was aghast at the earlier dress code, which had disappeared along with any trace of fedoras.

Because there was not much else to do after he finished his mill business, Herb began to seek out old bookstores on his travels, and would often bring back purchases on the train or plane. He avidly collected chemistry books that he felt would help him in his historical research, concerned more with content than appearance. He preferred his books to show signs of use. In due course, he built up a wonderful collection of 4000 chemistry books, primarily from the 19th century, with some from the 18th century.
As if he did not have enough projects, after Herb retired from DuPont in 1985, he enrolled in Goddard College in Plainfield, VT. With a combination of visits to the campus and doing the work at home, he got a Master's Degree in the History of Chemistry in 1987.

Chemical history was just one of Herb's many interests, which is evident from just a sampling of the organizations to which he belonged and actively participated in: ACS, AATCC, ASTM, Archaeological Society of Delaware, Torch Club of Delaware, New Castle Historical Society, Delaware Bibliophiles, Society for the History of Chemistry, and Friends of Bellanca Aircraft.

Herb was instrumental in doing the historical research on many projects in the Wilmington area. He received an award for spearheading the history and restoration of his church, the Mount Pleasant Meeting House and Parsonage, after it was transferred to the Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation. With his attention to historical detail, he even arranged to find furniture for it appropriate to the age, and have a carpet custom woven to match and replace the original worn carpet.

Another local project was researching the history of the only remaining airplane hangar on the site of the Bellanca Aircraft Company near New Castle. His research was instrumental in a volunteer group getting state funding for the restoration.

No matter what the project, Herb was drawn to it if he could help uncover its history. I often visited Herb at his home in New Castle, and he did the bulk of his research on a simple card table set up in the small sitting room. Projects were carefully laid out, covering the table, and he always bemoaned not having enough time for all his active projects. Yet, he was always willing to take on more.

As Herb described his approach to problem solving when he received the Olney Medal in 1993, he had spent the past twenty years researching the biographies of obscure chemists. Herb wrote numerous articles on these obscure chemists and the history of chemistry and dyeing. Herb always provided extensive, detailed references. A *Journal of Chemical Education* article, “Samuel L. Mitchill's Evaluation of the Lectures of Joseph Black,” particularly impressed me. It has one page of text and one page of fine print notes and references.

The publication Herb considered his most important contribution to the history of chemistry was the result of the purchase of a rare letter written by John Dalton to a Quaker Friend in 1803. It is a most significant find because it describes Dalton's experiments on atomic theory that prove he knew what he had found at that early time. He stated that, "I am just upon the point of discovering something superior to any of those already published, & which which may be of as much importance to science as that of Gravitation itself ..." Up until Herb found this letter, there had been controversy over whether or not Dalton knew what he was doing. Herb published that letter in *Ambix*, Vol. 57, No. 3, November, 2010, 301-10, "A Letter Signed: The Very Beginnings of Dalton's Atomic Theory."

No aspect of a chemist's life was too far afield for Herb, and one of his favorites involved Faraday's religion. In 1985 Herb spent a eight hours each day for a week at the Royal Institution going through Michael Faraday's Bibles. Faraday was an active member of the Church of Christ in London, known as the Sandemanians, and his Bibles are heavily annotated. Herb studied these marks in detail, bringing along new copies of the same Bible editions that Faraday had used, and marked his just as Faraday had. This led shortly to two publications, the first titled Brother Faraday, published in Restoration Quarterly, and the second Michael Faraday's Bibles as Mirrors of his Faith, published in Bulletin for the History of Chemistry.

Herb leaves not only a rich legacy of valuable historical research, but has touched many friends with his kindness and humanity. He is survived by his devoted wife of 65 years, Mary, who was his supportive partner for all his collections and research, and who collaborated on every aspect of his publications.

Steve Beare, Chief Bibliophile Elect, Bolton Society
Bolton Symposium Published

Just published!

A festival of chemistry entertainments edited by Jack Stocker and Natalie Foster contains papers presented at the Bolton Society Symposium held in 2008. The brain child of Jack Stocker, who organized the symposium, declared at the opening of the symposium that “This is a festival of whimsy”.


100% of the royalties from the sale of this publication (print and electronic) will be donated to the Bolton Society as designated by Jack Stocker.

Bolton Society and the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry

“The Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry (of the periodical Ambix fame) will hold its regular Fall 2013 Meeting in London on November 9, 2013 on the theme of Books in Chemistry. Bolton Society members are invited to present papers at this meeting.” — An Invitation from Robert G.W. Anderson and Gary Patterson To A Joint SHAC/Bolton Society Meeting In London, England in 2013.


