

## Denis I. Duveen (1910–1992)



Denis Ian Duveen was born in London, England, on June 5, 1910. He attended Rugby School and studied at Merton College, Oxford, with additional chemical studies at the College de France in Paris and the Battersea Polytechnic Institute in London. He was a chemist at the Royal Gunpowder Factory, Waltham, and then technical assistant to the director of Ordnance Factories in London during World War II. When the war ended, he became joint managing director of Ashe Laboratories, Ltd. In 1949 he immigrated to the United States where he founded the Duveen Soap Corporation, in Long Island City, New York. He was president of the corporation until 1970 when he retired and moved to a home in Petropolis, Brazil. There he turned his attention to breeding dogs and raising orchids, a field he published in extensively. Many orchids are named in his honor.

Duveen began collecting books on alchemy and early chemistry while he was a student at Oxford. Initially his collection covered all areas of chemistry and especially alchemy, but during his time in Paris he took a special interest in the works of Antoine Lavoisier and other French chemists. When World War II began, much of his sizable collection remained in France, secretly stored in a farmer's barn during the Nazi occupation. He continued collecting books and manuscripts even during the war years and by the late 1940s he had more than 3,000 volumes. He published a bibliography of this collection prior to selling most of it to the University of Wisconsin in 1950. Deciding that collecting in the whole field of chemistry was problematic, Duveen decided to specialize in the chemistry of Lavoisier and retained the Lavoisier-related books in his collection. After buying much of Lavoisier's personal library and archives and other Lavoisier material, he carefully added to the collection over many years. This collection was put up for sale and purchased by Cornell University in the 1960s.

Duveen was actively engaged in chemical research between 1936–1940 and published nearly 20 papers dealing with the synthesis and study of optically active compounds. After the war, Duveen concentrated on historical and bibliographic research. Between 1946 and 1960 he published more than 60 papers, the majority dealing with the works of Lavoisier. Of particular importance are his books: *Bibliotheca Alchemica et Chemica: An Annotated Catalogue of Printed Books on Alchemy, Chemistry, and Cognate Subjects in The Library Of Denis I. Duveen* (1949); *The Duveen Collection of Alchemy and Chemistry: Supplementing The Bibliotheca Alchemica et Chemica* (1953); *An Alchemical Correspondence in Germany Under the Nazi Regime between J. Dietzel and D. Georgievitz-Weitzer* (with John Dietzel, G. W. Surya and Emil Offenbacher, 1951); *Catalogue of Printed Works by and Memorabilia of Antoine Laurent Lavoisier* (with H. S. Klickstein, 1952); and *A Bibliography of the Works of Antoine Laurent Lavoisier* (with H. S. Klickstein, 1954, reprinted 1965).

Denis I. Duveen received the Dexter Award in 1960 for his numerous contributions to the history of chemistry, particularly for the preparation of bibliographies of his several collections of books in the field. Duveen died on December 2, 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

## Sources

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