

René Marcelle (December 30, 1931–December 18, 2011), the first editor-in-chief of *Photosynthesis Research*

Govindjee¹ · Dominique Marcelle²

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Abstract This tribute honors the first editor-in-chief of *Photosynthesis Research*, René Marcelle the Belgian plant physiologist who, with publishers in The Netherlands, launched the journal in 1980. Here, we present a glimpse of René Marcelle's early life, his education and research, as well as his editorial work for the journal and other conferences in plant physiology. He worked on control of photosynthesis, both the biological and environmental aspects, as well as on crassulacean acid metabolism. He is best remembered as a kind-hearted and humane editor.

Keywords Belgium · Book reviews · *Bryophyllum* · Horticulture · *Photosynthesis Research* · C. Sironval

Early life and education

René Marcelle was born on December 30, 1931, in Anderlues (Belgium). His father (Robert Marcelle) had a small trucking company and his mother (Simone Wiart) ran a small grocery shop. He had one older brother (André).

René studied biology with a specialization in botany at the University of Liège (Belgium), and graduated in 1953.

In the same year, he married Eliane Ripet, who was a history teacher in the middle-school. She died in 1996.

Figure 1 shows a 1995 portrait of René Marcelle.

After compulsory military service, René taught Biology in a secondary school. He left teaching in 1962 to work as a research scientist at the Opzoeking Station van Gorsem (Research Station of Gorsem) in Sint Truiden (Belgium) where he worked until retirement. This research station was partly funded by IRSIA (Institut pour l'encouragement de la recherche scientifique dans l'industrie et l'agriculture; in English: Institute for Scientific Research in Industry and Agriculture).



Fig. 1 A photograph of René Marcelle, ~1995. Source Archives of the Marcelle family; provided by Dominique Marcelle

✉ Govindjee
gov@illinois.edu

Dominique Marcelle
dominique.marthe.marcelle@gmail.com

¹ Department of Plant Biology, Department of Biochemistry, and Center of Biophysics and Quantitative Biology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 265 Morrill Hall, 505 S. Goodwin Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801, USA

² 5030 Gembloux, Belgium

René received his Ph.D. from Université de Liège, in 1969, on: Recherches sur la croissance, le bourgeonnement épiphyllé et le développement de *Bryophyllum tubiflorum* (Harve) et *Bryophyllum daigremontianum* (Berger): comparaison des effets de la gibbérelline et de la photopériode. It was a 227 page thesis in French (Marcelle 1970, 1975a).

The family had lived in Herstal, near Liège, until 1969, when it moved to a small village in the countryside, Fexhe-Slins, where René stayed until he could no longer live alone and moved to a retirement home in Herstal, where he died on December 18, 2011, just about 2 weeks before his 80th birthday. René and Eliane had 3 children (Dominique (author of this tribute), Fabienne and Christophe) and 5 grandchildren (Julien, Thomas, Emmanuel, Sarah and Astrid).

Research, editorial and academic life

René worked mostly in Belgium, but he had been abroad (e.g., in Poznan, Poland, in 1975). As one example of his early and highly reputed research, we mention a brief 1963 report in *Nature*, with his PhD supervisor Cyril Sironval, which dealt not with photosynthesis, but with the effect of gibberelic acid on flowering of apple trees (Marcelle and Sironval 1963). This treatment led to increased growth of shoots and a decreased capacity of buds to flower! His earlier work with C. Sironval dealt with chlorophyll accumulation in soybeans when they were transferred from one daylength to another (Sironval et al. 1961). During his research career, René worked on several areas of research in plant physiology including (i) effects of growth regulators on photosynthesis (Marcelle and Oben 1973; Marcelle et al. 1974; Oben and Marcelle 1975), (ii) photoperiod on photosynthesis in CAM plants (Marcelle 1975a), (iii) zinc nutrition (van Assche et al. 1979; also see Charnel et al. 1982) and (iv) drought effects on photosynthesis (Simon and Marcelle 1983).

