



Basement of Dreams

Psychology's History Is Alive and Well in Akron

By RICHARD HÉBERT
Observer Correspondent

They come asking questions. They come searching for clues to a killer's identity. They come seeking their lineage to hold a piece of the "true cross" to watch old movies to settle old scores. Most of all they come bearing priceless gifts of knowledge and wealth.

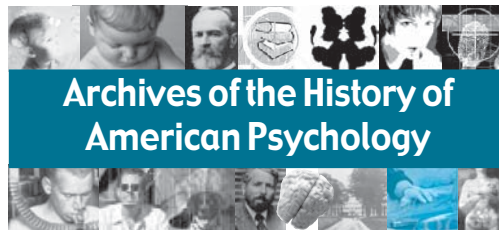
If they made a movie of it, it would probably be called "Basement of Dreams," another case of "build it and they will come." But, instead of a magical baseball diamond carved out of the Midwest's cornfields to lure players of a bygone era, this is the basement of a former department store in downtown Akron, Ohio, and the visitors who come simply want to touch and, somehow, grasp a bit of the elusive past.

The basement of the Polsky Building – officially Room LL10-A – is home to the Archives of the History of American Psychology (AHAP). Polsky's takes up an entire city block. Once downtown Akron's prime department store,

when it closed its doors to the shopping public it was donated to the University of Akron (the campus is only a block away). The University converted it into a multi-pur-

pose academic building of classrooms and offices. The Psychology Department was housed there temporarily but it moved out this summer.

When the Archives were moved into Polsky's lower level in 1995, the University fashioned for it a comfortable reading room and gave it lots of floor space. "It's a good thing it *is* in the basement," says Archives Director David B. Baker, "because it has a lot of open square footage for stacks for storing manuscripts and equipment." Before 1995, the Archives kept its collections in two separate buildings, the manuscripts in Bierce Library on campus, the apparatus and equipment in the psychology department.



Courtesy of the Archives of the History of American Psychology

Knight Dunlap's method for measuring the interference of anoxia encountered by World War I flyers at high altitudes. The subject, attached to a "rebreathing machine" that induces anoxia by steadily reducing the amount of oxygen delivered to the subject, seeks to respond quickly and accurately to three stimulus changes.

Basement of Dreams

Psychology's History is Alive and Well in Akron

Rummage through the Archives of the History of American Psychology and see what your intellectual ancestors were really up to.

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WHY AKRON?

Why Akron, a city not otherwise known as a Mecca for psychologists? Baker and his predecessor, Archives' co-founder John Popplestone, should be tired of that question by now, but they patiently answer it: "There's really only one answer," says Popplestone. "We were willing to do the work and the University was willing to pay the bills."

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Popplestone elaborates on the hesitancy of others to go where he and his wife, the late Marion White McPherson, went intrepidly in the 1960s: “Many psychologists are afraid of the past. Many scientists do this. They think the past is error. They see history as a recital of error, and they don’t want to be included in it. But the past did not bother me, or my wife.”

John and Marion met at Wayne State University, where Popplestone studied for his Masters. McPherson was a psychology professor there. “I took a course from her and one thing led to another,” he says. “Today we’d both be expelled for inappropriate behavior.”

McPherson herself had been a student of Jacob Robert Kantor at Indiana University, who ceaselessly emphasized the historic role of psychology. “He’d say, ‘To understand where psychology is now, you have to understand where it has been.’” McPherson, Popplestone says, was “a Kantorian.” “All Kantorians understand history,” he explains.

When Popplestone received his doctorate, he was a personality psychologist. After three years teaching at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, he and McPherson moved to Akron in 1961. “I was young and naive and defenseless,” he recalls. “The department head said he wanted to revive a course in the history of psychology, which was on the books but hadn’t been taught for a long time. I protested that I wasn’t a historian and didn’t want to do it. By the next semester I was doing it.”

There was only one textbook on the history of psychology, by an author with the ironic last name of Boring, first name Edwin G., of Harvard, at the time the *éminence grise* of the field. “The problem with Boring is that most modern students can’t understand it,” says Popplestone. “The sentences are too long and the words are too big, there are too many German words.”

