The Society for History of Pharmacy: as long as a century!

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The Society was founded on February 1st 1913 in the prestigious “Salle des Actes” of Paris Faculty of Pharmacy, which was, at the time, called Superior School of Pharmacy.

What is exactly history of pharmacy? The first item of the statutes of the new society tried to answer this question: “Society for History of Pharmacy is devoted to the study of everything concerning the past of pharmaceutical sciences, art and profession and to the conservation of objects or buildings related to it.”

Since the beginnings, the purpose was a double one: to encourage the scientific development of history of pharmacy and to promote actions in the area of conservation of all testimonies concerning pharmacy.

History of pharmacy regroups the study of the evolution of medicines and of men and women, pharmacists or not, who discover, design, prepare, control and dispense medicines, without forgetting the patients to whom they are administered.

History of pharmacy did not appear from nothing. Authors dealing with pharmacy were always conscious that it was necessary to know its history, in order to be able to better conduct its evolution. Books published during the 18th century often began with a historical introduction. In 1847, Paul-Antoine Gratacap published under the name of Cap what is considered as the first History of Pharmacy. Many other books followed. Pharmaceutical journals published, during the 19th century, articles developing specific topics concerning history of pharmacy. At the beginning of the 20th century, many theses were published concerning history of pharmacy in a specific region of France. In 1904, Hermann Schelenz published his famous Geschichte der Pharmazie, demonstrating, if there were any doubt, that the interest for history of pharmacy was general in Europe.

The Society genesis was initiated by three men: Charles Buchet, president of an important pharmaceutical company named “Pharmacie centrale”, Eugène-Humbert Guitard, an archivist and Paul Dorveaux, librarian at the School. They wrote to various colleagues potentially interested in the foundation of a society for history of pharmacy. They received positive replies and support from seventy people, who were either pharmacists, historians, professors or doctors, from Paris, French regions or foreign countries. They are considered as the founders of the society.

On February 1st 1913, they were then all invited to attend the foundation meeting in the “Salle des Actes”. Only twenty-three of the founders could manage to be present, but all sent messages of support. The statutes of the Society were approved and an executive committee was elected:

Honorary President: Prof. Dr. Guignard, President: Dean Henri Gautier, Vice-presidents: Camille Bloch, Charles Buchet, Permanent secretary: Paul Dorveaux, General secretary and Editor in chief of the Bulletin: E.H. Guitard, Treasurer: L.G. Toraude. SHP was born!

During this hundred years, only ten presidents were elected at the head of the society: Henri Gautier 1913-1920, Charles Buchet 1920-1928, Maxime Radais 1929-1945, Maurice Bouvet 1945-1964, Guillaume Valette 1964-1982, Georges Dillemann 1982-1988, Henri
Henri Bonnemain has, already described the activities of SHP, during its seventy-five first years of existence, in this review. During the last twenty-five years, new media appeared and SHP did not miss the opportunity to create a rich site on the web, offering information, virtual exhibitions, news, pictures, documents etc.

The journal of the society, first named Bulletin de la Société d’Histoire de la Pharmacie, was renamed in 1930 Revue d’Histoire de la Pharmacie. During this century, three hundreds and seventy-seven issues have been published, i.e. about 13,000 contributions, including 2,250 full papers. The information corresponding to all this century of publications, except for the last five years, is now available, free of charge, on the web, via the web portal Persée.

During this century, the society held exactly three hundreds and forty meetings, either in Paris or in French regions or in foreign countries i.e. about 1,200 lectures or short lectures. Nowadays, every year, five meetings are held. Some of these are joint meetings with the Club for history of chemistry or with the Society for history of medicine.

At the international level, our society was present. SHP is a member of the ISHP, of which Pierre Labrude has been Vice-president. Olivier Lafont is Past President and Bruno Bonnemain is now Vice-president. François Ledermann, our Swiss colleague, who is another Past President is also a member of the French Society.

SHP organised three times the International Congress for History of Pharmacy in 1975, 1995, and this year, in 2013. This will be a good opportunity to celebrate two important dates: the birth of SHP, a century ago, and the death of Antoine-Augustin Parmentier, philanthropic, military pharmacist, instigator of food chemistry etc., two centuries ago.

Many SHP members have been elected as members of the International Academy of history of Pharmacy, founded in 1952. Pierre Julien was Honorary President, Maurice Bouvet, Pierre Julien and Olivier Lafont were Vice-president, Pierre Julien and Bruno Bonnemain now, were secretaries. Many foreign Past Presidents were also SHP members.

In the occasion of the anniversary of the death of Parmentier, A “Parmentier Medal” was created to recognize and reward a career of distinctive merit in history of pharmacy.
Many books redacted by SHP members highly contributed to the development of history of pharmacy.

One can conclude that the Society realized most of its objectives. SHP is now ready to start for a new century of service for history of pharmacy. Long life to SHP!