

Naming Barbituric Acid – Ghent, 1864

Did Adolf von Baeyer name his chemical discovery of barbituric acid after a supposed girlfriend named Barbara? In fact, some officers in the local garrison of Ghent, luncheon companions and friends of the chemists AvB and Theodore Swarts (who later succeeded Kekulé), were out celebrating the feast day of their patron saint — Saint Barbara — on the very day AvB made his as-yet-unnamed discovery. The officers invited the chemists to join them, and then, hearing about the chemical discovery that day, convinced AvB to name the compound after their patron — Saint Barbara — and duly toasted the christening.

Note that Wikipedia says that the chemical was named as it was either because AvB discovered it on December 4, the feast day of Saint Barbara, or because he sometimes lunched with artillery officers whose patron saint was Saint Barbara. In fact BOTH stories are true, and offer a more nuanced and rather amusing take on history.