

History of Dermatology in Finland: 11th C. E. Sonck Lecture and 100th Anniversary Symposium, Turku, November 17th, 2005

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Carl Eric Sonck (10.11.1905–13.2.2004) was the professor of Dermatology and Venereology at the University of Turku from 1955 to 1972 (Fig. 1). C. E. Sonck attained his M.D. degree in 1933 at the University of Helsinki and became specialist in dermatology and venereology in 1938. His doctoral thesis dealt with light sensibility of



Fig. 2. Plants from the botanical collection of C.E. Sonck.

patients suffering from lymphogranuloma inguinale. He defended his doctoral thesis in Helsinki in 1941 and became docent in 1944. He was nominated to be professor of Dermatology and Venereology at the University of Turku in 1955, and he retired from this position in 1973. He was also known as a yeast researcher, and he founded a mycological research and diagnostic laboratory in Turku at the end of 1950s.

In addition to dermatology, Sonck was a dedicated botanist since his school years. He has deserved merits especially as an investigator of dandelions. He described several new dandelion species, e.g. *Taraxacum fennobalticum* (Fig. 2). After retirement he made several trips to Southern and Central Europe to collect more previously uncharacterized dandelions. His career as a botanist was appreciated by a nomination as

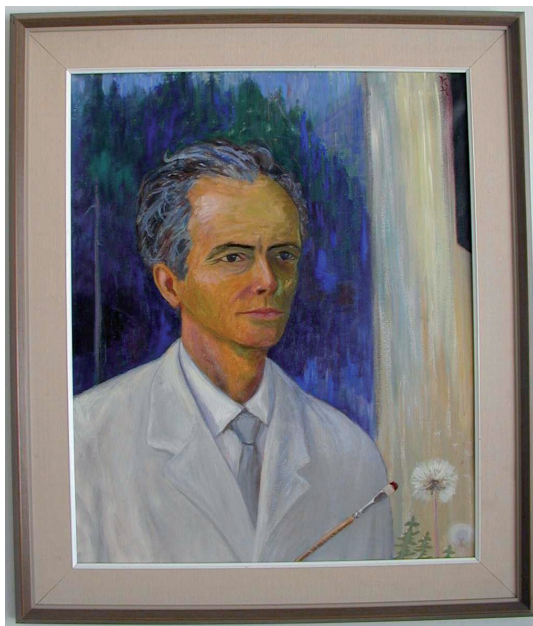


Fig. 1. A self portrait by C. E. Sonck from 1966.



Fig. 3. An oil painting by C. E. Sonck from the collection of Department of Dermatology, Turku University Hospital.



Fig. 4. Professors Väinö Havu (left) Carl Eric Sonck and his wife Karin Sonck listening to the second C. E. Sonck lecture in 1987.

Doctor h.c. of the Philosophic Faculty of University of Helsinki in 1969. Like many dermatologists, C. E. Sonck was a visual person who enjoyed and loved art as a painter, collector and patron of art. He painted hundreds of oil and watercolor sceneries, mainly from North Carelia, Lapland and Turku Archipelago (Fig. 3). Art gradually became his main activity

after retirement, and in 2002 when the Turku Dermatology Clinic was celebrating its 120 year anniversary Sonck - then 97 years of age - announced that he had finally given up dermatology and was purely an artist. At that time, he was busy preparing for one of several exhibitions. He also collected art, with specific interest in a Finnish painter Yrjö Saارينen.

He and his wife Karin donated their collection to the Art Museum of Hyvinkää. The collection forms a permanent exhibition there.

To celebrate Professor Sonck's 80th birthday in November 1985, a series of honorary lectures, C. E. Sonck Lectures on Clinical dermatology, was started. The first lecture was given by Professor Sonck himself on the topic of Lymphogranuloma inguinale - own observations and experiences. Thereafter these lectures have been given every other year (Fig. 4). In the following years the speakers of this series include many prominent Nordic dermatologists, such as Professor Hugh Zachariae, and Peter Bjerring from Aarhus, Associate Professor Kirsti-Maria Niemi from Helsinki and Professor Annamari Ranki (then from Oulu), and Professors Lennart Juhlin from Uppsala, and Inger Rosdahl from Linköping. Professor Sonck was always present and participated in discussions after these lectures until he passed away in February 2004. Stanislav Pavel was the last lecturer that met Sonck (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Professor Sonck (on the right) with his dermatologist colleague since 1950's, Leena Peltonen, and Professor Stan Pavel from Leiden, Netherlands who gave the 10th C. E. Sonck lecture in 2003.

In November 2005 we organized an 11th C.E. Sonck lecture and symposium to honour the 100th Anniversary of Professor Sonck. The symposium included a scientific lecture given by Professor Thomas Bieber (Fig. 6) from Bonn on the topic "Chasing the genes behind atopic dermatitis". Thereafter, lectures enlightening the life of C. E. Sonck as an artist, botanist and dermatologist were given by Professors Ralf Gräsbeck, Aarne Rousi and Väinö Havu, respectively. An exhibition of



Fig. 6. Professor Thomas Bieber from Bonn, who gave the 11th C. E. Sonck lecture in 2005, with three Professors of Dermatology from Turku: Veli-Matti Kähäri, Väinö Havu and Christer Jansén.



Fig. 7. A poster by C. E. Sonck describing cases of chromomycosis. The exhibition also included his original chromomycosis culture dating back to 1950's.

the life and work of C. E. Sonck had been built in the Department of Dermatology (Fig. 7). Finally, there was time to bring up memories of the life of C. E. Sonck. Most memorable of these was the story told by his daughter, Christel Sonck-Etchebarne (Fig. 8). She recalled the time when

sulphonamide antibiotics became available and could also be used against lymfogranuloma venereum. Her father took a list of names and updated the addresses of his lymfogranuloma patients of his thesis studies from 1930's. He took his car and drove around Finland to give this

new medicine to his patients. Many of the patients were extremely grateful and one of them even told Professor Sonck that he and his medicine was a gift from heaven to her. Maybe this story best describes the enthusiasm, devotion and humanism of Professor Carl Eric Sonck.



Fig. 8. Christel Sonck-Etchebarne, daughter of Carl-Eric Sonck, in discussion with Sirkku and Juha Peltonen.