

16 January 1950

University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

J. Lederberg

On Monday morning WW introduced WFL to Professor Robert Irwin in Genetics and then to Joshua Lederberg. The latter went to P & S Medical School for two years where he became interested in bacterial genetics under Francis J. Ryan; leaving medical school he then went to study under Dr. Tatum at Yale, where he took his Ph.D., since which he has become Assistant Professor of Genetics at Wisconsin. Lederberg was originally an exceedingly brash, aggressive young man, making "quite a fool of himself" (Elvehjem) at Cold Spring Harbor, but who has steadily matured and sobered down since that time. His main work of course is concerned with the question of "sex" in bacteria, or more properly speaking, with the problem of gene recombination. He finds that when two strains of bacterial mutants, each deficient in two respects, are grown on the same medium, that they apparently interchange genetic material, thus yielding offspring that are complete for the four items concerned. There is little doubt concerning Lederberg's intelligence and originality, but in WFL's opinion he should be in an environment where he is surrounded by his intellectual superiors, as otherwise there is danger that he might fail to develop to his full. Perhaps Wisconsin provides just such an environment. Lederberg should be most interesting to follow over the coming years, as with luck he may become a truly significant worker.

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