And, other than the difficult textbook, there were no materials to use to bring the history to life. “I went home one night after class complaining bitterly about how there was nothing to teach, how difficult it was. One of the things I said to my wife was that the field was never going to amount to anything unless we had an archives that preserves and makes available prime resources. Most of what existed in that era was anecdotes and secondary sources. If we were going to have a modern, scholarly history of psychology, the first thing we needed to do was create what today we’d call a data bank.”

He proposed to do just that, and his wife urged him to take his idea to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, who was himself an historian. The dean agreed. “He said, ‘Why don’t you explore it? Find out whether anyone else has tried the idea. Would we be stepping on anyone else’s toes, is there enough scholarly interest?’”

Popplestone wrote to Boring, who suggested he talk to the late Robert Watson at Northwestern University, a “vigorous, hustling, very political” psychologist. They met and Watson, too, liked the idea. It had been talked about before, he told Popplestone, but no one had done anything. “He told me, ‘If you want to get busy and do it, I will give you my support.’”

Popplestone wrote more letters and found others who supported the idea. He joined an informal group that gathered at American Psychological Association conferences.

(The group later became the APA’s History of Psychology Division, Division 26.) “It all came together,” he says. “The president of the university liked the idea, it went to the Board of Trustees, and we were created in 1965.”



David Baker became the Director of the Archives of the History of American Psychology after co-founder John Popplestone’s retirement in 1999. Baker’s primary goal is to see the archive serve the academic and research community more widely and to become known as a resource center in the history of psychology.

The Archives became Popplestone’s and McPherson’s lifelong joint project. (Rules against nepotism prevented her from joining the faculty at first, but gradually her role at the Archives made her a part of the academic community and in time she too received a full-time faculty appointment.) They started with no budget, no space and no staff. They paid out of their own pockets for “some beautiful letterhead” and wrote yet more letters. Soon they had a small

budget, a student assistant, a desk at the library and “a corner where we could put things.” Next came office space. “The university was young then, we had a very ambitious president, and we had a dean who was very supportive.”

It was an idea whose time had clearly come. The mid- and late-1960s saw the creation of the APA’s Division 26; the launch of the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, the first such journal; the start of the first doctoral program in the history of psychology, at the University of New Hampshire; and the birth of the Archives.

Ludy Benjamin, of Texas A&M University, another eminent historian of psychology and mentor to Baker, his student who 30 years later would assume the mantle of Archives director, notes that the 1960s were ripe with psychological challenge.

“Perhaps the interest in the history of psychology during that decade was a reflection of our attempts to make sense of a horrible time in America – the assassinations, civil rights



horrors, the war in Vietnam, intergenerational conflict as it had never been seen before,” said Benjamin. “Suddenly, historians of psychology had a place to get their training, to discuss their ideas with one another, to do their research, and to publish it. The founding of the Archives represented real vision on the part of John and Marion.”

Popplestone’s idea, born in the pique of his resentment at having to teach a history course with inadequate materials, has mushroomed into what Baker now calls “the largest and most important collection of its kind in the world.” The Archives founder remembers that a vice president of academic affairs once told him that when he went to academic meetings and conferences, “they used to look at my badge and say, ‘Akron, that’s where the rubber comes from,’ but now they look and say, ‘Oh, Akron, that’s where the Psychology Archives are.’”

Manuscripts, notes, correspondence, tests, apparatus, films, photos – the collections streamed into Akron faster than they could be inventoried. As the Archives grew, more funding was needed, for more space and more staff.

The husband-and-wife team pushed. “This was a completely joint operation,” Popplestone emphasizes. “In the course of our careers, all of our publications have been joint. We published two books as co-authors, and the creation and direction of the Archives was a joint project.” Popplestone handled “public relations and external affairs” while his wife helped visiting scholars, managed student staff and ran the office.

He recalls how Mary Henle, formerly of the New School for Social Research and now 90, once told him and his wife, “Not many psychologists can be sure that their lifetime’s work has amounted to something. You two can have that assurance.”

LIFE BEFORE COMPUTERS

“Remember, all of this was before computers,” Popplestone says of the building of the Archives. “The system for finding materials was largely in our memories and on three-by-five cards. One of the things David [Baker] is doing is bringing us kicking and screaming into the 21st century.”

