

Harris, Isaac Foust ^[1]

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by Maurice M. Bursey, 1988

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Isaac Foust Harris, chemist, was born in Chapel Hill, the son of [Thomas West Harris](#) ^[2], organizer and first head of the medical and pharmacy schools of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[3], and Sally M. Foust Harris. He attended the [Bingham School](#) ^[4] in Mebane and The University of North Carolina, earning a B.S. degree in 1900 and an M.S. degree in 1903; his first thesis in biochemistry was entitled "Nucleic Acid of the Wheat Embryo." The work was actually done at the [Connecticut Experiment Station](#) ^[5], where he had been a Carnegie research student since 1901 and would continue until 1907. Afterwards the city of New York invited him to join its Lederle Antitoxin Laboratories, where he studied the preparation of antitoxins. In 1909, he received wide recognition for the purest and most potent preparation of diphtheria antitoxin made until then; that summer he was called to demonstrate his techniques in the most important laboratories in Europe.

From the Lederle Laboratories Harris moved to the Arlington Research Laboratories in Yonkers, N.Y., in 1912. Three years later, when he was awarded the Ph.D. degree from [Yale](#) ^[6], he left the Arlington Laboratories to oversee the department of biochemistry at E. R. Squibb & Sons in New York. There he developed and supervised the manufacture of chloramines for the use of army medical units in [World War I](#) ^[7]. He resigned in 1919 to form his own company.

Harris Laboratories, in Tuckahoe, N.Y., was the first, and for ten years the only, commercial producer of vitamins. The U.S. Public Health Service sought Harris's products for use across the country; indeed, his preparation of Vitamin B was the key to ridding his native South of the scourge, [pellagra](#) ^[8]. Research at the company was conducted not only on the preparation of vitamins but also on a broad range of biochemical topics: vegetable proteins, especially ricin from the castor bean and urease from the soybean; thromboplastin; and blood serum immunity. Eventually the laboratories' annual business was measured in hundreds of millions of dollars. In 1942 Harris retired as owner and director of the company, which was purchased by [Bristol Laboratories](#) and moved to Syracuse, N.Y.

On 29 July 1915, Harris married Elizabeth Heroy of Stamford, Conn. They had two daughters: Elizabeth (Mrs. John Hahn of Kansas City, Mo.), born 13 Oct. 1916; and Helen (Mrs. Tristram B. Johnson of Princeton, N.J.), born 11 Feb. 1921. In 1932 the Harrises moved to Rockledge, their home in Rye, N.Y., where he died.

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Additional Resources:

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