

## BIOGRAPHY – NANOSCIENCE MEETS HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Can facts of history emerge from contemporary science? We believe they can – and we prove it! As scientists involved in current nanoresearch, we have uncovered facts of history in the course of work not otherwise history-related. The key to the discoveries has been – biography. Our curiosity was sparked by a simple question concerning one of the materials studied: nickel oxide, NiO, an archetypal nanoantiferromagnet [1]. Mineralogists have named NiO *bunsenite*, after *Robert Wilhelm Bunsen* (1811-1899). Was *bunsenite* originally discovered by Bunsen, then? – Where, and when? – As a matter of fact, neither the biographical records nor Bunsen's own writings support this long-standing assumption. Our own findings [2] point to another prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century chemist: the German-American *Friedrich August Genth* (1820-1893). Here, then, biography is at the fore, and from it, further facts of history emerge in quick succession: first, concerning the true discovery of the *cobaltammines*, rectifying a minor misconception in the history of experimental chemistry, which escaped such deserving historians even as G. B. Kauffman. Second, and more importantly, unforeseen facts emerge touching an apparently unrelated matter: the popular depiction of *Justus Liebig's* chemical laboratory at Gießen by *Wilhelm Trautschold* (1815-1876). Therein, 13 chemists – some well-known among them – are portrayed with light strokes of the pen by an accomplished artist. Actually, a comparison with extant photographs is possible in several instances. And yet, two of the individuals have always remained unidentified. Only now, after a careful collation of biographical data on Genth and selected contemporaries, can we reasonably conjecture that one of the two missing names is, in fact, Genth's, and the other that of *John Lawrence Smith* (1818-1883), the first American to work under Liebig. – Thanks to biography, the list of the chemistry adepts standing at the bench in that venerable “hall of fame” is complete at last!

**Keywords:** Bunsen, Cobaltammines, Genth, Liebig, Nanoscience, NiO, Trautschold

### References

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