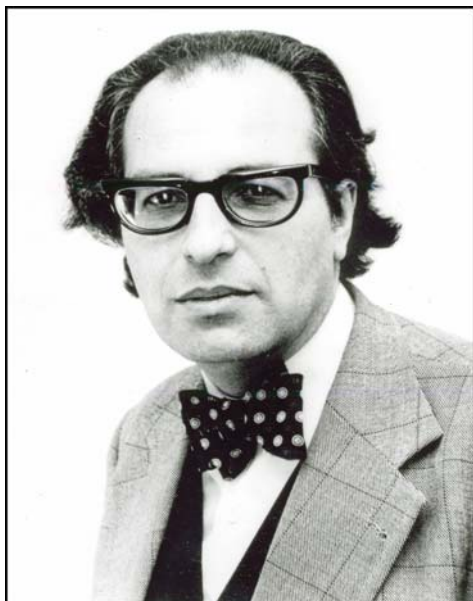


## Jan W. van Spronsen (1928–



Johannes Willem van Spronsen was born on February 7, 1928 in The Hague, The Netherlands. After completing studies in the Fundamental School in 1940, he attended the Atheneum before beginning to study chemistry at the Technische Hogeschool, Delft. He graduated from the technical university in 1946 and the University of Leiden in 1952. His D.Sc. degree was conferred by Leiden in 1969 for his study of the periodic system. His thesis was "The Periodic System of Chemical Elements: A History of the First Hundred Years."

He became a chemistry teacher at the Electro-technical School in Amsterdam (1953–1963) and the Municipal Gymnasium in Alkmaar (1954–1984). In 1960, while continuing his positions in Alkmaar and Amsterdam, he became assistant professor at the University of Utrecht, where he began offering a course in the history of chemistry. He was a visiting professor of chemistry at the University of Ghent in 1971. He taught at the University of Utrecht until retiring in 1984.

van Spronsen began publishing papers on history of chemistry in 1952; they became very numerous in the 1960s and 1970s. During his career he gave numerous lectures not only in Holland but in France, Belgium, England, Germany, Austria, Poland, and Russia.

During the late 1970s and 1980s van Spronsen was involved in a program leading toward the publication of numerous papers and monographs dealing with the history of special areas of chemistry and that focused on the contributions of Nobel laureates. He edited a book series on this topic in 1981, *Nobel Prize Topics in Chemistry*. Many of his publications have appeared in several languages and in a variety of scientific journals including: *Chemische Weekblad*, *Spiegel Historiae*, *Chemie Magazine*, *Chemie Nouvelle*, *Scientiarum Historia*, *Nucleus*; *la Revue Scientifique*, *Journal of the Dutch Chemical Industry*, *Echo*, *Schriftenreihe für Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften*, *Technik und Medizin*, *Boletín de la Academia de Ciencias (Córdoba)*, *Organon* (Warszawa), *Janus*, *Chymia*, and the *Journal of Chemical Education*. Some representative papers are: "One Hundred Years of the Law of Octaves," *Chymia* 12 (1965): 125–137; "The History and Prehistory of the Law of Dulong and Petit as Applied to the Determination of Atomic Weights," *Chymia* 12 (1967): 157–169; "The Priority Conflict Between Mendeleev and Meyer," *Journal of Chemical Education* 46 (1969): 136–139; and "Mendeleev as a Speculator," *Journal of Chemical Education* 58 (1981): 790–791. He has published two monographs on the problems related to periodic law: *L'Histoire de la Découverte du Systeme Periodique des Elements Chimiques et l'Apport de Béguier de Chancourtois* (1965), and *Historia del Descubrimiento del Sistema Periodico de los Elementos Quimicos* (1967). Other books and monographs include: *The Periodic System of Chemical Elements: A History of the First 100 Years* (1969, Japanese translation 1976); *Historie van de Scheikunde in Europe Musea* (1973, 1982); *Louis Pasteur, in Actuele onderwerpen* (1985), *Schets der Leere van Lavoisier door Martinus van Marum* (1987); *Guide of European Museums with Collections on History of Chemistry* (1981, 1996); and *Guide for Museums with Collections on History of Chemistry and of Pharmacy* (1998).

From 1952 to 1958 van Spronsen was director of the Society of Artists, known as Artifex. He was a member of the Stichting Orgelcentrum, The Netherlands, and served as president from 1978–1995. He served as secretary of The Netherlands Society for the History of Medicine,

Mathematics, Physics, Sciences and Technology (1978–1988). He is a member of the Royal Netherlands Chemical Society (since 1945) and has served as chairman of its Historical Group for forty-five years. van Spronsen is a member (since 1976), presently secretary (since 1995), and former chairman (1976–1993) of the Working Party on the History of Chemistry of the Federation of European Chemical Societies.

Van Spronsen has received many awards, including the J.B. Gillis Award of the Royal Flemish Academy of Sciences (1970); the Silver (1970) and Aureate (1987) Medals of the French Société Académique : Arts-Sciences-Lettres, Paris; the Van Marum Medal (1994) of the Royal Netherlands Chemical Society; the Sarton Medal (1994) of the University of Ghent; the Liebig-Wöhler Freundschafts Prize (1997); the Minerva Medal (1988) of the Netherlands Society for the History of Medicine, Mathematics, Physics, Sciences and Technology; the FECS Award for Service (1998) for his outstanding work as a historian of chemistry. More recently he was named “Member of Merit” of the Royal Netherlands Chemical Society (2005). In 1975, van Spronsen received the Dexter Award for his extensive literary contributions to the history of chemistry, particularly for his book *The Periodic System of Chemical Elements: A History of the First 100 Years*.

### Sources

Autobiographical information provided by Johannes W. van Spronsen.

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): 14.

Photo courtesy Johannes W. van Spronsen.