Baker was also a reluctant recruit as a psychologist-historian. He wanted to be a practicing psychologist, but in graduate school at Texas A&M he was required to take a course in the history of psychology. It was taught by Benjamin, an APS Fellow and Charter Member. Warned that it would be “the hardest course you’ll take in graduate school,” he recalled in a recent dialog published in *Teaching of Psy-*

Gesell Twins



Courtesy of the Archives of the History of American Psychology

Arnold Gesell, a leader in developing the use of motion picture evidence of infant and child growth, completed several studies of twins. The analyses of stills and animation allow for the observation of the minutiae of growth.

chology (Vol. 28, No. 4), Baker entered it “with a great deal of resentment and resistance.”

Benjamin’s course turned out to be “the most important experience of my graduate education,” Baker says. He researched the founding of the first psychology clinic in the US, in 1896, then published his research and presented it at an Eastern Psychological Association symposium, all at Benjamin’s urging.

“I was hooked,” he remembers. “It changed my life. What I learned as a graduate student was that history could be an exciting, dynamic, and completely legitimate area of research and scholarship in psychology. Indeed, it can do much to synthesize and organize the seeming mass of confusion that we call psychology. I found that to understand psychology was to understand some of the context in which it developed and the assumptions by which it continues to operate.” To this day, he says, Benjamin continues to be “my friend and my mentor.”

With his brand new doctorate, Baker went to the University of North Texas, cautioned by Benjamin that if he wanted to achieve tenure, he shouldn’t focus on the history of psychology. In effect, he says, Benjamin was warning him, “Don’t quit your day job.” He taught and published on child clinical psychology, but he also kept alive his interest in history, even teaching a course in it. When Popplestone retired in 1999, Baker applied for the Archives position and, “to my surprise and great joy,” was interviewed for it – and hired. He quit his “day job.”

“The collections at Akron are truly amazing in terms of their diversity and their importance,” Benjamin says of Baker’s new responsibilities. “Virtually all areas of American psychology are included in the collection. If you want to



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write a history of industrial-organizational psychology, the collections at Akron on that subject are incredible. Likewise for counseling psychology. Likewise for animal psychology.”

Thousands of stories lie buried in Polsky’s basement. Altogether, the Archives include the manuscripts of some 750 psychologists; the historical records of more than 50 organizations (including those of the American Psychological Society); more than 1,000 pieces of equipment; well over 15,000 photographs, from portraits and snapshots to lab and field study photos; some 6,000 reels of film – research, training, and educational; a collection of between 8,000 and 12,000 tests, both paper-and-pencil and three-dimensional, that have been used in research and practice over the years; plus published books and papers that trace the development of psychological science and a collection of rare and antiquarian books.

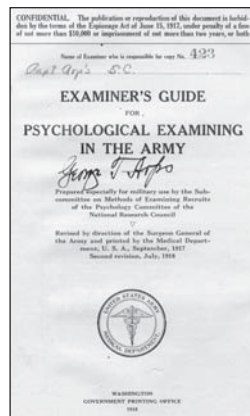
The papers of the late Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), the famed Brandeis University Psychology Department head who developed the theory of human motivation, alone would stack 65 feet high. The inventory of those papers is itself 448 pages long, and the Archives has another 350 pages of other documents *about* the work of Maslow that led to self-actualization therapy.

For much of the 20th century, American psychology concerned itself with the study of individual differences and the development of tests to measure those differences. Benjamin calls the Akron Archives “a goldmine on those subjects” as well. For example, a recently published biography of Henry

Herbert Goddard, by Leila Zenderland, professor of American Studies at California State University-Fullerton, which relates the early history of intelligence testing, relies heavily on Archives material, including the Goddard Papers.

“In my opinion,” says Benjamin, “it is one of the most important books published on the history of psychology and American social history, and it could not have happened without the Goddard Papers having been available.”

In the Army Now



Courtesy of the Archives of the History of American Psychology

An Examiner's Guide for Psychological Examining in the Army issued to George F. Arps, one of the last American's to receive a doctorate from Wilhelm Wundt. United States entry in April 1917 in World War I prompted many scientists to enlist or otherwise offer their services. Psychologists were appointed to the Army's Sanitation Corps, the only unit for nonmedical personnel in the Army Medical Department.