René had a major impact on photosynthesis research following his acceptance of the position as the first editor-in-chief of the journal *Photosynthesis Research*, launched in 1980 by Dr. W. Junk Publishers, The Hague, in The Netherlands (see Govindjee et al. 2002 for details of how this came about). René was supported by a large international Editorial Board he had assembled from 12 countries, including leaders in the field and several young researchers of promise.¹

¹ T. Akazawa (Japan); J. S. Boyer (USA); J. W. Bradbeer (UK); J. Coombs (UK); J. Duranton (France); H. S. Egneus (Sweden); A. Faludi-Daniel (Hungary); J. C. Goedheer (The Netherlands); Z. Gromet-Elhanan (Israel); D. O. Hall (UK); S. Katoh (Japan); G. J. Kelly (Germany/Australia); R. A. Kennedy (USA); A. J. Keys (UK); W. M. Laetsch (USA); J. Lavorel (France); R. Leech (UK); H. K. Lichtenthaler (Germany); M. Losada (Spain); M. M. Ludlow (Australia); M. Mousseau (France); W. L. Ogren (USA); S. P. Robinson (USA/Australia); N. Terry (USA); I. P. Ting (USA); K. J. Treharne (UK); F. E. Wielgolaski (Norway); A. Wild (Germany); and M.-R. Wolwerz (Belgium).

Govindjee, who had been in photosynthesis research at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign since 1956, was especially pleased to see that his colleagues John Boyer and Bill Ogren had agreed to serve on the Editorial Board of the new journal. René Marcelle is remembered for his kind and democratic dealings with the Board, as well as with authors. He was often dismayed by severe and harsh opinions of some referees. When two referees rejected a paper, he always appointed a third referee. When he had to reject a paper, he always wrote to the author “Don’t worry! Make revisions, and submit your paper to another journal”.

René Marcelle had been known to Govindjee since 1980 when volume 1 (1–2) of *Photosynthesis Research* was launched. Volume 1 (issue 1) had a humble beginning; the topics included: structural characterization of Photosystem I; and the effects of herbicides, of kinetin and of a glycolate oxidase inhibitor on photosynthetic apparatus of plants. Govindjee joined René as an Associate Editor in 1983 (volume 4 (1), and then in 1985 (vol. 6 (3), as co-editor in chief, a role in which he continued with René until 1988. It was in 1988 that René left the editorship after serving the journal for 8 years. He was very proud of his role in establishing a journal dedicated to broad aspects of research in photosynthesis.

In addition to being the editor-in-chief of *Photosynthesis Research* for 8 years during which he exercised a personal focus on physiological aspects, René Marcelle organized several conferences and edited many volumes including: Marcelle (1975b, 1984), Marcelle et al. (1979, 1983, 1986) and Govindjee et al. (1986). Figure 2 shows René’s photograph at a reception of one such conference.

René Marcelle was also active in alerting the readership of *Photosynthesis Research* to recently published books through short book reviews. We cite just a few of these reviews from *Photosynthesis Research* **1**: 209–2011 (1980); **3**: 369–373 (1982); **4**: 179–182 (1983); **5**: 89; 199–201; 371–373 (1984); **8**: 93–96 (1986); **15**: 91; 281–282 (1988). Book reviews by others were encouraged, for example a detailed book review by G. C. Papageorgiou in *Photosynthesis Research* **13**: 269–274, 1987. This activity has remained a feature of the journal.

Recollections of Hartmut Lichtenthaler

“I knew René Marcelle very well. I was on the editorial board of *Photosynthesis Research* from the very beginning until 1990. When René started the journal we had many discussions on the way as to how to do it; I helped him establish the journal, to get good manuscripts, and I persuaded many colleagues to publish in this journal. Also, I reviewed very many manuscripts at that time. Marcelle also organized, from time to time, discussion meetings on



Fig. 2 A photograph of René Marcelle (on the right, wearing a tie, listening to a participant), ~1990, at a reception of a conference that he had organized. Source Archives of the Marcelle family; provided by Dominique Marcelle

photosynthesis at his place, where open questions and controversial matters were discussed. For this purpose he invited European as well as American scientists who worked in that field and could contribute to it. These meetings provided an important input into further research activities and enhanced progress in photosynthesis research. I had participated in such a discussion on “Effects of stress on photosynthesis”; the contributions of this symposium were soon published (Marcelle 1982). René was an excellent scientist and editor and a very pleasant person. We miss him.”

Concluding remarks

René Marcelle, the first EIC of Photosynthesis Research, retired from academic research on January 1, 1993. He worked until his retirement from the Research Center of Gorseme at the end of 1992. This facility was reorganized in 1997 as a center of excellence in fruit research (<<http://www.pcfruit.be/en/about-pcfruit>>). René passed away on December 18, 2011, and he leaves behind two daughters, Dominique and Fabienne, and a son, Christophe, and their families.

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