



THE NENCKI INSTITUTE IS 90 YEARS OLD

Last December the Nencki Institute celebrated its 90th anniversary. Among others, Prof. Barbara Kudrycka, Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education, Vice-Minister Prof. Jerzy Duszyński (former Director of the Nencki Institute), Prof. Michał Kleiber, President of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Prof. Maciej Nałęcz, Director of the UNESCO Department of Basic and Engineering Sciences (also former Director of the Nencki Institute) attended the jubilee.

The past, present and future of the Nencki Institute

Marceli Nencki (1847–1901), born in Boczki, Poland, was an eminent biochemist of the end of 19th Century. For many years he was director of the Medizinisch-Chemisches Institut in Bern, Switzerland. In 1881 he accepted a new post at the Institute of Experimental Medicine, St. Petersburg, Russia, where together with I.P. Pavlov he created the Department of Physiology. While working on the metabolism of purines, Nencki described the structure of hem in hemoglobin and found it to be similar to the active group of chlorophyll.

In 1911 a group of Nencki's pupils and collaborators decided to create a scientific institute in his name. The project was delayed by the outbreak of WWI but in 1918 the Nencki Institute was created in Warsaw by the aggregation of several laboratories working in the fields of biology and biochemistry. Therefore, from its beginnings the Nencki Institute had a broad scope of scientific interests. Unfortunately at the beginning of WWII, in 1939, the Institute was bombed and burned, losing all its equipment and magnificent library. Before the end of war, many of the Nencki scientists had been killed, died of hardships or emigrated.

As Warsaw was completely destroyed during the war, the Institute was reactivated in 1945 in Łódź by three couples of surviving eminent scientists: Włodzimierz and Stella Niemierko (Dept. of Biochemistry), Jan and Stanisława Dembowski (Dept. of Biology) and Jerzy Konorski and Liliana Lubińska (Dept. of Neurophysiology). In the 1950s the Nencki Institute was incorporated into Polish Academy of Sciences and received a new building in Warsaw. In the next 50 years Nencki constantly evolved, always being a leading Polish biological institution and keeping pace with world science. Its best known scientists were Jerzy Konorski, Liliana Lubińska and Wojciech Drabikowski.

The Nencki Institute always conducted research in many branches of biological science and at present that research has become multidisciplinary, integrating the various branches and techniques of biological research

present in the Institute. Neurobiology is becoming a mainstream of scientific research, uniting other specialists around its problems. Several scientific groups focus not only on basic research, but also on mechanisms of epilepsy, obesity, brain cancer and psychological disorders. Nencki is an open structure. Over 200 scientists work in the Institute and every year more than 20 new scientists join its ranks. These are mainly PhD students, but Nencki has also opened the posts of new heads of laboratories to international competition.

Like in the past and present, in the future, the Nencki Institute wants to be present at the front line of research in neuroscience, cell biology and biochemistry and to integrate its activity with that of other international institutes conducting the most modern research in neurobiology. When a reunited Europe brought new opportunities for such integration Nencki started joining international research programmes effectively.

Further information about the Institute may be found at <http://www.nencki.gov.pl>.

The jubilee

On the 4th of December 2008 many distinguished guests attended an anniversary session organized by the Nencki institute that took place in the Mirror Hall of the Staszic Palace, belonging to the Polish Academy of Sciences and presided over by the Director of the Nencki Institute, Prof. Adam Szewczyk. The history of the Institute was described by Prof. Leszek Kuźnicki, author of the 3-volume historical monograph on the Institute. Prof. Leszek Kaczmarek, Head of the Scientific Council of the Nencki Institute described the present status of Nencki, while its Vice-Director, Prof. Urszula Sławińska presented insights into its future. Afterwards, Prof. George Gerstein from the University of Pennsylvania received the Nencki Award for his collaboration with the Nencki and his long-lasting help. Prof. Gerstein then gave a lecture titled “Are neuronal assemblies organized as synfire chains”. An informal wine and cheese party afterwards gathered many past and present members of the Institute, as well as its friends, some of whom came from far away to be with us for the occasion.

On the next day (December 5th) there was a multitude of events at the Nencki Institute. Three scientists who started their careers in the Nencki Institute, Aleksander Włodawer (Macromolecular Crystallography Laboratory, The National Cancer Institute at Frederick, Maryland USA), Bohdan Dreher (School of Medical Sciences & Bosch Institute University of Sydney, Australia) and Stanisław Głazewski (School of Life Sciences Keele



Audience at the session in Staszic Palace (fot. A. Mirgos)



Director of the Nencki Institute, Prof. Adam Szewczyk greets Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education, Prof. Barbara Kudrycka (fot. A. Mirgos)

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University, United Kingdom) gave exciting lectures and afterwards several young scientists from the Nencki presented results of their research.

There was also a multimedia presentation of old pictures of the Nencki Institute and its scientists and a screening of an 1974 film about research in the Nencki. Young scientists showed old scientific equipment that they had collected in the Institute for the planned Museum of Science, while the Nencki Library presented its rare books. There was also an exposition of hobby collections of Nencki scientists and food prepared by those who like to cook. At the same time there was a general discussion on the future of science. The jubilee was very lively and enjoyed by everybody.

Krzysztof Turlejski



Aleksander Włodawer (fot. A. Mirgos)



Bohdan Dreher (fot. A. Mirgos)



Stanisław Głazewski (fot. A. Mirgos)



Collection of sea shells (fot. A. Mirgos)



Equipment collected for the Nencki Museum of Science (fot. A. Mirgos)