

Chapter 1

Introduction and Outline

Canisius College was founded in Buffalo, New York in 1870 as a mission school of the German Jesuits. In the beginning the first academic offerings were at the high school level and gradually evolved to a college curriculum. By the middle 1880's both Canisius High School and College operated in the same buildings on Washington Street in the heart of Buffalo. In 1910, the College began construction of a new building and in 1913, Canisius College moved to its new and current location on Main Street at Jefferson Avenue upon completion of the building now called Old Main.

The move to Main Street provides one reason for beginning the story of the Chemistry Department in 1913. Another major factor was the rapid growth of the chemical industry in Western New York at that time. With the introduction of electric power generation at Niagara Falls in 1896, major electrochemical and electrothermic industries were founded and employed a large labor force in the early 1900's. The early beginning and growth of the Chemistry Department at the College paralleled this industrial growth.

In 1937, the College constructed a second building on campus, the Horan-O'Donnell Science Building which was in addition to Old Main. The building was a new facility for the Chemistry and Physics Departments and reflects the growth of the physical sciences at the College. Built during the economic depression of the 1930's, the building was never fully completed until its eventual renovation in 1984. Its stark, gray cinder block walls and lack of elevator over this approximately 50 year period provided a dull physical setting for legions of science students, but did not deter them from experiencing a relevant, challenging set of chemistry, physics and mathematics courses in the pursuit of both undergraduate and master level college degrees.

The history of the chemical industry in Western New York is a story in itself. It grew rapidly from 1900 to the 1950's and then began to decline over the next 50 years. Only a few of the major nationally recognized industries like DuPont have a presence today in Western New York. Today the health related industries and the State University have become the major employers of chemists and biochemists. The evolution of the Chemistry Department reflects these changes in the chemical community as this history will clearly show.

In general terms, it is convenient to consider the history of the Chemistry Department over five progressive time periods.

I. Origins and Growth (1913-1929)

In the first fifty years of the College, there were no departments based on academic disciplines in the administrative structure. The history begins in 1913 as the Chemistry Department emerges and coincides with the opening of Old Main.

II. Austerity, Depression and the War Years

A national economic depression in the 1930's caused a severe strain on the operation of the College and resulted in a decline in student enrollment. World War II also had a major negative effect on enrollment of the all-male undergraduate student body as all able bodied males of college age went off to war.

III. Growth and Transition

The end of the war and the large increase in student enrollment caused by the influx of veterans financed by the G. I. Bill provided an opportunity of change and growth for the College. New faculty appointments resulted in a Chemistry Department with new direction.

IV. A New Era; Stable and Professional (1957-1999)

In the beginning of this period, new faculty, a significant chemical industry presence and transition to coeducation by introduction of women into the undergraduate student body allowed for a long term of stability, growth and productivity.

V. Stability in Time of Change (2000-2015)

The regular cyclic change of faculty resulted in the influx of a second cohort of young faculty. The inclusion of a biochemistry major and changes to the curriculum to accommodate it have resulted in a current period of stability and productivity as measured by student outcomes.

In each time period the narrative includes sections about:

- Curriculum- liberal arts core and courses
- Instruments and the nature of laboratory work
- Buildings and laboratory facilities with photos
- Chairmen, faculty and staff with photos
- Nature of the student body- outcomes and achievements
- Special projects and programs

In addition to the narrative section of the history, an appendix will be presented as a separate part that will list the details of history such as; course titles, student awards, curriculum content, and grant support.

Lastly, reference will be made to the department's website where more extensive information can be found.