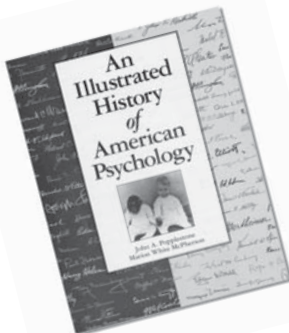
SHOCKINGLY IMPORTANT

Perhaps the most notorious instrument in the Archives is the controversial “Shock Generator” used at Yale University during the 1960s by Stanley Milgram in his experiments demonstrating that, given the right circumstances, we might all make “good Nazis.” The “shock box” has ominous-looking dials and gauges labeled with danger warnings of “Extreme Intensity Shock” past the 300-volt marker. Sub-

jects were instructed to administer “shocks” at the box’s maximum level, 450 volts, to unseen victims. Despite the screams they could hear, they continued obediently “shocking” their victims, not knowing that it was all faked.

The Archives also contains the papers of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), whose members worked with Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP in preparing for the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case that toppled segregation in 1954. During the past five years, at least three books and numerous articles have

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been written about that case, and virtually all of them relied on the Akron collection.

The Archives also contains the 2,164 child development films made by Arnold Gesell (1880-1961), the physician who had such influence on Dr. Benjamin Spock and parenting in America. Gesell started a child study center at Yale University, and eventually the Gesell Institute in New Haven, where he filmed infants and toddlers under a special dome to study their actions. Lewis Lipsitt, a developmental psychologist at Brown University who specializes in learning processes, recalls viewing some of those films on a visit to the Archives around 1980. “I took the opportunity to use the Gesell equipment, including his hand-cranked frame-by-frame projector. It’s a thrill to go there, as I did, and actually ‘use’ the equipment in viewing his films.”

The nationwide search for the Unabomber during the early 1990s also led postal inspectors to Akron, to pore through the collected papers of James McConnell, of the University of Michigan, one of the Unabomber’s targets. (McConnell was not injured, but two others were wounded by the letter bomb sent to him.)

The inspectors came twice hoping to find clues to the Unabomber’s identity. They were “carrying heat,” as Popplestone tells it. The first time, only one inspector came. He stayed “a week or two.” Later, a crew of four armed inspectors came and stayed a week, using a private room to search through the McConnell papers. They photocopied “an awful lot of stuff,” but Popplestone says he doesn’t think they found anything useful. It didn’t matter, because a few days after the inspectors left, Ted Kaczynski was arrested, turned in by his brother.

Popplestone’s theory about why McConnell was targeted is that Kaczynski didn’t like the research he’d done. McConnell is most widely known for “teaching” a planaria worm a conditioned reflex in anticipation of an electric shock, then passing on the ability to “learn” that reflex more rapidly to an “uneducated” worm simply by feeding it bits of the “smart” worm. Science fiction writers seized on the notion that you might become smart through cannibalism, although “it later turned out

to be not that simple.” Presumably, the armed postal inspectors read a great deal about planaria while in Akron.

Then there are the genealogical charts of the Jackson-Whites, a clan from southern New York and northern New Jersey whose members often found themselves in The Training School at Vineland (NJ), named “The New Jersey Home for the Education and Care of Feebleminded Children” when

its doors opened in 1898. Henry Herbert Goddard directed its Department of Research from 1906 to 1918. Generations of Jackson-Whites ended up there, and when the school was finally closed in the 1990s, replaced by community-based group homes, its records, including partial genealogical charts, went to Akron.

So did a group of people who called themselves the Jackson-Whites, seeking to prove to the Bureau of Indian Affairs that they were descended from a Native American tribe, apparently with visions of lucrative casinos in their

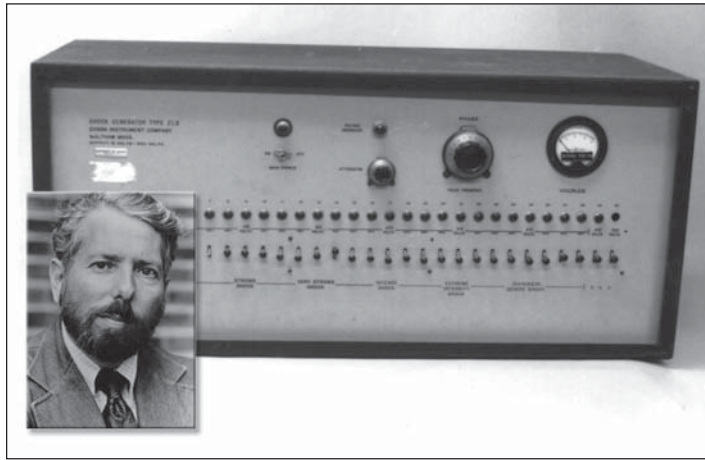
future. They hoped the genealogical charts might reveal their Native American lineage. It appears that they, too, came up empty-handed.

