

In Memoriam:
Academician
Jānis Stradiņš
(1933–2019)



Academician of the Latvian Academy of Science (LAS), Professor Jānis Stradiņš has passed away on November 29, 2019, at the age of 85.

He was born on December 10, 1933, in Riga, into the family of surgeon Pauls Stradiņš and his wife, physiotherapist Nina Stradiņš. Jānis Stradiņš was the third child in the family—he had two older sisters—artist Irēna Stradiņa (1925–1972) and linguist Maija Sosāre (1926–2008)—and a younger sister—doctor and physiotherapist Asja Eglīte.

Academician Jānis Stradiņš spent his whole life in Riga. After completing his studies in chemistry at the Latvian State University (1956), he worked at the Scientific Institute of the LAS and at the same time as a lector for the history of chemistry at the Latvian State University (1956–1958) and the Riga Polytechnic Institute (1958–1961). As he liked his pedagogical tasks, in 1969–1976 he

worked at the Chair of Physical Chemistry at the Faculty of Chemistry of the Latvian State University. In 1974, he was elected professor, and until 1987, at just another of his posts, he managed scientific diploma studies and practical exercises at the Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis, an institute of the LAS. In 1961, Stradiņš established the Laboratory of Physical Organic Chemistry and chaired it until 2006.

In 1968, Stradiņš became a corresponding member of the LAS for issues related to the sector of physical organic chemistry. In 1973, he became a full member of the LAS, an academician. He remained connected to the LAS for the rest of his life. In 1976, he became the deputy secretary of the Department of Chemistry and Biology at the LAS. He became a member of the Academy's Presidium and then of the Senate in 1990. In 1992, he was elected the Academy's vice president and in 1998 president and stayed at the post until April 2004. In May 2004, he was elected president of the Senate on the LAS, the position he held until his death.

Since 1990, he was a researcher in the branch specialising in the history of sciences at the Institute of History of Latvia of the University of Latvia and, in 1993, he was elected a professor of the chair of this speciality. In Latvia, he was known for his publications and his encyclopaedic knowledge in the area of the history of sciences—he was the number one historian of sciences in Latvia!

Since 1992, he was also a researcher at the Institute of History of Medicine of the Riga Stradiņš University. He was very interested in history—especially the history of medicine. After completing his university studies, he worked under other obligations and workplaces at the newly founded Museum for the History of Medicine in Riga. He was head of the department in 1957–1958. For the rest of his life, he kept friendly relations to this museum, which had been founded by his father. When the Museum for the History of Medicine first established the Pauls Stradiņš Prize in 1983, it was awarded to Jānis Stradiņš.

His work—activities in the history of sciences—started in 1958. Jānis Stradiņš became the secretary of the Association of the History of Natural Sciences and Technology. In 1968, he became its vice president, and from 1987 until 1992 he served as the president of the association. Following the early period of Latvia's newly gained independence, the association changed its name and since 1992 is called the Latvian Association of the History of Science. The academician headed the association until 2015 and since 2002 was its honorary member.

Stradiņš was also an honorary member of the Estonian and Lithuanian associations of the history and philosophy of science. He served as president of the Baltic Association of the History and Philosophy of Science for several terms (in 1991–1996, 1999–2001, 2006–2008, and 2014–2015). He was one of the longest-serving participants of the conferences of the Baltic Association of the History and Philosophy of Science, taking part in all but a few of these conferences from 1958 to 2015. In his research, he approached different subjects, as is also reflected in his publications. The academician is the author and co-author of 27 books and more than 330 scientific articles on chemistry and 270 articles covering the history of science.

An overview of his research can be found in concentrated form in his monumental edited book *Origins of Science and Higher Education in Latvia*, published in Latvian with summaries in English and Russian in 2009, and again in 2012. This highly influential book covers the early period of the development of science, research, and institutions of higher education in present-day Latvian territories until 1862, which marks the year of the founding of the Riga Polytechnicum.

The many topics that he was thinking about and working on were never written down and published, after all, his days had also only 24 hours. Apart from his scientific publications, he held many speeches and gave interviews on different subjects.

His views were listened to with respect. The public was thirsty for what he had to say and to write; there was a hunger for scientific literature on subjects that had not been written before. For his research in history, the LAS awarded him the title of doctor honoris causa in 1992. Since 1984, he was a member of the Latvian Writers Association. Stradiņš was also a member of the editorial boards of many journals—*Acta Baltica Historiae et Philosophiae Scientiarum* since its launch in 2013, *Acta medico-historica Rigensia*, *History of Engineering Sciences and Institutions of Higher Education*, etc.

Academician Stradiņš was also active in his civic duties. He took part in the Latvian national awakening movement at the end of the 1980s. With his participation, the culture-historical heritage of Latvia was strengthened. Monuments were solidified, and coins were minted. Also, prizes for excellence in preserving culture were established.

He belonged to the student association *Fraternitas Metropolitana*.

In the 2004 Latvian survey to name the most famous people of Latvia (from the period of 1885–2004), Jānis Stradiņš was mentioned among the 100 most famous people. Stradiņš was highly decorated on the state level in Latvia, Estonia, France, Lithuania, and Italy. He was not only decorated with medals but was awarded several prizes. However, the long list of honours did not change his personality. He kept his feet firmly on the ground, remained friendly and simple. He valued the work of others, even if it was part of their duties.

He was an extraordinary person, standing high above others in his education, knowledge and behaviour, and a unique scientist and man, who shaped the scene of Latvian science with his wisdom, life experience, optimism and wholehearted presence. With him, a whole era is gone.

The man, who engaged the author of these lines, and many others, in the history of science, now belongs to eternity. He gave a helping hand and encouraged many who now follow in his footsteps—the next generation of scientists, who have to carry on and realise what their professor can no longer do. We have lost the most prominent representative of the Latvian scientific elite, the soul of our time, one of the most well-known figures of Latvian science and culture of the 20th and 21st century. The name of Jānis Stradiņš now stands on par with the most prominent Latvians of his time. His contemporaries still say he was the only one who could communicate scientific facts in simple language without losing scientific precision. He was the only one who was liked and respected by people of all different national backgrounds and professions. At the end of his life, many called him the Wise Guy.

Here it is only possible to give insights and to point to fragments of his life. His life-long achievements will not rust away; his scientific achievements and publications will stay with us forever. There is so much of it left that we can all share among us, and there will still be enough left. Let us, contemporaries, be proud of the chance to have known the Latvian Jānis Stradiņš!

Jānis Stradiņš will be remembered in the Baltic States, the Baltic Association of the History of Science and Philosophy, and beyond.

Dr. Prof. Alīda Zigmunde

Institute of Humanities of Riga Technical University