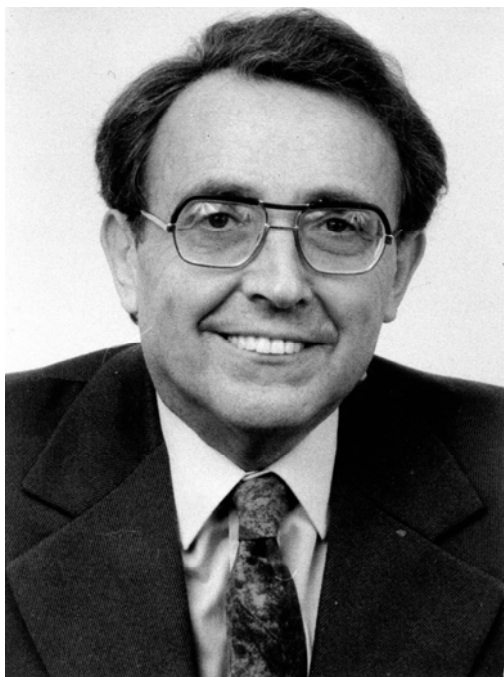


## Ferenc Szabadváry (1923–2006)



Ferenc Szabadváry was born in Köszeg, Hungary on September 1, 1923. He graduated from the Budapest Technical University (now known as Budapest University of Technology and Economics) as a chemical engineer in 1944. During his final year, he and his fellow students along with the faculty, were moved to Dresden, Germany where they survived the large air attack from February 13–15, 1945. In 1949, he became assistant lecturer in the Department of General and Analytical Chemistry at the Technical University. In 1965 he took the Dr. Tech. degree and was appointed associate professor. In 1970 he earned the Sc.D. and was subsequently promoted to professor of chemistry.

Although Szabadváry's teaching assignments were in analytical chemistry, he rapidly developed an interest in the history of chemistry which gradually became his central activity. His early focus was on the lives and works of Hungarian chemists. He also began studies on the history of analytical chemistry, a field that had remained virtually untouched. In

1971, he added the duties of director of the Hungarian National Museum for Science and Technology to those he undertook at the Technical University. The museum was a newly created institution, and the organizational duties were unusually heavy, particularly in connection with its building problems. Nevertheless, he made important contributions to the development of the history of science through his writing and lecturing during the inception of the museum's development. In 1987, he was promoted to chair of the Department of General and Analytical Chemistry. He served as chair until 1995, when he was named professor emeritus. He has addressed several audiences, not only in his native Hungary, but also in Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Germany, several countries in the former U.S.S.R., Sweden, Switzerland, and Great Britain. He is a linguist who, like many Central European intellectuals, speaks numerous languages fluently. Parts of his "Great Moments in the History of Chemistry" series, prepared for broadcast over Hungarian radio and television, have been published in the American Chemical Society's journal, *Chemistry*.

Szabadváry published extensively in the area of analytical chemistry, particularly concerning the rare earth elements. He also published over 200 papers on the history of chemistry, not only in Hungarian journals, but in German and English as well. His papers appeared in the *Journal of Chemical Education* and *Chemistry*, and *Talanta*. Of particular interest are his papers "Development of the pH Concept" and "Indicators: A Historical Perspective," both published in the *Journal of Chemical Education*, 41 (1964) 105–107 and 41 (1964) 285–287. He contributed more than twenty sketches of noted East European chemists to the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*. He published several books and is best known for his *AZ Analitika Kémia Modszereinek Kialakulása* (1960) which was subsequently translated and published in German and English versions. The original Hungarian text was translated by Gyula Svehla of the Technical University of Budapest to become Szabadváry's *History of Analytical Chemistry*. This extremely useful text was the first systematic, continuous description of chemists' attempts to find the compositions of substances and then apply them to definite purposes. Included are essential biographical details of more than 800 chemists, providing valuable personal stories behind the advances in analytical methods. His other books and book chapters include: *Antoine Laurent Lavoisier: The Investigator and His*

*Times, 1741–1794* (1977), which after publication in Hungarian, appeared not only in German and English translations, but in several other languages (e.g., in Russian and Korean); *The History of Analytical Chemistry in Hungary*, in *Reviews on Analytical Chemistry, EUROANALYSIS II*. (1977); *Technologietransfer Und Wissenschaftsaustausch Zwischen Ungarn und Deutschland Aspekte Der Historischen Beziehungen in Naturwissenschaft Und Technik* (The Transfer of Technology and Science Exchange Between Hungary and Germany) (with Holger Fischer) (1995); and *A magyar kémia művelődéstörténete* (1998). In addition, Szabadváry has published, in Hungarian, nearly twenty other books on the history of chemistry.

Ferenc Szabadváry served as editor of the Technical University's *Periodica Polytechnica* and of the *Technikatörténeti Szemele*, published by the Hungarian National Museum for Science and Technology, and served on the editorial boards of the international periodicals *Journal of Thermal Analysis* and *Journal for Radioanalytical Chemistry*. He has also served as chairman of the Hungarian Committee of the International Union of History and Philosophy of Sciences and deputy chairman of the Committee for History of Sciences and Technology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Szabadváry was Director General of the National Museum for Science and Technology, Budapest, Hungary for 22 years. During his tenure at the museum, he played a great role in the domestic and international appreciation of the institution's scientific and educational activities. Szabadváry was the founding president of the Federation of European Chemical Societies (FECS) on the History of Chemistry. He was honorary chair of the 4th International Conference on the History of Chemistry (2003), a conference he actively supported since it was established in 1992. He became corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1995 and in 2004 he became an ordinary member of the Academy. Beside his membership in several Hungarian Societies, he was also a member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geschichte der Wissenschaften und Technik, Österreichische Gesellschaft für Wissenschaftsgeschichte and the International Commission for the History of Universities.

After the collapse of the Socialist Regime in Hungary in 1989, he was one of the first scientists to receive the Széchenyi Award (1991) founded by the first democratic Hungarian government. In 1996 he received the Europe Award from the Federation of European Chemical Societies and in that same year the Award of the Hungarian Federation of Technical and Scientific Societies.

In 1970, Ferenc Szabadváry received the Dexter Award for his numerous contributions to the history of chemistry, particularly for his book, *History of Analytical Chemistry*. Szabadváry believes that "this was one of his greatest honors as it finally represented an acknowledgement of his scientific activity that had been ignored for decades due to his family background before 1945." Szabadváry died on 21 May 2006.

### Sources

Aaron J. Ihde, *A Quarter Century of Dexter Awards*, 1981, unpublished manuscript. Copy in the University of Pennsylvania Library, QD21 .Q8 1981a; an abridged version can be found in *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry* 3 (1989): 12–13.

Autobiographical information provided by Ferenc Szabadváry (Archives, American Chemical Society Division of the History of Chemistry, Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia PA).

Photo courtesy Ferenc Szabadváry.