THE TEACHING MACHINE

Not so for a young man at Akron who was researching the history of the first teaching machine, invented at The Ohio State University in 1934 by Sydney L. Pressey but never put on the market because the Depression intervened. (It took another 20 years before practical methods of programming were developed and B.F. Skinner was able to reintroduce the system at Harvard in 1954.)

No one remembers the student’s name now, but “when he came in here, it became quite apparent that he had never seen one of these gadgets,” recalls Popplestone. “So I went and got him a couple. He clutched one to himself and said, ‘Ah, a piece of the true cross!’ We gave it to him to set on his desk while he was here.”

The Archives’ real importance, however, transcends the search for telltale nuggets from the past. One of its overriding missions is educational, says Baker – “to help support those people teaching the history of psychology by providing them



Stanley Milgram [inset] and his shock generator. Milgram sought to clarify the perplexing willingness of some people, when directed by superiors, to commit acts they knew were wrong. The subject, functioning as a “teacher,” was instructed to apply the next highest voltage level by depressing switches on the instrument panel whenever the “student” made an error. Nearly one-half of the “teachers” continued to follow orders to administer higher levels of voltage in spite of the learner’s apparent suffering.

Courtesy of the Archives of the History of American Psychology



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with original materials, the media that help them animate the history of psychology, primary source materials, films and photographs that really do bring history alive. Even the language itself and what it communicates changes over time. And that is one thing you can get a glimpse of [from the Archives], in terms of how people have defined constructs, what kinds of tools they've used to measure those."

The manifest benefits of historical archives include learning from past mistakes and successes and the collective body of knowledge available for review: the questions people asked, how they asked them, what they found out, what they learned, and how today's scientists can improve upon that.

"A solid grounding in what came before and how it was done can, hopefully, provide more direction, more hypotheses," Baker explains. "You can learn from past mistakes, you can build upon previous work. Scientists sometimes believe the only things that exist are the present and the future – they are not as cognizant of what has been done before."

Less obvious, he says, is that "in looking at the material culture of psychological science in the 20th or 19th century, when I look at instruments and apparatus, I can see in some ways the kinds of limitations they would put on what someone could do and what their science could tell them, and I learned some lessons from the evolution of apparatus and equipment, or the evolution of statistical techniques – the ways in which data can be modeled.

"One of the things the past teaches me is that we're in some ways limited by the tools that we have. I think it's probably wise to keep that in mind, that there's a technology to our science that goes hand in hand with our hypothesizing and theorizing, and that evolves over time."

EXPLORING LIFE

Benjamin, at Texas A&M, explains the importance of the Archives more simply: "Getting people to appreciate history is, to me, like trying to get them to appreciate music or art. I'm not sure how you teach that. Historians offer all kinds of reasons for why we should study history – to understand the present, to avoid the mistakes of the past, to learn some humility for our own views and tolerance for the views of others – but I find for me the best justification is intellectual curiosity. Like everyone, I have questions about life, and his-

tory helps make sense out of what often seems like chaos."

As for its importance to the science of psychology itself, "We say that science is self correcting. But so is history. One of the benefits of good history is that it helps us understand the course of science. Although history may not change the course of science, it often gives us a perspective that helps us understand science in the broader context of which it is a part."

Baker has high hopes for the Archives' future. His first innovation after becoming director was an annual conference to honor distinguished careers. The first conference's honorees were Poplestone and McPherson. Historians of psychology presented essays on their own archival research. Baker hopes those essays will be published as a book by year's end.

The second such conference, in April 2001, honored Robert V. Guthrie, now retired, whose seminal work, *Even the Rat Was White*, published in 1976, presents a detailed history of African American psychologists. Guthrie has named the Archives the official repository for his papers, making him the first African-American psychologist to be included in its manuscript collection.

