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Marcel Dekker

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In Memoriam



Dr. Maurits Dekker
March 18, 1899 - January 16, 1995

Dr. Maurits Dekker (commonly known as Mau or Chairman Mau) was born in Amsterdam on March 18, 1899. He was the youngest of the four children of Elizabeth Pekel and Marcus Dekker. In Amsterdam, he attended elementary school and a three-year high school. His academic excellence allowed him to transfer to a more advanced five-year high school, from which he graduated in 1916. While in high school he demonstrated a gift for languages; for example, he read for pleasure the literature of Flaubert, Rabelais, and Balzac in the original French. He took great pride in this skill, fluently speaking Dutch, German, and English, as well as French.

In 1917 Mau began his university studies at the University of Amsterdam. He studied chemistry and microbiology and graduated in 1922 with a "Doctorandus, Drs." degree. During his studies he was supported by several organizations supervised by J. F. van Oss, a teacher and author of a textbook on "Warenkennis" (consumer goods). He helped van Oss in writing some of the chapters, reading and checking the manuscripts, and preparing the index. Dekker also did technical writing, which provided him with a small income. He wrote two or three times a week on the economics of the chemical industry. The columns were edited by J. F. van Oss and Dr. Gerrit Hondius Boldingh of the University of Amsterdam and published by D. B. Centen in two of its publications: *Chemisch Weekblad* and *Pharmaceutisch Weekblad*. These experiences were the forerunner of what was to come. Because of his experiences, Mau was aware of the importance and difficulty involved in editing technical material.

Instead, through his contact with *Chemisch Weekblad*, he developed an idea which was entrepreneurial in nature: he offered his services to D. B. Centen for six months free of charge in order to develop a direct mail book selling division for scientific and technical books. He was so successful that he became the paid managing director of this innovative division: "D. B. Centen's Wetenschappelijke Boekhandel."

Dekker continued to tutor a number of pupils after finishing his University studies. One of his students was Johann Gerhard Nordemann, who enlisted Dekker's help to teach him the principles of chemistry and physics. He planned to use this knowledge in his summer beer enterprise and winter anthracite business. During the lessons they often talked of other entrepreneurial possibilities. This led them to the idea in 1926 of Nordemann becoming the bookkeeper of D. B. Centen. In 1927, they decided to form a partnership called "Dekker and Nordemann's Wetenschappelijke Boekhandel." Since the owners of D. B. Centen wanted to retire, Dekker and Nordemann merged the two companies. Under the aegis of Dekker and Nordemann, the former owners received half the profits of the newly created company for several years.

The company grew very rapidly with its newfound strategy of selling Dutch books by mail, specializing in the fields of chemistry and pharmacy. After a period of time they decided to augment this activity by selling other scientific and technical works. They had the foresight to visualize that the English language would become the common international language for science and technology. To test their theory, they decided to purchase the translation rights to a few famous German texts. The most famous of these were the *Textbook of Organic Chemistry* by Paul Karrer and *Spot Test* by Fritz Feigl.

Mau learned that publishing was a different business from distributing. As a consequence, he came into contact with Johann Klautz, president of Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, who guided them through the production and printing processes of their publishing programs.

Since it was expected that the United States would in the future be a large, if not the largest, buyer of English language books, they decided in 1937 that a visit to the United States was necessary. They decided to establish the Nordemann Publishing Company, New York, owned by Dekker and Nordemann Wetenschappelijke Boekhandel, Amsterdam. Dr. Eric Proskauer was asked by Maurits Dekker to help to develop this publishing company in 1938.

In the spring of 1939 Elsevier Publishing, Amsterdam, asked Maurits Dekker to go to the United States for the primary purpose of founding their New York office. In June 1939, he and his family took care of all the necessary requirements for entry into the United States. These included physical examinations, passports, visas, and

appropriate bank papers. It was planned for Dekker to leave in the first week of September. His family—which included his wife, Rozetta Roos; his daughter, Elizabeth; and his two sons, Andrew and Marcel—were to follow within three months. However, when Germany declared war on England on September 3, Maurits changed his mind because the English and the Germans had mined the English Channel. Nevertheless, by the middle of October he finally decided to buy passage for himself only, but his wife insisted that the entire family accompany him. Within one week, possessions were sold or packed, and the entire family set sail on *The Zaandam* of the Holland American Line on October 26, 1939, arriving in New York on November 7, 1939. It was the next to last regularly scheduled liner to arrive successfully from Holland.

