

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

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Dear Cy {LEVINTHAL}

I don't know whether there is much hope that relevant papers can still be found -- if that much was saved the job of selection might be hopeless; but may I nevertheless ask your help in surveying the files of your department for material that might bear on the history of genetic recombination in bacteria.

This was provoked by the piece by Wyatt in Nature, which has already started to consolidate some myths; and I am chagrined by having only a few fragments to lack up my sometimes hazy recollections. I have the lab notebooks, but they convey very little of the intellectual atmosphere that motivated various experiments.

Some of the general issues are outlined on the attached. In particular, department files may have some details like

dates of seminars concerning Avery, DNA etc esp. in 1945
correspondence or file data on me as a student or an employe 1943-45

I think that Franz Schrader was then chairman; other figures would have been Ryan (of course), Pollitzer, Dobzhansky, Barth. Harriett Taylor (Ephrussi) must have played a central role in communicating between Rockefeller and Columbia, but I think she did not finish her Ph.D. (on the kinetics of yeast growth) until May or June 1945; nevertheless I think she may have been already deeply interested in transformation even by then. My experiments with Francis (on "transforming" Neurospora) began in June, and in July I had outlined some protocols for bacterial sex.

For your own interest I will enclose copies of a few archival items. Anything you can lead me to would be received with gratitude and interest.

Yours

P.S. Wyatt does have a point-- the skepticism with which "premature" molecular biologists were greeted in a Zoology Dept. Francis used to joke that Neurospora could grow (4 mm/hr) faster than some animals could run, and that only this maintained his reputation in the dept. But I recall anything but lack of awareness about Avery. I felt the issue was more, what do bacteria and their God-knows-what genetic systems have to do with real organisms? I intend to be writing in some more detail about this.