

St. Elmo Brady

The first African American chemist to earn a doctorate in the US.

ABOUT

St. Elmo Brady was born in 1884, in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1914 he received his master's in chemistry and continued his graduate studies under Professor Clarence G. Derick. Derick and the Harvard chemist Arthur Michael disagreed on how the acidity of carboxylic acids was affected by replacing hydrogen atoms on the carbon chain with other functional groups. This was St. Elmo Brady's focus during his PhD; he investigated the acidity of straight-chain carboxylic acids in which a pair of hydrogen atoms were replaced with an oxygen atom to give a keto acid. Due to St. Elmo Brady's research, new methods for preparing and purifying carboxyl groups were identified, and clarifying the effect of carbonyl groups on the acidity of carboxylic acids.

In 1916, in just two years, St. Elmo Brady completed his PhD; his dissertation was titled "The Scale of Influence of Substituents in Paraffine Monobasic Acids. The Divalent Oxygen Atom".



Did you know?

St. Elmo Brady established a strong undergraduate curriculum and a fund-raising campaign at all four historically black colleges and universities in the US.

He also established the first graduate chemistry programme at a historically black college.

At the University of Illinois, he set up a summer programme in infrared spectroscopy, which was open to all colleges and universities. He also started a lecture series that invited recognised chemists to share their research at Fisk University.