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at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory

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Carnegie Institution of Washington

In 1903 the Carnegie Institution of Washington (CIW), the privately-funded scientific research organization founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1902, approved a plan to establish a biological experiment station to study evolution. The Station for Experimental Evolution (SEE) formally opened on June 11, 1904 in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, to study heredity and evolution through breeding experiments with plants and animals. Under the initial directorship of Charles Benedict Davenport (1866-1944), the unit would flourish and operate for 67 years, undergo name changes as it fine-tuned its research focus, combine with and then close down a eugenics research operation, and eventually merge with neighboring



Long Island Biological Association's Biological Laboratory (LIBA Bio Lab.) This union eventually became Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, a research and educational institution which played a pivotal role during the 20th century in the emergence of molecular genetics, the scientific foundation of the revolution in biology and biotechnology.

In 1902, and again in 1903, Charles Benedict Davenport (1866-1944), approached CIW with a proposal to establish a biological station at Cold Spring Harbor. The trustees of CIW approved his plan, and he became the first director (1904-1934) of the Department of Genetics (originally named the Station for Experimental Evolution (SEE)). During this same time period Davenport was also the director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences' Biological Laboratory (BIAS Bio Lab), a summer field station for high school and college science teachers that he had led since 1898. The Department of Genetics and the BIAS Bio Lab were neighbors, operating on adjacent acres of land donated to each of them by The Wawapex Society, a philanthropic foundation established by the John D. Jones family of Long Island, New York. In 1910, while Davenport was directing both those operations, Mrs. E. H. Harriman established the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) at Cold Spring Harbor for him to head as well. In 1918 the ERO was donated to CIW, and became part of the Department of Genetics in 1921. Davenport concurrently headed BIAS Bio Lab, CIW's Department of Experimental Evolution (changed from SEE in 1918), and the ERO until 1924. That year ownership and management of BIAS Bio Lab was transferred to a newly formed Long Island Biological Association (LIBA). See Related Collections for histories of BIAS Bio Lab, LIBA Bio Lab, and ERO.

The occurrence of overlapping directorships was to be repeated again among the Department of Genetics, the BIAS Bio Lab, the LIBA Bio Lab, and the ERO during most of the 67-year span the Department of Genetics was in existence. See Cold Spring Harbor Organization Timeline 1890-1988 for organizational relationships and overlapping directors.

There were five directors of the Carnegie Institution of Washington Department of Genetics:

1. Charles Benedict Davenport (1866-1944), director from 1904-1934
2. Albert Francis Blakeslee (1874-1954), director from 1934-1941
3. Milislav Demerec (1895-1966), director from 1941-1960
4. Berwind Peterson Kaufmann (1897-1975), director from 1960-1962
5. Alfred Day Hershey (1908-1997), director from 1962-1971

Special Collections

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- » [CIW Monograph Series](#)
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In 1962 CIW and LIBA's Bio Lab agreed to merge to form Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory of Quantitative Biology. By 1970 the name was shortened to Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. A reduced number of CIW scientific investigators, including Nobel Laureates Alfred D. Hershey and Barbara McClintock, would remain with a skeletal staff and operate as the Genetics Research Unit until it closed in 1971.



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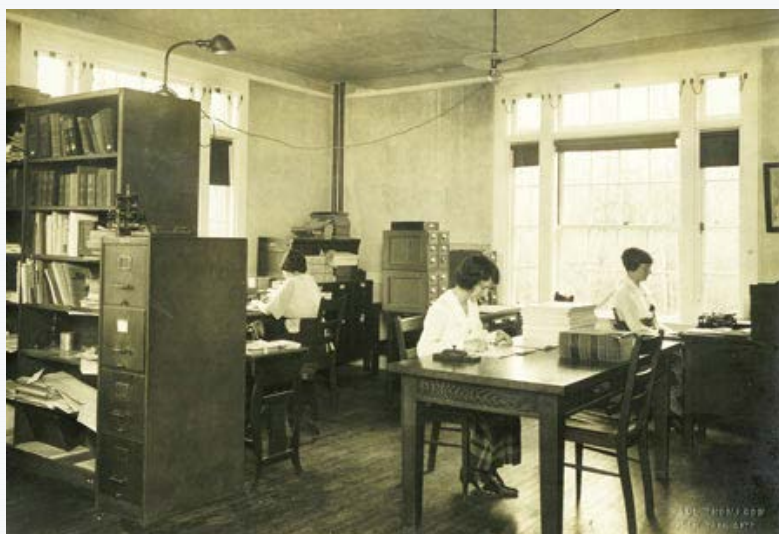
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Eugenic Record Office

This collection was generated by the Eugenic Record Office which was created as a department of the Carnegie Institute of Washington Station (CIW) for Experimental Evolution at Cold Spring Harbor New York. The Carnegie Institute of Washington engaged in research in biology from 1904 using a tract of about 9 acres leased for 50 years from the Wawepex Society in Cold Spring Harbor NY. With Charles Davenport as the Director, a laboratory was built and the "station" opened in June 1904; it was named "Station for Experimental Evolution" (SEE) in 1906. In 1910, with funding from Mrs. E. H. Harriman, an 80 acre farm near the SEE was purchased, and an office building was erected to establish the Eugenics Record Office (ERO). In 1918, Mrs. Harriman transferred the farm and building to CIW along with an endowment for its maintenance. In 1921 the SEE and ERO were combined into the CIW Department of Genetics with Charles Davenport as the Director. After Charles Davenport retired in 1934, Dr. Albert Blakeslee served as Director of the CIW Department of Genetics until 1941 when Milislav Demerec was named Director. The ERO closed in December 1939 and materials including the collection of forms containing hereditary and genealogical information records were put into storage. At this point the name of the ERO was changed to Genetics Record Office. In 1948 the records from the Eugenics Records Office were donated to the University of Minnesota for use by the Dight Institute of Human Genetics. That material was ultimately dispersed amongst three institutions: the American Philosophical Society, Jackson Laboratories and The Genealogical Society of Utah.



The ERO was devoted to the collection and analysis of American family genetic and traits history records. These eugenics studies collected information such as inborn physical, mental and temperamental properties to enable the family to trace the segregation and recombination of inborn or heritable qualities. The family study files include individual analysis cards, field worker reports, pedigree charts, and special trait studies. Davenport was president of the American Society of Zoologists and in 1910 he founded the Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, and appointed Harry H. Laughlin to direct it. H. H. Laughlin became a spokesman for the programmatic side of the previous eugenics movement, lobbying for eugenic legislation to restrict immigration and sterilize "defectives," educating the public on eugenic health, and disseminating eugenic ideas widely. The Record Office formally came under the aegis of the Carnegie Institution of Washington in 1918.

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- » [Eugenics Records Office Director](#)
- » [Image Archive on the American Eugenics Movement](#)
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