



BAEKELAND, Leo Hendrik

Born: Ghent, Belgium (1863)

Died: Beacon, N.Y. (USA) (1944)

After attending evening classes at a technical institute in Ghent, he obtains a scholarship at the University of Ghent, where he graduates as a chemist in 1884. Coupling an innate sense for business with an interest in photochemistry, he sets up a small factory making photographic plates. As a start of his academic career his mentor – and father in law Théodore Swarts (1839-1911) - sends him with a scholarship to the United States where he researches thoroughly the properties of the suspension of silverhalogenides in gelatin, leading to the invention of the Velox photographic paper which earns him a very advantageous financial deal with the Eastman Kodak Company. With this newly acquired fortune he builds in Yonkers, N.Y., a house with an adjacent laboratory where he does research into electrochemistry. Later on he initiates a series of experiments with phenol and formaldehyde which lead to the discovery of Bakelite (1909). Having become an American citizen in 1897, he keeps his links with Belgium and during WWI contributes large amounts of money to supply food from the US to Belgium.