

Obituary

Zygmunt Lasocki (1922–1993)

Zygmunt Lasocki, Professor of Chemistry in the Technical University of Łódź and founder of the Polish Research School in Organosilicon Chemistry, died suddenly on 5 December 1993.

Zygmunt Lasocki was born in 1922 in north-eastern Poland at a family country mansion in Dzierżbia. His youth was strongly affected by the tragic events in World War II. He passed the entrance examinations for the Faculty of Chemistry at the Technical University of Warsaw in 1939, but was not given the opportunity to begin his studies. For the next six years he taught within the Polish underground educational scheme in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, served as soldier of the Home Army, and fought during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.

In 1945 he went to Łódź to study chemistry at a newly created Technical University, the old Warsaw universities being in ruins. He received his M.Sc. degree in 1950 and in the following year he became an Assistant Lecturer in Organic Chemistry. The early years of his academic career, the whole of which were spent at the Technical University of Łódź, were largely devoted to the establishment of an undergraduate teaching programme and the creation of new courses in polymer chemistry and technology. In 1960 he received the Ph.D. and in 1964 his Habilitation Degree, and he became a professor in 1971. In 1973 he was elected a Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

His research was mainly on organosilicon chemistry, and his first papers in that field were published in 1955. In 1956 he went for one year to Great Britain to work at the University of Leicester with Colin Eaborn. It was there that his interest in the kinetics and mechanisms of reactions of organosilicon compounds was aroused, and from then on he continued research in that area. He was the first to carry out systematic kinetic studies of the polycondensation of diorganosilanedioles. As part of this research he synthesized a series of new organosilicon compounds as substrates and model diols that were used to establish structure–reactivity relationships employing the Taft and Hammett approach. An extension of the programme led to important observations on the formation of polysiloxanes in the course of cationic ring-opening

polymerization of cyclic siloxanes and poly(dehydrocondensation) of silanols and silicon hydrides.

Lasocki also contributed to development of the chemistry of silazane-type polymers and copolymers, synthesizing new poly(siloxazanes) by ring-opening polymerization and various new polysilazanes by polycondensation and polyaddition routes.

A considerable part of his research was devoted to the silylation of organic compounds. His kinetic studies led to greater understanding of silylation reactions involving use of bis(silyl)amides and silyl esters of carboxylic acids. The synthesis of new cyclic silyl amides and their siloxazine isomers enabled him to carry out quantitative studies of silylamide–silylimine isomerization.

Zygmunt Lasocki was also always firmly dedicated to teaching. For five years he served as Sub-Dean, and for several years he ran the Polymer Institute of the University as the Deputy Director responsible for teaching and research. Over 150 students received their B.Sc., M.Sc. or Ph.D. degrees under his direct supervision. He had a great ability to motivate and encourage young chemists in their efforts to carry out up-to-date research during the days of great economic hardship in the country.

Lasocki's research activities were well recognized within Poland and abroad. He was a member of several important boards and councils, and held visiting professorships at universities in France, UK, Japan, USA, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the former Soviet Union.

Zygmunt Lasocki formally retired in 1992, but he remained as active as ever. In 1993 he was the Chairman of the National Scientific Committee of the 10th International Symposium on Organosilicon Chemistry held in Poznan (Poland). After that symposium a celebration for his 70th birthday was held in Łódź during an international scientific meeting devoted to "Organosilicon Polymers", which attracted 70 participants. This gathering of the organosilicon community was an occasion to pay tribute to a most distinguished Polish organosilicon chemist and a wonderful person. All those who met Zygmunt could sense his air of authority, his wide-ranging intellect and his friendly nature. We who were privileged to work with him in close collaboration will never forget his courteous, slightly

old-fashioned manners, his gentle smile and pensive mind. He was, as E.A.V. Ebsworth said in an address during the Łódź meeting, not only an excellent chemist but also the epitome of a gentleman.

Zofia M. Michalska
Julian Chojnowski
Włodzimierz Stąńczyk

Note by Regional Editor

I knew Zygmunt Lasocki well, and I treasured our friendship. He was a chemist of considerable ability

who achieved much under very difficult conditions, and a highly cultured person with a true nobility of mind and manner. He experienced much tragedy in his life, and although he never complained of his lot a sadness remained with him. However he also possessed a gentle, warm sense of humour and especially enjoyed the wonderful jokes that sustained the Polish people under their oppressors. The world is a poorer place without him. The thoughts of his many friends are with his wife Kamila, to whom he was devoted.

Colin Eaborn