MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS AARON J. IHDE

Aaron Ihde, professor emeritus of chemistry, history of science, and integrated liberal studies since 1980, died on February 23, 2000 in Sarasota, Florida. He was born on December 31, 1909 and raised on a dairy farm near Neenah, Wisconsin. His immigrant parents had little formal education, but they treasured books and learning. Aaron was only the fourth graduate of his one-room country "K through 8" school to go on to high school. His parents realized his lack of interest in farming and supported their son to attend the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He graduated in 1931 from the university's "Chemistry Course" and accepted a job as the staff chemist at the Blue Valley Creamery Company in Chicago (later acquired by Beatrice Foods.)

In early 1938 he returned to Madison where he majored in food chemistry (under Professor Henry Schuette) and minored in biochemistry (under Professor Harry Steenbock), earning his doctorate in 1941. After one year of teaching at Butler University, he returned to Madison for a one-year instructorship in the Chemistry Department. After two renewals of this appointment, in 1945 he was hired on the tenure track. In the summer of 1946, he revived a dormant course in the history of chemistry, and two years later he placed the history of science at the center of the new Integrated Liberal Studies Program. In 1951-52 he was a Carnegie Intern at Harvard University where he was associated with James B. Conant and Thomas Kuhn in the teaching of the historical Case Studies general education courses. In 1957, the University of Wisconsin History of Science Department welcomed Aaron officially to its ranks.

Aaron's research and publications transformed the field of the history of chemistry. The intellectual fruits of six decades at Wisconsin as a student, as a faculty member, and as professor emeritus occupy seven bound volumes in the stacks of the Memorial Library and consist of 342 items including a posthumous paper published in the Bulletin of the History of Chemistry. He made the University of Wisconsin the premier center for the study of the history of chemistry especially after he was joined on the faculty by his first Ph.D. student Robert Siegfried. Over the years, Aaron supervised 21 Ph.D.s in history of science, as well as a number of master's students and post-doctoral fellows. His best known books are, The Development of Modern Chemistry published in 1964 by Harper and Row and still available as a Dover paperback, and his volumes of Selected Readings in the History of Chemistry, culled from the Journal of Chemical Education and co-edited with the journal's editor William Kieffer. The Development of Modern Chemistry, the standard textbook in the field, included the history of chemical technology, biochemistry, agricultural chemistry, chemical physics, and much more, extending coverage to the first half of the twentieth century. Aaron wrote broadly and widely about Paracelsus and Boyle, on classic nineteenth century European scientists such as Avogadro, Faraday, Bunsen, and Baeyer, on the development of chemistry in the United States, and on the history of the pure food law.

Aaron was an advocate of progressive causes especially the social responsibilities of scientists and the purity and safety of drugs. From 1955 to 1968 he was a member of the Wisconsin Food Standards Advisory Committee and served as its chair for two years. In 1958 he was offered the position of scientific director of Consumer's Union, but declined the position that would have doubled his salary because he loved his work as a scholar and teacher. In the early 1960s Aaron Ihde and other UW professors, including Grant Cottam, James Crow, Arthur Hasler, Hugh Ilits, Karl Schmidt, and Van Potter, advocated public and scholarly discussion of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring and the impact of pesticides on the environment. As a result, they were accused of spreading false and misleading information and some questioned their competence and their qualifications to speak to the public about pesticides.

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Aaron was admired and respected by students and colleagues. All his dealings with students were models of organization, dignity, and respect for scholarly inquiry. He was generous in making all his books and resources available to any visitor to his office. He promoted and enjoyed contacts with alumni and former students. He was the long time editor of the Badger Chemist. His interest in the history of the University of Wisconsin Department of Chemistry resulted in the publication in 1990 of his last book: Chemistry, As Viewed from Bascom Hill: A History of the Chemistry Department at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Aaron was recognized by the American Chemical Society with the Dexter Award in 1968 and by the University of Wisconsin with the Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Teaching in 1978. He served as president of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters, chair of the ACS Wisconsin Section, and chair of the ACS History of Chemistry Division. He was elected fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In 1933, Aaron married Olive Tipler, a former high school classmate and a teacher of Latin and history. Their marriage lasted until her death in 1988. Aaron's dedication to Olive was exemplary. They raised two children, Gretchen and John, and lived in a home built in the middle of the University Arboretum. He was especially proud when John was named the 1999 recipient of the ACS James B. Conant Award for High School Teaching of Chemistry. He remained active in retirement and devoted himself to reading, writing, family visits, and volunteer work in the Arboretum, removing invasive honeysuckle and buckthorn thickets from the Lost City Forest section of the Arboretum; over the years he single handedly restored a large wildflower meadow. He spent his final eighteen months with Gretchen and her family in Sarasota where he began to show symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. He is survived by his two children and their families.

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