

**Mary Virginia Orna (1934- )**  
**2021 HIST Award Winner**



Sister Dr. Mary Virginia Orna was born and raised in New Jersey. She received a B.S. in Chemistry in 1955 from Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is a Roman Catholic college with an outstanding reputation in the sciences. She pursued graduate education in Analytical Chemistry at Fordham University in New York and received her Ph.D. in 1962 under Michael Cefola. She completed her preparation for her professional life at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. and received an M.A. in Religious Education in 1967.

Sister Dr. Orna joined the College of New Rochelle (New York) in 1966 and is now Professor of Chemistry Emerita. Throughout most of its history, the College of New Rochelle was a private, Roman Catholic, women's college. Although she is being honored for her contributions to the worldwide community of historians of chemistry, she has devoted her life first to her Ursuline order and to her students, both in her own college and in the rest of the world. She has received many awards for her devotion to chemical education, including the CASE New York State Professor of the Year in 1989 and the ACS George C. Pimentel National Award in Chemical Education in 1999. She continues her efforts to inform and educate the world about Chemistry through her NSF spin-off enterprise, ChemSource.

Although her professional base was in New Rochelle, she has often posted to other locations to pursue some of her many passions. She became Director of Educational Services at the Chemical Heritage Foundation (now Science History Institute) in Philadelphia from 1997-2000. She was also the Editor of Chemical Heritage Magazine. Dr. Orna was instrumental in founding the Edelstein Center for the Analysis of Middle Eastern Textiles and Artifacts. During her Fulbright Fellowship in Israel (1994-95), she lectured at Hebrew University, the Weizmann Institute of Science and the Shenkar College of Textile Technology. During her posting to Rome she partnered with Marco Fontani and Mariagrazia Costa to produce *The Lost Elements: The Periodic Table's Shadow Side* (2015). Wherever she has been, she has reached out to the worldwide community of chemical historians for the benefit of all.

Sister Orna joined the Division of the History of Chemistry in 1976 and rapidly became an essential member of the Executive Committee. She served as Chair in 1984 and as Treasurer in 1989-90. She has been a Division Councilor for more than 30 years and has served on all the elected and standing ACS Council Committees. She received the ACS Volunteer Service Award in 2009. Her life of dedicated and unselfish service to the American Chemical Society community, local, regional and national, was honored with the 2018 Radding Award.

Sister Professor Dr. Mary Virginia Orna is the recipient of the 2021 HIST Award for Outstanding Lifetime Achievement in the History of Chemistry. She has devoted her technical career to the study of color and its role in human culture: *The Chemical History of Color* (2013). She has been a champion of the Archeological Chemistry community: *Archeological Chemistry: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of the Past* (with Seth Rasmussen, 2019). She has been a leader in the appreciation of the geography of Chemistry: *Science History: A Traveler's Guide* (2014), and has made major contributions to the understanding of the chemical elements: *Development of the Periodic System and its Consequences* (*Substantia* special issue, with Marco Fontani, 2019). Professor Orna appreciates the personal side of Chemistry and has published biographies: *Carl Auer von Welsbach: Chemist, Inventor, Entrepreneur* (2017). Her achievements in pure history of chemistry would easily qualify her for this Award.

One of the ways in which Dr. Orna has blessed the worldwide community in the History of Chemistry is as an organizer of symposia (with corresponding books): *History and Preservation of Chemical Instrumentation* (1985); *Electrochemistry, Past and Present* (1989); *Chemistry's Role in Food Production and Sustainability: Past and Present* (with Gillian Eggleston and Alvin Bopp, 2019). She is also one of the most frequent contributors to symposia organized by others (dozens of papers). Her role in the growth and development of historians of chemistry is another one of her major achievements (dozens of people). Sister Orna has also taken a leadership role

in researching the contributions of women scientists to the history of chemistry: *Dame Kathleen Lonsdale: Scientist, Pacifist, Prison Reformer* (2018).

Sister Dr. Mary Virginia Orna has accomplished much for the History of Chemistry. She has served this community with both grace and humor. She has helped to establish HIST within both the ACS and the worldwide community of historians of chemistry.