





Y. Xia PhD (Harvard 1996)
|
G. M. Whitesides PhD (Cal Tech 1964)
|
J. D. Roberts PhD (UCLA 1944)
|
W. G. Young PhD (Cal Tech 1929)
|
H. J. Lucas MA (Ohio State 1908)
|
W. McPherson DSc (Ohio State 1895)
|
H. A. Weber BS (Munich 1868)
|
J. von Liebig PhD (Erlangen 1822)
|
K. F. W. G. Kastner PhD (Jena 1805)
|
J. F. A. Göttling Apothecary (Langensalza 1775)
|
J. C. Wiegleb Apothecary (Langensalza 1765)
|
E. G. Baldinger MD (Jena 1760)
|
C. A. Mangold MD (Erfurt 1751)
|
G. E. Hamberger MD (Jena 1721)
|
J. A. Wedel MD (Jena 1697)
|
G. W. Wedel MD (Jena 1669)
|
W. Rolfinck MD (Padua 1625)
|
A. van den Spieghel MD (Padua 1603)
|
G. Fabrici MD (Padua 1559)
|
G. Fallopio MD (Ferrara 1548)
|
A. M. Barasavola MD/PhD (Ferrara 1520)
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N. da Lonigo MD/PhD (Padua 1453)

At the occasion of the Installation Ceremony at Washington University
September 2, 2008

Former Alumni

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dong and Younan,

It is a great pleasure and honour for us, former alumni, to be here with you today at this marvellous event. We do live through moments of joy and pride while at the same time reflecting upon the diverse career paths that we have pursued in recent years. It is, in some sense, revitalizing our past.

We took the occasion of this ceremony to look back with you in space and time and resume our academic history beyond of what we have experienced so far and learned in previous lectures this afternoon.

Our present to you is, in fact, that one piece of the tree that represents our genealogy. It includes more than 20 generations of scholars. These men, our academic ancestors, were active in a variety of disciplines, spreading wisdom and knowledge over a period of 550 years at three different geographic locations.

This, our tree, has its roots in medieval Italy, and the first one to be identified with a complete record of historical data is a man named Nicolo da Lonigo. He obtained a PhD in medicine in Padua in 1453. He was one of the most famous scholars of his time. He was a professor of mathematics, Greek philosophy and medicine. He published first scholarly work on syphilis, which had only recently appeared in Europe.

A number of famous practitioners followed him over the course of the next few centuries. Worth noting, perhaps, is Girolamo Fabrici, who obtained a medical degree in Padua in 1559. He was a professor of anatomy and surgery, and the first to describe in detail the valves in veins. He published work on anatomy, the lens of the eye, the mechanics of respiration, and the actions of muscles. He further published an exhaustive study of the chick embryo and thereby founded the fields of comparative and developmental embryology.

Educated in Padua was also a man named Werner Rolfinck. He obtained a degree in medicine in 1625. He was German, though, and upon his return became the first professor of chemistry in Jena. He also taught anatomy, surgery, and botany. He heavily opposed alchemical and superstitious thinking, and wrote a book on chemical impossibilities, such as the transmutation of metals to gold.

From now on, the evolution of the tree continued in Germany over the next 250 years. Among the many distinguished scientists we find one of the greatest chemistry teachers of all time: Justus von Liebig. He obtained a PhD in Erlangen in 1822. He was a pioneer in agricultural and food chemistry. Among many things, he discovered structural isomers, and devised the concept of functional groups.

One of his fellow students, then, Henry Adam Weber, who obtained his degree in Munich in 1868, eventually moved to the United States. He designed the first chemistry building at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign while he was a professor there.

And it was American scholars that shaped the tree over the course of the past century, at Ohio State, Cal Tech, and Harvard University. One of them, your teacher and PhD adviser, Prof. George Whitesides, is among us today. This distinguished scientist, I believe, does not need any further introduction to this audience.

We wish you, Dong and Younan, a good start in your new positions here at Washington University, and good luck in all scientific adventures you envisage to endeavour. May this tree continue to grow in prosperity so that future generations of scientists can look back with pride as we can do today.