Gary Patterson’s Thanksgiving for Chemistry: A Reflection after my trip to England follows.
Thanksgiving for Chemistry: A Reflection after my trip to England

Gary Patterson, Carnegie Mellon University,
Chemical Heritage Foundation, Bolton Society, Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry

While the official civic holiday of Thanksgiving is a characteristically American celebration, it does provide a good excuse to reflect on Chemistry and its pleasures. A group of Chemical Bibliophiles (Bolton Society) attended the Annual General Meeting of the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry at the Royal Institution in London on November 9, 2013. While most of the Boltonians are members of SHAC, it was a good opportunity to meet and greet fellow book lovers and historians of alchemy.


The Royal Institution has been a major part of the history of chemistry since its founding in 1799. It is once again in good hands and Frank James gave a wonderful introduction to “The Royal Institution and its Library.” Boltonians enjoyed an unfettered romp through the actual library.

David Knight (Durham) gave an illustrated lecture on “Chemists and Books of Natural Theology.” The high level of this talk reinforced the ambiance of the SHAC meeting.

While words are associated with the literature of Alchemy, it is the images that dominate the subject. Anke Timmerman (Cambridge) has thought deeply about how to catalog such images and make them truly available to chemists.

The international character of SHAC was on display when Pierre Laszlo (Ecole Polytechnique, Paris) discussed “Marginalia, Historians and Historians of Chemistry.”

Another senior respected member of SHAC, William Brock (Leicester), talked about “Liebigiana: Liebig Collectors and Bibliographers.” Bibliographers got their due at this meeting of the Bolton Society!

One of the high points of the meeting was a presentation by an undergraduate at the University of Edinburgh, Elizabeth Clarence, on “Arthur Conan Doyle and the Chemistry of Sherlock Holmes.” The role of Crum Brown in the education of Doyle was featured.
The good feelings generated during the official day were continued over dinner, a common outcome of this venture.

Many of the Boltonians took advantage of Robert Anderson’s suggestion that the Penn Club might be a pleasant and affordable venue. The common breakfasts were both pleasant and informative. Sunday in London was spent relaxing and enjoying the many joys of the town. Indian food in London is superb and was sampled by most of the Boltonians.

Monday arrived with a bus trip to Cambridge. The comfortable Mercedes coach delivered us to the Whipple Museum of the History of Science in Cambridge. There we were treated to a feast of bibliophilic material served by Lisa Taub (Director), Anna Jones (Librarian) and Peter Wothers (SHAC Secretary-elect). Going from glory to glory, we moved on to King’s College where Peter Jones showed us a collection of Isaac Newton’s alchemical manuscripts. And to top off the morning, Jenny Rampling (soon at Princeton) showed us her personal object of alchemical devotion, a Ripley scroll. We can hardly wait for the full book on the Ripley scrolls and their place in the History of Alchemy. The bus then transported us to Robert Anderson’s private lair, Clare Hall, for lunch. A common room lunch was enjoyed by all the Boltonians and Jenny Rampling.

The final event of the afternoon was a visit to the new Cavendish Laboratory Museum hosted by Malcolm Longair. Many famous pieces of scientific apparatus were on display and the personal commentary made them live in 2013. A walk by the original Cavendish Lab provided an opportunity for pictures.

The final day of the tour was spent in Oxford. We gathered in the basement of the Museum of the History of Science in Broad Street, the site of the original Ashmolean Museum and chemistry laboratory of Elias Ashmole. A discourse on the chemistry lab was presented by Stephen Johnson (Director). SHAC has an official archivist, Tony Simcock, and he presented a history of SHAC and its journal *Ambix*. In addition to its illustrious President, Robert G.W. Anderson, SHAC has a charming Secretary, John Perkins. He regaled the Boltonians with tales of “Chemistry in the Popular Press in France, 1760-1789.” The morning finished with a talk by Robert Anderson on “Robert T. Gunther and the History of Chemistry.”

After a great lunch at Quod Brasserie in High Street, we enjoyed a tour of the Oxford University Press Museum hosted by Martin Maw (OUP Archivist). So many words, so little time! Just before leaving Oxford, a visit to Blackwell’s was allowed. They knew we were coming.
Bolton Society membership continues to grow


The society’s membership as of May 2014 is 95.

The Othmer library and archives collections contain intriguing, quirky and often fun images. *Othmeralia* — named after our benefactors, Donald and Mildred Topp Othmer, showcase the library’s hidden treasures.

Our Tumblr insignia is from a sketch by Don. Visit Othmeralia and find out the entire story behind this emblem.

**BOLTONIA** is the newsletter of the Bolton Society, an organization of chemical bibliophiles. A subsidiary of the Chemical Heritage Foundation, the Bolton Society promotes the individual love for and collection of all types of material related to the history and development of the chemical sciences and related technologies. It also advances the cause of the Donald F. and Mildred Topp Othmer Library of Chemical History.

For more information contact: 

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