



*Thomas Baron*

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1921–1985

By Monroe E. Spaght

Thomas Baron, who retired in September 1981 as president of Shell Development Company, died in Houston, Texas, on May 20, 1985, at the age of sixty-four. He was born in Budapest, Hungary, on February 15, 1921, but came to America in 1939.

He attended De Paul University, after which he continued his education at the University of Illinois, obtaining a B.S. (1943) and a Ph.D. (1948) in chemical engineering. He also served in the U.S. Army from 1944 to 1946. After receiving his doctorate, Dr. Baron remained at the University of Illinois, first as an instructor in chemical engineering from 1948 to 1949 and then as an assistant professor in the same department until 1951.

In 1951 Dr. Baron joined Shell Development Company in Emeryville, California, as a chemical engineer. In 1955 he became assistant head of Shell's Chemical Engineering Department and was named head of that department in the next year. He held that position until 1961. After an assignment with the Shell Chemical Company at its synthetic rubber plant in Torrance, California, Baron moved to Houston, Texas, in 1965 as vice-president of Shell Development's Exploration and Production Research Division. In 1967 Thomas Baron became president of Shell Development Company, then an organization of nearly 2,000 people. He

held that position with distinction until his retirement in 1981.

During his thirty-year career with Shell, Dr. Baron received several awards and distinctions that showed the high regard of the chemical engineering profession for his contributions and accomplishments. He received the Alan P. Colburn Award of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers in 1952 and the Institute's Professional Progress Award in 1961; in 1973 he was elected a fellow of the institute. He also received the American Academy of Achievement Award in 1962 and the University of Illinois College of Engineering Alumni Honor Award for Distinguished Service in Engineering in 1967. At various times, he served on advisory councils at Princeton and Stanford universities and was a consultant to the U.S. Army Chemical Corps from 1949 to 1951. In 1977 Thomas Baron was elected to the National Academy of Engineering.

The above paragraphs record the impersonal facts that describe the career of Dr. Thomas Baron. Yet, there is much more to be said about this outstanding man.

When Tom joined our organization, I was president of Shell Development Company with offices in Emeryville, California. It was my pleasure to see him through the following years and to witness firsthand much of his work. It was evident to all of us from the very beginning that he was a most outstanding engineer, indeed.

In his years at Emeryville, Dr. Baron made significant contributions to chemical engineering theory and practice in fluid dynamics—specifically, to the areas of organic chemical reactions relating to both the petroleum and chemical process industries, of combustion phenomena, and of multiphase separation processes. He successfully found solutions to complex problems in these areas by the use of applied mathematics. His publications, most notably those concerning the design of catalytic reactors and turbulent flame theory, are classic contributions to the literature.

Most significant in these later years, however, was his personal

direction of, inspiration to, and leadership in broad fields of industrial research that he perceived were necessary for his company. These fields included such diverse areas as (1) extractive technologies (petroleum exploration and production; coal extraction, beneficiation, and upgrading; shale oil extraction; and tar sands technology); (2) basic chemical and engineering exploratory work; and (3) process research and development in the oil and chemical products sectors.

Thomas Baron was highly respected by his colleagues. Writing about him some years ago, one of his senior people expressed that respect in this way:

Dr. Baron is totally committed to scientific excellence, and insists on professional excellence among those who work for him. He uses his own manifold talent in scientific, intellectual, and artistic matters to excite the imagination and inspire the efforts of scientists under his leadership. His own scientific accomplishments in mathematics, physics, and chemical engineering stand as an example of the excellence which he inspires in others. His dedication to scientific excellence is based on his firm conviction that the welfare of his company, the industry, and the nation demand such excellence from all who work for them. His intense commitments are tempered by a sense of fair play, human understanding, and judgment which enable him to place the inevitable pressures into a proper perspective.

Thus, there has passed from the human scene another distinguished scientist. The world is better for his having been with us, and all of us who knew and worked with him will always carry happy and respectful thoughts of that association in our hearts.

Dr. Baron is survived by his wife, Marjorie; his mother, Mrs. Maria Baron; and two daughters.