

Biography of Harold Nathaniel Taylor, Ph.D.

Written 2/17/09/RJT



Harold N. Taylor died Friday, October 14th, 2011, at his home in Pikesville, Maryland. Harold was born on May 18th, 1921 in Baltimore, Maryland. He was the second son of Isaac and Rose (nee Caplan) Taylor. He lived with his parents above the family store, Taylor's Department Store, on Main St., in Ellicott City, MD. He attended the public school system in Howard County through high school and then entered the Johns Hopkins University where he received a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering in 1942. He was a member of Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity. On May 24th, 1942 he married Selma Henrietta Taylor (nee Weidenfeld) from Atlantic City, New Jersey.

In 1942, following marriage and his graduation from Johns Hopkins University, he worked in Alabama for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) doing basic research for making aluminum oxide from low grade clay. At that time, during World War II, German submarines were sinking the bauxite (high grade aluminum oxide) ships in the Caribbean. In 1943, he returned to Johns Hopkins University to teach and work on a master's degree in chemical engineering. His research was for the US Rubber Reserve which was trying to produce synthetic rubber during World War II. While at Hopkins, he studied under the legendary Dr. Paul Emmett who one day called on his protégé and asked him to participate in classified research at Columbia University. He received his master's degree in chemical engineering in 1945 at Johns Hopkins University. From 1944 to 1946 he worked at Columbia University on the classified Manhattan Project (atomic bomb project) doing fundamental research on the separation of U-235 (uranium) from U-238. That work was carried out under Prof. Harold C. Urey (Nobel Prize winner).

In 1946, he moved with his wife and first child to Ithaca, NY where he studied at Cornell University for his PhD in physical chemistry. In Ithaca, the young family lived in an attic. At Cornell, he worked under Prof. Peter Debye (also a Nobel Prize winner). His research dissertation was entitled "Chromatographic Fractionation of Polymers." His PhD was awarded in 1949 at Cornell.

In 1949, his second son was born and the family moved to Wilmington, DE where he worked at DuPont Chemical from 1949-1953 doing scouting research on polyethylene and other polymerization materials. While in Wilmington, his third child, a daughter was born. Feeling the need to more adequately provide financially for his family, the family moved, in 1953, to Hagerstown, MD where he acquired the stock of the Hagerstown Leather Goods Co. which was financially floundering at the time and he proceeded to rebuild the operation. The company was originally located in an old factory building belonging to the Hagerstown Rubber Company at the Washington County City Park. After improving the company's financial condition and because of the need for more space, he constructed a brand new, large manufacturing facility in Hagerstown. While the Hagerstown Leather Goods Co. was his basic company until, his retirement in 1985, the company was supplemented with many other companies and divisions. This was necessary because of the constant competition from low-cost foreign imports.

His business activities included:

The *Hagerstown Leather Goods Co.* was a manufacturer of personal specialty leather and vinyl goods.

Ardee industries was started to make a vinyl lunch kits and Styrofoam thermal bottles for the school trade.

Digby Products was a Connecticut manufacturer of schoolbags. This company was purchased and (a year later) the entire operation was moved to Hagerstown to consolidate with *Ardee* for the school trade.

Tempo was set up to manufacture carrying cases for both audio and video cassettes.

Specialty Manufacturing started as a direct mail operation to sell manufactured line of both leather and vinyl products with special company imprints. The idea was to provide a service with a speed that imports could not match.

He started *Avalon Manor* in 1960 at the then empty Fairchild Aircraft corporate headquarters office building, just north of Hagerstown, converting it into a plush nursing home. This was before nursing homes became prevalent and *Avalon* was so unusual it was written up in a national trade magazine. *Avalon* was sold 1966 when it had grown to such a size that it required more attention than he and his wife could give it, considering the other business activities in which he was involved.

Custom Computing was started because he enjoyed being an innovator and he became a computer bug when his children bought him his first crude Radio Shack computer. Since, at that time, Hagerstown had no dedicated computer stores he started *Custom Computing* prior to IBM entering the personal computer field. The store sold Apple, Ohio Scientific and Radio Shack computers. Again, after the business grew he sold that operation to an interested party.

He served on the board of *Central Chemical* in Hagerstown for five years.

Ampal Industries is an Israeli company with investments worldwide. The company is listed on the American Stock Exchange. Harold served on the American board of directors for 10 years until they consolidated their operation in Israel.

In 1985, Harold sold all the manufacturing enterprises, inventories and accounts to companies that were his competitors at the time. However, in 1989, when approached by a young engineer with an interesting project, he began *Maryland Paper* which manufactured roofing felt by recycling old newspapers and corrugated boxes. A brand-new manufacturing plant was built after purchasing old paper mill equipment. In 1995, the young engineer got sufficient financing from a bank to buy out Harold's interest and allow him to move to Baltimore to retire and be geographically closer to his children.

In addition to his business activities, Harold was also active on many Hagerstown projects and charitable drives. He served on the local executive boards of United Way, Boy Scouts of America, YMCA, Volunteers of America, the Greater Hagerstown Committee, and the Board of Advisers for Technical Projects for Hagerstown Junior College. He also held every office (except secretary) several times in Congregation B'nai Abraham in Hagerstown. He was treasurer and then president for several years of the Maryland Theater in Hagerstown. He was a lifetime member of the Rotary Club (and a Paul Harris Fellow) since 1954 until moving to Baltimore.

In 2000, following the death of his beloved wife, he made a large endowment to Destination Wild Earth: Campaign for the Baltimore Zoo (now called the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore). The African Gateway is named the "Harold and Selma Taylor African Gateway" directly off the central plaza. His choice was easy because of his late wife's love of animals.

In 2004, he endowed the "Harold N. Taylor Auditorium" at the Whiting School of Engineering at Johns Hopkins University. Ironically, it was in that large lecture hall where he spent many hours as an engineering student while at Johns Hopkins.

His wife, Selma, died in 1999. He is survived by son Dr. Ronald J. Taylor, son Dr. Richard L. Taylor and wife, Kathryn, and daughter Debra E. Taylor. He is also survived by two grandchildren, Steven and wife, Meghan, and Allison Taylor as well as two great grandchildren, Sydney Taylor and Joshua Taylor. He is also survived by his older brother, Dr. Irving J. Taylor. Interment will be at Chizuk Amuno's Arlington Cemetery in Baltimore.