

The Chilean botanist Eberhard Kausel

Eberhard Kausel was a Chilean botanical taxonomist from the early 20th century who became known for his studies on the plant order *Myrtaceae*. He was a dentist by profession and a notable botanist by avocation, with an intense interest and passion for the natural sciences. His dual career resulted from the fact that at the time that he grew up in Chile, it was difficult for him to make a living as a botanist. Thus, he chose to do dental work during weekdays and then dive into his lab and peek into his microscope on weekends, holidays and when on vacations. Then again, being a free practicing dentist, he could also choose to reschedule his clients and take days off at will —or even take lengthy vacations away from his odontological apron— and left on excursions with his children or visiting scientists to collect plant specimens and do field work.

Early life & family background

Kausel was born in Santiago de Chile on February 23, 1910 as Eberhard Maximilian Leopold, but in his later life he dropped the two middle names. He was the seventh and last son of a family of German teachers who arrived in Chile during the late 19th century and who gave rise to a family of educators and professors. His maternal grandfather Martin Schneider was the founder of the school for elementary schoolteachers *Abelardo Nuñez* in Santiago, and the founder and director of the high school *Liceo Santiago*. His maternal grandmother Helene was also a schoolteacher in Santiago who in due time rose to become a girl's school director. His father Theodor was a beloved math teacher at various high schools and institutions of higher learning in Santiago, which included the University of Chile as well as the preeminent [Liceo de Aplicación](#), where he also served once as a director. Among Eberhard's brothers, Ernst was a mining engineer and Professor of the School of Engineering who served many years as director of the School of Mines at the University of Chile. Ernst's own son [Edgar Kausel Vecchiola](#) became a notable Chilean seismologist, a professor of Geophysics and the director of the School of Geophysics at the University of Chile. The son of the latter, Edgardo Kausel Elicagaray is currently Professor of Business Administration in the School of Management at the Catholic University of Chile in Santiago. The son of Eberhard's sister Lilli, [Edgardo Boeninger Kausel](#), became the dean of the School of Economics and later also the Rector of the University of Chile; some years later, Edgardo served as chief of staff in the government of Chilean president [Patricio Aylwin](#), and ultimately was elected senator in the Chilean parliament. A nephew of Eberhard, Teodoro Kausel, is a professor



Figure 1: Eberhard Kausel, approx. 1940

emeritus in the School of Economics at the University Austral de Chile in Valdivia. Finally, Eberhard's own son [Eduardo Kausel](#) is a professor emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

While still a teenager Kausel developed a passion for chemistry. He mounted at home a rather complete chemistry lab where he spent many hours tinkering with reactants. This was also to become useful later on when his father Theodor developed a severe case of type-2 diabetes, in the course of which Eberhard regularly monitored his father's glucose levels. Regrettably, Theodor died when Eberhard was only 15 years of age, which caused him to begin assuming responsibilities at his home and thus accelerated his maturity.



Figure 2: In his laboratory, approx. 1926

He graduated from high school at age 16 and at first enrolled in Forest Engineering, but after a year in that career, he switched to Odontology and graduated as dental surgeon in 1932 at the early age of 22. About that time, he also began pursuing his passion for botany and started collecting his first plant specimens. In the years following his graduation he met fellow dentist Greta Bolt, whom he married in 1937 and then had four children.

