

DATE: March 3, 1977

TO : File

FROM : Joshua Lederberg

SUBJECT: Conversation with Samson Gross, subject: Ed Tatum.

Sam called me back from Salt Lake City, apparently having gotten the message from his own lab that I had called him there. I very carefully did not mention anything about the grant review nor did he bring it up although I expect his alacrity in responding to my call had to do with the possibility that I was seeking information.

I pressed him particularly on main issues of Ed Tatum in New York. He generally agreed with the picture that I offered about his running a lab and giving a good deal of headway to his students. However, he also stressed that Ed planned to use Neurospora for the study of morphogenesis as a follow-up to the biochemical mutational analysis of previous years. He thought Ed was not very revealing about his fundamental objectives and programs and that the paper with Brodie was probably the least unsatisfactory exposition of this effort. (This makes the obliteration in recent reviews even more ironic).

Sam put a great deal of stress on Ed's role as Chairman of the Board of Cold Spring Harbor which was "the greatest source of pain" to Ed during that time. Sam has written down some notes on this question which he had sent to the Neurospora Newsletter but which he believed that Barbara Bachmann had edited before publication. Evidently Watson and Cairns had "a vicious campaign in which they blamed all of the problems of the laboratory on Ed".

The other roles mentioned were the National Foundation and the National Science Board. Ed spent a great deal of time on foundation affairs but Sam did not really know what overall significance this had. The Cold Spring Harbor issue was the only one that he had ever known Ed to lose his temper about.

I asked Sam if Ed had ever reminisced about the discovery of Neurospora. Sam replied that he had the acute sense that Ed consistently avoided talking about the period of his work with Beadle. He felt that Ed would very much have preferred to go with Beadle to Cal Tech along with or instead of Horowitz and Mitchell. (This is corroborated to some degree by June's remark that after H. Mitchell arrived at Stanford, he was Beadle's "fair haired boy"). As an instance of this, Sam had repeatedly asked Tatum to request aromatic mutants from Hershell Mitchell and consistently found that Ed had evaded doing so. He never heard any bad words of any kind but it was obvious that there was some coolness and distance which Sam never quite understood, although he put it down to a kind of father-child-rejection syndrome. For someone who was as friendly as Ed was with just about everyone in sight, this was perhaps more conspicuous.

Sam also recalled conversations with B.O. Dodge which made out Morgan and Lindgren to be the heroes. He agreed with me that Dodge was very enthusiastic but never really quite understood biochemical genetics at all, and this would then have no bearing on events of 1940-41.

He promised to send me the materials he had prepared for the newsletter and in turn I will sent him a draft.