



**PROFESSOR MACIEJ WIEWIÓROWSKI —
A MAN OF ACTION AND A VISIONARY
1918–2005**

Professor Maciej Wiewiórowski passed away on March 30, 2005, at the age of 87. He was a distinguished scientist and a recognized authority in the field of organic and bioorganic chemistry, a teacher and master for a vast rank of students, a model scientist for more than a generation of his disciples.

Professor Maciej Wiewiórowski was born on August 24, 1918 in Bagatelka near Września, the youngest of three sons of Władysław Wiewiórowski, a forest inspector. He never met his father; Władysław Wiewiórowski, a co-organizer and participant of the Wielkopolska Uprising died in 1919 in a battle against the Germans. Since that time, it was his wife, Emilia Wiewiórowska-Średzińska, who brought up the sons.

Since his childhood, Maciej Wiewiórowski was attached to Poznań where he moved after his father's death. He attended primary school in Poznań and graduated from Adam Mickiewicz Humanistic gymnasium. In 1936, he began his studies at the University of Poznań. First, he studied at the School of Agriculture and Forestry but after one year changed his major discipline to Mathematics and Natural Sciences. The World War II interrupted his studies.

The war-time chapter of Professor Wiewiórowski's life is very tempestuous. We see him as

a 21-year-old volunteer in the September Campaign, fighting against the Nazi invasion of Poland. On September 19, he is captured by the Germans near Iłża but manages to escape the following day. He comes back to live in Poznań, which during World War II became part of "Wartegau", incorporated into the German Reich. Facing persecution inflicted on the families of the participants of the Wielkopolska Uprising, Maciej Wiewiórowski decides to escape to German-occupied southern Poland.

At first, he spent some time in Częstochowa, Wąchock and Skarżysko where he was involved in the underground movement as a member of AK (Polish underground army — the biggest underground army operating during World War II in Europe). On February 21, 1941, he was arrested and accused of sabotage. After two years in prison, he manages to escape and joins again the underground movement. He graduates from underground military college and shortly afterwards becomes a communication officer of the AK municipal headquarters in Częstochowa. Since March 1944, Maciej Wiewiórowski is persecuted by the occupant, goes into hiding in Częstochowa, Bochnia, and Krakow. Finally, he is then sent to the "Wolf" partisan's forces actively operating in southern Poland around Nowy Targ, Nowy Sącz, and Limanowa. As the "Wolf" and "Spruce" forces united in July 1944, the AK I Podhale Rifle Brigade was formed in which corporal, officer cadet, Maciej Wiewiórowski was a squad commander and then platoon commander. With his squad he participated in numerous operations, to mention the most important ones: assassination of Sikora in Jazowsk, road trap between Szlachtowa and Szczawnica, disarmament of Grenzschutz station in Kamienica, traps on German convoys on Krościenko-Czorsztyn road and on the following day — near Tylmanowa, taking over a railway station in Kasina Wielka, trap on Germans in Łopień, bridge trap on a German convoy in Kamienica, an expedition for supplies to Leśnica in Slovakia, an attempt to disarm a military police station in Czarny Dunajec and taking over a railway station in Lesk near Nowy Targ, the battle in Ochotnica to rescue the "Lampart" battalion, and a battle with a Wehrmacht battalion over a sawmill at the Szczawa-Rzeki road where air-drop containers were stored.

After the war, Maciej Wiewiórowski came back to Poznań to continue his studies, completed in 1946. He obtained a PhD degree in chemistry in 1950 for his work on chemical transformations of codeine conducted under the supervision of Professor Jerzy Suszko. During the years 1946–1959, he worked at the Poznań University of Economics where, in addition to teaching and carrying out research projects, he organized from scratch chemical laboratories and

formed new research groups. In recognition of his pivotal contribution to the foundation of its chemistry, the Poznań University of Economics awarded Professor Wiewiórowski in 1986 the title of Doctor Honoris Causa.

