

Senier, Alfred

by Enda Leaney and Linde Lunney

Senier, Alfred (1853–1918), chemist, was born 24 January 1853 at Burnley, Lancashire, son of Alfred Senier, pharmacist, from Dover, Wisconsin, USA, and his wife Jane (née Sutherland). Shortly after his birth the family returned to America, where Senier grew up and was educated. He graduated MD from the University of Michigan (1874) and returned with his family to London, obtaining the post of demonstrator at the school of the Pharmaceutical Society. Elected a fellow of the Chemical Society (1875) and the Institute of Chemistry (1878), in 1881 he took up a position teaching chemistry at St John's College, Battersea, and remained for three years. During this time he was a founder of the Aristotelian Society and its honorary secretary and treasurer. He lectured on the early history of terrestrial physics to the Positivist Society in London. He left London (1884) for the chemistry department of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität of Berlin, studying under August von Hofmann, who profoundly influenced his subsequent career. In 1887 he graduated Ph.D. in Berlin and returned to London, remaining for a few years and contributing articles to dictionaries of chemistry. He then became locum tenens for Maxwell Simpson (qv), professor of chemistry at QCC, before succeeding A. E. Dixon as professor of chemistry at QCG in 1891. In addition to his duties as professor of chemistry, he lectured on medical jurisprudence and hygiene. He was noted for his work on the college council, and his strong interest in the welfare of the students earned him a reputation as a champion of students' rights. Although not much interested in sports himself, he realised their value in promoting harmony among the student body and became the active patron of most of the college's sporting societies.

Senier's attempts to foster the spirit of scientific inquiry in Galway materially advanced the cause of education in the city, and he championed the German system of research universities in his pamphlets *A visit to Giessen; or thoughts on Liebig and chemistry in Germany* (1898) and *Bonn on the Rhine; pages from its history and stray thoughts on education* (1910). *The university and technical training* (1910) suggested that industrial development did not depend on the technical development of operatives, but instead arose out of scientific research at the universities. He helped develop the chemical laboratories and chemical library at Galway; thanks to his efforts, Galway had one of the most advanced chemical laboratories in Ireland. He contributed a number of original papers, chiefly on acridines and on phototropic and thermotropic compounds, to the *Transactions of the Chemical Society*. Through his connections with the Kodak company, he persuaded it to maintain a research fellow in Galway working on photographic chemicals.

Senier became a member of the RIA (1907), received an honorary doctorate from the RUI (1908), and acted as president of the chemical section of the British Association at the Dundee meeting (1912). He took an active part in the organisation

and development of the NUI when it was established in 1908, and served on its senate until his death. He died 29 June 1918 in Galway after a short illness, and is buried in the New Cemetery, Bohermore, Co. Galway.

He married (1887) Elsbeth Ida, eldest daughter of Heinrich Friedrich Wagner of Berlin, and was survived by his wife and two daughters.

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*Journal of the Chemical Society*, cxv (1919), 447–53; *Cork Hist. Soc. Jn.*, xlv (1941), 52–3; J. P. R. Ryan, *The Chemical Association of Ireland, 1922–36* (1997), 161; Tadhg Foley (ed.), *From Queen's College to National University: essays on the academic history of QCG/UCG/NUI, Galway* (1999), 222–3, 225–6, 228 (portr.)

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