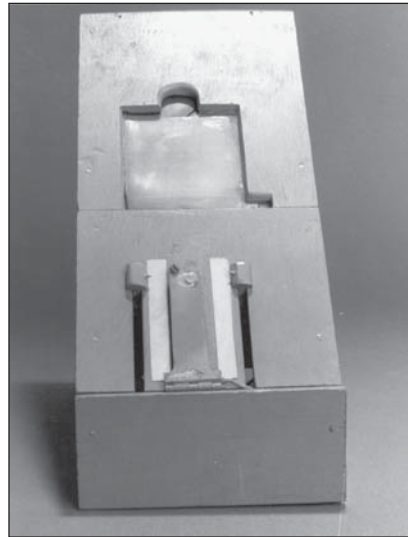
"The Guthrie conference, I was hoping, would send a signal to others,"

Baker says. "Black psychologists were the first and largest [minority] group to organize. Now there are any number of minority associations in psychology, and I have written all of them and I've presented to them *en masse* – all the presidents of all the minority psychological associations. I invited them to use the Archives as the repository for both their organizational and personal papers."

He wants to do more conferences on selected topics in the history of psychology, possibly teaming with others for joint conferences. He's already talking with one potential partner.

"For whatever reason," Baker points out, "this strip of northeastern Ohio is home to all kinds of archives and halls of fame," including the ones for rock and roll, football and inventors. "We're talking with the Inventors Hall of Fame about doing some exhibits, perhaps a conference on creativity and invention. Creativity is a psychological process; psychological science has a lot to offer in understanding the creative process." Not the least of which, he says, is that psychologists often have had to invent their own tools – witness teaching machines and the infamous "shock box."

He's also curious about inventions by psychologists that



Courtesy of the Archives of the History of American Psychology

Prompted by dissatisfaction with arithmetic instruction in his daughter's fourth grade class, B. F. Skinner built his first teaching machine in 1953. Skinner programmed the machines to accelerate learning using principles of operant behaviorism.



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don't seem to be related to the science of psychology. "We have the manuscript collection of Lillie Bowman, a psychologist who in the 1930s patented the pour spout for boxes. I was intrigued by it. We now have her drawings, her correspondence about it and her patent application."

More ambitious is Baker's plan to get the Smithsonian Institution's help in displaying the Archives' more than 1,000 pieces of lab equipment and other apparatus, much of it from the "brass and glass" era. "I think they tell a story in and of themselves," Baker says. "One means of educating the public, as well as students, professors, and scientists, is exposing them to the instruments and apparatus, what they say about us and about our science." So he's negotiating to become a Smithsonian affiliate, status that would allow him to borrow items from the Smithsonian's own collection, and to have access to Smithsonian help in mounting exhibits and dealing with preservation and presentation concerns.

The Smithsonian, it turns out, is not as advanced in this area as he'd thought. While it includes some psychological exhibits, they are scattered among various topical areas, with no specific psychological science collection. It may be that joining forces with the Smithsonian will benefit the Smithsonian as much or more than the Archives.

Most of all, Baker says, he needs massive injections of funding, starting with a million-dollar endowment, if the Ar-

chives is to become what he envisions. "If the athletic department of the University of Akron can bring in a million dollars a year, I feel the psychology archives ought to bring in a million a year. I really think of us as the national archives of psychology. There's considerable cost associated with processing all that material and making it available both to the psychological community and the lay public."

His current budget shows annual costs of \$270,000, of which he estimates \$40-\$50,000 represents gifts, with the remainder derived from the taxpayer-supported University in the form of space, utilities and salaries.

"Staff is the big issue. There are two of us doing this (plus some part-time student help). It's almost inconceivable when I think of it." He estimates that just making an inventory of the backlogged manuscripts that have been donated to the Archives would keep two to four employees busy 24 hours a day for two to four years. In addition, he's working on on-line databases for the psychological test, photograph and apparatus collections.