When still at the Poznań University of Economics, Professor Maciej Wiewiórowski spent a sabbatical training period at the University of Vienna. Later, he obtained additional training during two long-term research visits to the National Research Council of Canada. At that time, he was already employed at the Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań (UAM). He began his work at the UAM in 1959, first as an associate professor, and since 1969 – as full professor. He widely disseminated his knowledge gained in foreign laboratories. He pioneered the development of modern organic and bioorganic chemistry based on the innovative spectroscopic and chromatographic techniques. Owing to Professor Wiewiórowski's international contacts, numerous young scientists could go abroad for their research training in the best European, American, and Japanese research centers. At the same time, many eminent scientists from all over the world were invited by Professor Wiewiórowski to visit Poznań Universities and Institutes.

In 1969, Professor Wiewiórowski was appointed Head of Stereochemistry Department. In the same year, he initiated the transformation of a group of Chemistry Departments at the UAM School of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry into the Institute of Chemistry (the core of the future School of Chemistry), of which he became the first director. In the years 1968-1972, he was a Prorector for Scientific Affairs of the Adam Mickiewicz University.

Additionally, since 1955, Professor Wiewiórowski began to work at the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). In 1965, he was elected Corresponding Member and in 1977 Full Member of the Academy. Initially, he headed a laboratory in the Institute of Plant Genetics of the Academy and then in the Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics. In 1969, he became Head of a Department being part of the Institute of Organic Chemistry PAN. At that time, Professor Wiewiórowski formed a new research group of young scientists working under his supervision on the chemistry and biochemistry of nucleic acids in the Institute of Chemistry UAM and in the Department of Stereochemistry of Natural Products in the Academy. In 1974, the newly formed research group was moved from the University to the premises at the Noskowskiego street in Poznań, into buildings without any infrastructure for scientific work. This was how an independent Department was formed, transformed in 1988 into the Institute of Bioorganic Chemistry (IBCh) of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The first director of the Institute was Professor

Maciej Wiewiórowski and he remained at this post until his retirement in 1988.

Besides his scientific work, Professor Wiewiórowski was devoted to organizational activities concerning the entire scientific community. He held numerous distinguished offices, e.g. in the years 1969–1983 he was a member of the Presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences and later (1981–1983), was elected as its Vice-President. During the years 1972–1980 he was the Scientific Secretary of the Poznań Branch of the Academy. During the term 1985–1988, he served as a President of the Polish Chemical Society, and between 1973 and 1979 he was chairing the Central Commission for Scientific Titles and Degrees.

The scientific and organizational achievements of Professor Maciej Wiewiórowski were recognized with numerous awards and distinctions. However, the most visible evidence of his accomplishments is the school that he created. It includes tens of MSc's who graduated under the supervision of Professor Wiewiórowski and thirty eight doctors, most of them already professors. Professor Wiewiórowski's legacy is marked by over two hundred scientific papers and, perhaps more importantly, by a strong and modern research Institute, equipped by him with vigorous, highly motivated, and highly qualified staff. The staff, who not only continue to study chemistry, biochemistry, and biology of nucleic acids, a discipline that he himself introduced on Polish soil, but who also extend their interests into new, uncharted areas, in a way that was so typical of their Master.

Professor Maciej Wiewiórowski was a great scientist, an accomplished and renowned chemist, whose fascinating and productive life was spent in difficult times marked by two totalitarian systems. He was one of those who never compromised their ideals but who also never gave up. His life and work influenced the condition of science in Poland in the second half of the XXth century. He was one of those who facilitated its development and contacts with the free world. Professor Wiewiórowski's research was remarkably far-sighted, persistent, and systematic. Very demanding of himself, he expected his co-workers to follow him because of purely idealistic desire to participate in discovering the unknown. In return, he promised them a chance to test themselves and to experience the thrill of discovery. Professor Wiewiórowski was not only a great scientist and a visionary. He was also a kind-hearted, understanding and cheerful man. And this is his image that remains in our memory.

*Marek Figlerowicz,
Wojciech T. Markiewicz &
Mariusz Jaskólski*

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