

Origin of the International Polymer Colloids Group

Irvin Krieger

Professor Emeritus of Chemistry, Case Western Reserve University

The IPCG is approaching its fiftieth anniversary, I was there when it started, and won't be around much longer, so maybe I should tell you how it began.

On an unrecorded date in the early 1960's, Case alumnus David Williams, then a Professor of Chemical Engineering at City University of New York, visited me in my laboratory at Case. Both of us were working with polymer latices, I focusing on their rheology and order-disorder phase equilibria, and Dave on the insight his autoradiographic studies gave into the mechanism of emulsion polymerization. We lamented that much of what we were doing had probably already been done in industry, but never published. How could we gain access to this treasure of knowledge?

The industrial laboratory most prolific in latex research was that of Dow Chemical Corporation. Dave told me that John Vanderhoff, one of Dow's most experienced researchers, was about to retire to take a professorship at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. When we approached John, he pointed out that, although he had been allowed to publish some of his research, industrial secrecy still prevented him from revealing the rest. However, he agreed that we should form a group to interchange ideas and discuss our current research. John immediately suggested adding Ron Ottewill of the University of Bristol, who headed Britain's foremost academic colloid laboratory. At least once each year, Ron came to the USA to visit his sister, who lived in Bethlehem. We all agreed to meet annually at Lehigh, and to bring with us members of our research groups.

We now had the seed of an international consortium. After we added Bob Fitch, then at the University of Connecticut, the seed grew rapidly. Bob's vision and initiative brought in new members worldwide, and new venues such as the biennial Gordon Research Conferences and short courses sponsored by NATO. Fitch was abetted and ultimately succeeded in his leadership role by Mohamed El-Aasser, who came from the Lehigh group (and now leads it).

Today, the IPCG is large and flourishing. But I closed my laboratory 19 years ago and am well off the "cutting edge", so some one else will have to write the definitive history of the International Polymer Colloid Group.