"We could keep a full-time staff of 10 busy," he says. "I'm spending 30-40 percent of my time on [fund raising] – and the first step in that is creating public awareness. A lot of people just don't know we exist, or if they do, they don't understand what we do or what we have. Once we had the staff, we could get more materials processed, do more website

Of Rats and Men

It was with particular pleasure that APS Fellow and Charter Member Donald A. Dewsbury, of the University of Florida, accepted the challenge of setting straight the record on a 1940s controversy, between the late Norman R. F. Maier of the University of Michigan and the late Clifford T. Morgan of Johns Hopkins University, over just what was causing seizures in rats. It was right up Dewsbury's alley: he specializes in the history of comparative and experimental psychology and related parts of the biological sciences.

With a nudge from John Popplestone, co-founder of the Archives of the History of American Psychology (AHAP) in Akron, Ohio, Dewsbury searched the Archives' papers and correspondence and wrote an article published in 1993 in *American Psychologist* under the title, "On Publishing Controversy: Norman R. F. Maier and the Genesis of Seizures." He gave the *Observer* this account of his article's own genesis:

"On my second visit to Akron, I dined one night with the Archives co-directors [Popplestone and Marion White McPherson]. Popplestone informed me of the ma-

terials in the AHAP concerning the controversy between Maier and Morgan over the genesis of seizures in rats. Maier's was an important study that won him the prestigious Thousand Dollar Prize of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a major event in psychological science.

"Maier believed that the seizures suffered by rats faced with unsolvable discrimination problems originated in their conflict. Morgan, by contrast, interpreted the seizures as a response to the air puff used to stimulate the rat to jump in the Lashley Jumping Stand apparatus. The prevalent opinion of the controversy favored Morgan's interpretation.

"The criticism stemming from this project was one major factor leading Maier to abandon animal research entirely several years later. The unpublished materials in the Akron collection, including important editorial correspondence, revealed that Morgan had actually conceded error. Popplestone wanted someone to tell the story. I could not resist such a juicy opportunity handed to me on a silver platter and completed the project."



development, work more on becoming visible, and that would generate more interest and more income.”

His primary goal, he says, is to serve the academic and research community more widely and to become “better known as a resource center in the history of psychology.” Under that umbrella, his wish list is ambitious. With enough funding and staff, Baker says, here’s what else he’d put on it: 1) Moving into his own campus facility and developing public exhibit space. 2) Opening the Archives’ doors to all comers. (Currently, visits are by appointment only.) 3) Taking exhibits “on the road.” 4) Hosting a summer teaching institute at which noted historians of psychology would train high school and college teachers in the subject. 5) Highlighting the work and achievements of selected psychologists. 6) Documenting the advance of psychological science, for example with exhibits on the psychology of vision, or on mapping the human mind.

“Showing that progress would be interesting and fascinating,” Baker says. “I think it would show the contributions of psychological science to everyday life. One thing I’ve learned from studying history is that I’m proud to be a psychologist. The science of psychology has contributed a lot to the quality of life, but we don’t do a good job of letting the public know that. That’s one thing history can do. You can use history to show over time the progress psychology has made in answering fundamental questions about the human condition.” ♦

For more information about the Archives of the History of American Psychology, visit its web site: www.uakron.edu/ahap. These are some of its resources:

- ♦ A searchable index of the archival holdings, including biographical data on each collection’s source, the size of the collection, and contents notes.
- ♦ Information on donating materials or monetary support.
- ♦ Back issues of AHAP’s newsletter, tracing its own history since 1994.
- ♦ A list of products offered for sale that tell the story of psychology’s history – posters, books, slide shows and films, including *An Illustrated History of American Psychology*, by John Popplestone and Marion White McPherson (\$29.95 in paperback).

Giving to the Archives

The Archives of the History of American Psychology (AHAP) relies on donations of print, photographic and other materials for its collections, but it also relies on monetary gifts, accepted through several planned giving programs administered through the University of Akron Development Office.

Both gifts of materials and money are tax-deductible. Gift materials should be appraised before shipment. Appraisal and shipping fees also are often tax-deductible.

Lewis Lipsitt, an APS Fellow and Charter Member, is one who decided to help. Although he is not an historian and has never done research at the Archives, he says “as a psychologist interested in the history of the field, I’m simply a strong supporter and have taken steps to have my personal and professional papers deposited there.” He went even further: “My wife and I have put in our wills a substantial bequest to the Archives, which I have watched develop under John [Popplestone] and Marion [White McPherson], and now David [Baker], from the beginning.”