From December 1939 to May 1940, Maurits was salaried by Elsevier and managed the distribution of Elsevier books in the United States and Canada. At the same time, Dekker joined forces with Proskauer. When Germany invaded Holland in May 1940, contact with Europe ceased. As a consequence, all the assets were placed in an escrow account and a new publishing company was founded: Interscience Publishers, Inc., New York. Maurits became President and Eric S. Proskauer Vice President and subsequently Chairman of the Board.

With the help of such key people as Herman Mark for the field of polymers, I. M. Kolthoff for analytical chemistry, A. Weissberger for organic chemistry, and Richard Courant for mathematics, Interscience grew rapidly and became internationally recognized as one of the leading scientific and technical publishers of its time. Mau was fond of telling stories of his weekly meetings in Brooklyn with Ray Kirk for the planning, developing, and publishing of the *Encyclopedia of Chemical Technology*. In the early days, this was Interscience's greatest success. It was also a prelude to Interscience's international acclaim because Mau traveled the world to sell the encyclopedia. He repeated these international visits periodically. He glowed when he stated, "I didn't go to sell; instead I traveled to smooth out our distribution." Even today, when I visit distributors throughout the world, they all ask for him and say there never has been a better publisher's ambassador who cared so much for the welfare of the book trade. Mau's education as a scientist and his activities as bookseller gained him the trust and admiration of colleagues in the book trade. Interscience became a premier publisher because of its ability to attract leading international authors, maintain standards of excellence, establish an unusually good market penetration, and maintain a publishing program at the forefront of scientific and technical developments. Examples of titles other than the *Encyclopedia of Chemical Technology* of which Mau was especially fond of remembering are: *The Treatise of Analytical Chemistry*, edited by I. M. Kolthoff and P. J. Elving; *Industrial Oil and Fat Products* by A. E. Bailey; *Medicinal Chemistry* by A. Burger; *Advanced Inorganic Chemistry* by Albert Cotton and G. Wilkinson; *Methods of Biochemical Analysis*, edited by David Glisk; *Fatty Acids* by S. Markley; *Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology*, edited by F. A. Patty; and the *Journal of Polymer Science*. All of these are now classics. Twenty-one years later, in 1961, Interscience merged with John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Mau remained with Wiley-Interscience until 1965.

Maurits and Ro Dekker's daughter, Elly, married Professor Dr. Hans Wynberg, a professor of organic chemistry, University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Their oldest son, Andrew, is a professor of pathology at Presbyterian Hospital, University of Pittsburgh. His son, Marcel, following in his father's footsteps in the publishing business, founded Marcel Dekker, Inc. in 1963. The *Journal of Liquid Chromatography*, in which this tribute is published, is one of Marcel Dekker, Inc.'s flagship publications.

Maurits joined Marcel Dekker, Inc. in 1966 with the responsibility for editorial acquisitions and was appointed Chairman of the Board. His interests ranged far and wide, but analytical chemistry was one discipline he revered, as exemplified by his association with such publications as *Advances in Chromatography* (now in 34 volumes), *Electroanalytical Chemistry* (in 32 volumes), the journal *Separation Science and Technology*, and the large program of titles in chromatography, spectroscopy, and a myriad of other books on analytical methods and techniques.

During Mau's 67-year career, he originated one successful bookselling business, founded two new publishing companies, and helped to develop a third. Most people would be proud to be the founder of one business establishment, never mind three. His motivation stemmed from the knowledge that he was advancing the building blocks of science and technology by publishing state-of-the-art works. As Herman Mark said in his letter of November 21, 1988 to Mau: "It was repeatedly said that you were a leading factor in the publication activities in this field of polymer science." The same can be said for other specialties and subspecialties, too many to mention here. His life and his career truly typify the spirit of a publishing pioneer.

His creative efforts were best captured in the last paragraph of the Honorary Doctoral Degree awarded to him in 1982 by the Polytechnic University:

For your creative, preeminent, and continuing achievement as an international editor and publisher, and no less for your shining example as a human being, we confer on you the highest academic distinction that Polytechnic Institute of New York affords, the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa.

The world of publishing has been known as a sanctuary for the intellectual, dignified, discreet and refined. Maurits Dekker will be missed for all of those qualities and for the unifying force he represented in interfacing the scientific community with scientific and technical publishing.

Marcel Dekker