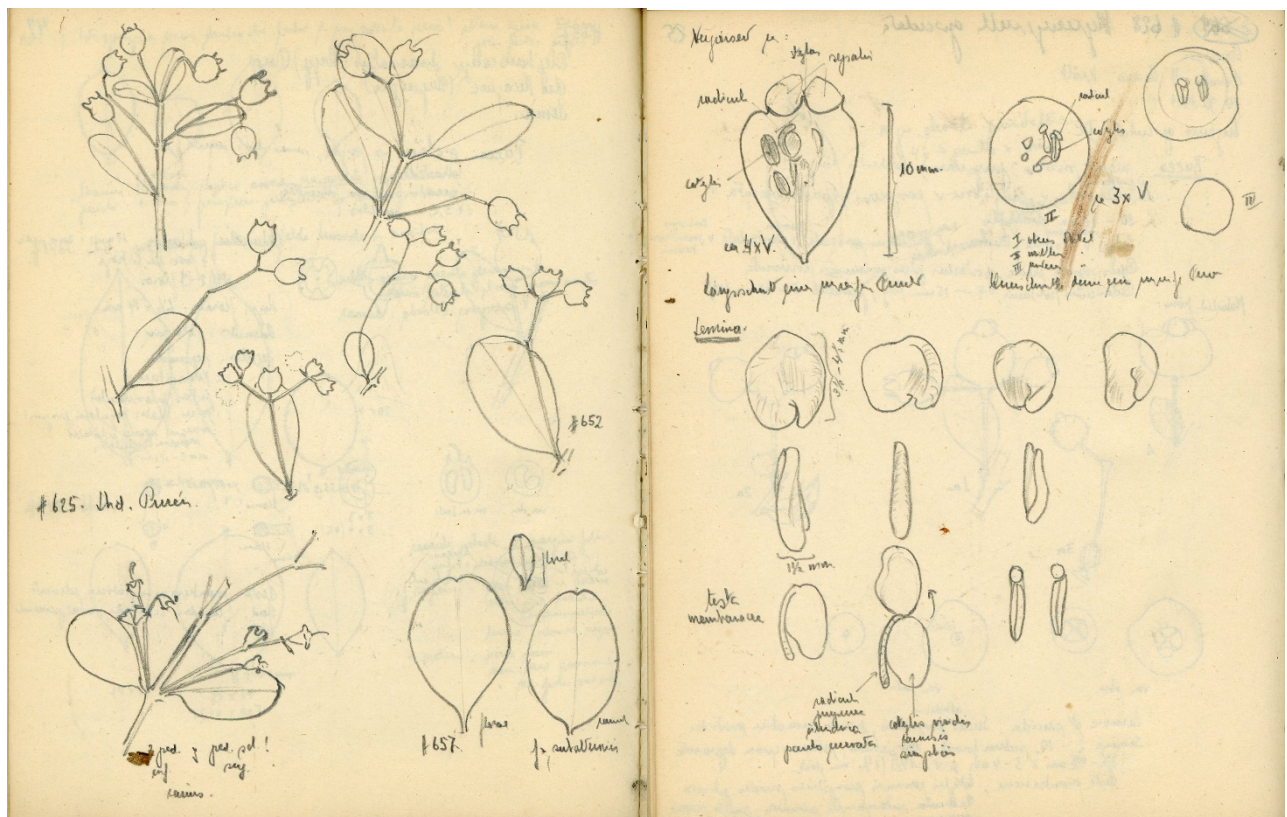


Figure 3: Botanical art of Eberhard Kausel (out more than thousand like these)

Eberhard spoke and wrote both Spanish and German with native fluency; in addition, he was able to write and do limited conversations in English as well as managed the use of elements of Latin. As fate would have it, his life was ended much too early by a stroke at age 62 on July 25, 1972, most probably the result of having been a chain smoker for all of his adult life.

Kausel was particularly well known for his contributions to South American Myrtaceae, and especially those genera that grew in Chile and Argentina. A prolific writer at a time when word processors did not exist, he left behind a voluminous collection of botanical sketches, typewritten essays, and letters. He also published a number of scientific papers, which for the most part appeared in Argentinian botanical journals ^[1-18].

In addition, a massive portion of Kausel's scientific contributions came about by direct exchange of information, botanical specimens, and correspondence with fellow botanists from around the world, such as [Gualterio Looser](#), [Benkt Sparre](#) or [Harold Moldenke](#). Especially noteworthy are two of his bound volumes of letters with Uruguayan botanist [Diego Legrand](#) and with Swedish botanist and Antarctic explorer [Carl Skottsberg](#), both of which are still extant (Eduardo Kausel, kausel@mit.edu, personal collection). At present Kausel's vast herbarium of South American Myrtaceae is housed at the [Finnish Museum of Natural History](#).



Figure 5: In 1948, accompanied by other botanists. From left to right: Gualterio Looser; possibly Harold Moldenke; unknown colleague; and Eberhard Kausel

Kausel introduced to the botanical world several new taxa, among which are *Reicheia*, *Myrceugenella*, *Legrandia*, *Nothomyrcya* and others. Several plant species now carry his name, among which are: *Myrceugenella Kausel Myrtaceae*; *Myrciariopsis Kausel Myrtaceae*; *Reichea Kausel Myrtaceae*; *Amomyrtella Kausel Myrtaceae*; and so forth^[19].

According to the web site of the *Index Kewensis*, Kausel did propose 174 new names or combination of species of vascular plants, many of which are still valid and have been confirmed by genetic studies. He focused mainly on Chilean myrtaceae, which due to his work are among the best known in Latin America. To honor his contributions to botany, colleagues of his have added his name to several species, among which are *Schinus kauselii* F.A. Barkley (Anacardiaceae) and *Myrcia kauseliana* D. Legrand (Myrtaceae)

Finally, it should be mentioned that in the years from 1933 to 1944, Kausel was also an Adjunct (i.e. part time) Professor of Prosthesis at the Dental School of the University of Chile. For some years, he also served in the governing committee of the *Chilean Federation of Dentists*, where he focused mainly on tax and social security issues of relevance to Chilean dentists. Over the years, he also published a handful of odontological papers^[20-23].

At his death, Kausel was survived by his colleague and wife Dr. Greta Bolt —who was to outlive him for another quarter of a century— and by his four children and many grandchildren. A lengthy obituary on Kausel, penned by fellow botanist [Gualterio Looser](#), appeared in the *Annals of the Museum of Natural History of Valparaíso* in October of 1973 (Vol 6, 281-284).

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Figure 5: *Legrandia concinna* (Phil.) Kausel, a taxon described by Kausel.

Source: chileflora.cl



Figure 7: In his dental office, in 1943

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Note: The botanical papers of Eberhard Kausel are downloadable from the web site of Chloris Chile (<http://www.chlorischile.cl/>)