The Archives offer three methods of contributing to its support:

Endowments: Monetary donations may be made to the AHAP Endowment Fund, a vehicle for providing the Archives with long-term support. The fund is seeking contributions from individuals, organizations, and corporations.

Friends of the Archives: Membership in the Friends begins with a requested donation of \$25 (\$10 for students) and is open to individuals, institutions, and organizations. Annual membership donations support the day-to-day operations of the Archives. Members receive a newsletter and a poster depicting the history of psychology.

Popplestone & McPherson Honorary Fund: To honor their long service to the Archives, The University of Akron established the John A. Popplestone & Marion White McPherson Honorary Fund. All proceeds support the Archives.



Reading Other People's Mail

By Ludy Benjamin

Since 1975, I have made probably 15 trips to the Archives of the History of American Psychology, in Akron, Ohio. My first is the most memorable. In 1974 I was a young assistant professor at Nebraska Wesleyan University. That year I presented a paper on the history of psychology at the American Psychological Association annual meeting, based on some research I had done at the University of Nebraska Archives.

Marion McPherson was in the audience and approached me after my talk, informing me that there were materials at Akron relevant to my topic. I explained to her that my salary at NWU would not allow me to make a trip to Akron and she responded by suggesting that I apply for a research fellowship they offered each year. I did and was awarded the grand sum of \$350 for study at the Archives.

At the time, my wife and I and our two children existed on my salary, which was about \$28 a month more than the income level that would have allowed us to get food stamps. In the summer of 1975 I used that \$350 to spend three weeks in Akron, traveling there by bus from Lincoln, Nebraska, and staying in a dorm for \$4 a night. I carefully budgeted my meals and spent about \$40 on photocopies (which would have been around a thousand pages at 4 cents a copy).

That trip was a watershed event in my life. It gave me the materials (and some confidence) I needed to make a career change, from experimental psychologist to historian of psychology. From the materials gathered on that first trip I published an article on the first psychology museum in America. I also wrote about a secret society of experimental psychologists, a group called the Psychological Round Table, that began meeting in 1936 and continues to this day, still getting rid of individuals when they reach 40 years of age because they are, of course, "over the hill" intellectually.

Several years ago I received a National Science Foundation grant for about \$700,000. I was pleased to get that funding, but I can assure you that it did not bring the excitement that I felt when Akron gave me \$350.

My subsequent trips to the Archives have proved fruit-

ful as well. I always go there with several research questions in mind, but while there I spend some of my time just browsing, looking at the inventories of new collections to see if anything sparks my interest. One of the dangers of archival work is what I call *documenta distracta*, a common archival disease. You go to an archive to work in a particular collection but you find yourself caught up in other lives and other stories that are difficult to ignore. Projects that should have taken three days then require a week. I used to get frustrated by giving in to such distractions; now I accept them as one of the joys of archival research.

[Editor's note: The following is excerpted Benjamin's talk he titled "Archival Adventures: The Joy of Reading Other People's Mail."]

The best times for me professionally are the hours I spend in archives. There are never enough such opportunities, thus I treasure every one.

On the day the archival work begins, I am there 15 minutes before the door opens. During the course of the day, other researchers will wander in and out, spending an hour or so in a particular collection. But not me; I am there for the duration, leaving only when one of the archivists says to me, "we really have to close now."

Historian of psychology Josef Brozek has described archival research as a high-risk/high-gain operation. It is difficult to predict what you will find in such work. Days may be spent with no substantial finds. Indeed, an entire archival trip may produce little of value for a project, although I would say that has never happened for me. This high-risk/high-gain nature of archival work is no doubt part of the drama that makes it so exciting. There is intrigue in every visit.

[O]ne typically begins in one archival collection and then pursues related materials through other archives, following wherever the leads suggest going. Collections are rarely, if ever, complete. Some documents relating to important questions are almost always missing. As geographer-sociologist Michael Hill wrote in his 1993 book, *Archival Strategies and Techniques*: "Each archival visit is a journey into an unknown realm that rewards its visitors with challenging puzzles and unexpected revelations."

For me that captures the magic well. This kind of work is there for you as well. No doubt there are archives in your own back yard: in your university, in your local historical society, in a state hospital, and so forth. So, if you have a few spare hours one afternoon, you might just wander in and read somebody else's mail. But I warn you that the high may be something that you find you cannot do without. ♦



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