

Waldemar B. Kaempffert Dies; Science Editor of The Times, 79

**Noted for Explaining Technical
Developments for Layman
—On Staff 26 Years**



The New York Times Studio

Waldemar B. Kaempffert

Waldemar B. Kaempffert, science editor of The New York Times for twenty-six years, died last night in the Neurological Institute, Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, after a short illness. His age was 79.

He had been active in his work until twelve days ago, when he suffered a stroke.

Mr. Kaempffert was one of the early "science editors" in journalism, a writer for magazines and newspapers whose specialty was explaining the technical discoveries of scientists to the layman in popular language.

In fifty years he wrote thousands of articles to inform the average reader of the ever-increasing flow of new-found facts of nature. This educative task he performed with lucidity, without bewildering the reader by talking over his head or patronizing him by talking down. Though he often dramatized science, he never tried to sensationalize it.

He was one of the first to urge that cancer research be organized like a research laboratory in a great industry. An editorial he wrote helped to start the movement in cooperative research, which, he held, would lead to quicker discoveries in the field of cancer.

Elected to Phi Beta Kappa

Mr. Kaempffert was born in New York on Sept. 23, 1877. His parents, Bernhard and Juliette Kaempffert, were of German descent. He graduated at the age of 20 from City College, where he majored in science for a bachelor's degree and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

The same year, 1897, he obtained a job as an assistant editor of The Scientific American. While working for the magazine, Mr. Kaempffert studied law at New York University. He won a law degree in 1903 and was admitted to the bar but never practiced.

In 1911 Mr. Kaempffert was named managing editor of The Scientific American. Four years later he joined Popular Science Monthly as editor, holding that position until 1920.

Mr. Kaempffert was a freelance writer on science for some years. In 1927 he became science editor of The Times, writing a weekly column on current research, occasional editorials on scientific subjects and sometimes covering conventions of scientists and other news events in his field. Except for a hiatus of three years on another task, his work for The Times occupied the rest of his life.

The three years, from 1928 to 1931, he spent as first director of the new Museum of Science and Industry at Chicago. There, Mr. Kaempffert tried to tell dramatically the complete story of scientific progress.

His ideal was for visitors to leave the museum convinced that scientists did more to "transform the earth and mold institutions than Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon, and that history is made in the laboratory and workshop as well as on the battlefield."

Mr. Kaempffert's subject matter in The Times was as wide as nature itself. He speculated on the origin of life, a rocket trip to Mars, and whether a man could, theoretically, live forever. He discussed atomic energy, the end of the world, evolution, vitamins, sulfa drugs, industrial management, the effect of dictatorship on scientific progress and self-hypnosis.

In these discussions Mr. Kaempffert tried to steer between the Scylla of technicality and the Charybdis of vulgarization.

"It is the business of the journalist," he wrote in 1935, "to present the discoveries of the laboratory so that the many will understand. But Heaven forbid that the popularizer should rely too much on emotion. We have passed the stage when gaping wonder can pass for popularization. The facts, simply, humanly and interestingly presented, are what the public wants."

For the sake of scientific progress, Mr. Kaempffert pleaded for establishment of a world state, democracy and mobilization of scientific effort for peacetime, as well as military goals.

Won British Science Award

In 1954 he became the first science writer to receive the Kalinga Prize, worth \$2,800. He was nominated for the award by the British Association of Science Writers, which cited him for contributions to the public understanding of science.

A few weeks earlier, Mr. Kaempffert had accepted for The Times a special award of the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation. It credited him with having "shaped profoundly his newspaper's contribution to medical reporting in the public interest."

Last June Mr. Kaempffert received the grade of Fellow in the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

He wrote articles for other publications than The Times on many occasions, was the author of six books on various aspects of science and served as editor of half a dozen other popularized volumes, some for children.

Mr. Kaempffert's wife, the former Miss Carolyn Lydia Yeaton, died in 1933.

He resided at the Century Club.