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Guide to the Frederick Bernheim and Molly Bernheim Interview, 1984

Frederick Bernheim and Mary ("Molly") Bernheim were original faculty members at Duke University School of Medicine.

Descriptive Summary

Collection Title: Frederick Bernheim and Molly Bernheim Interview, 1984

Creator: Bernheim, Frederick, 1905- Bernheim, Molly.

Extent: 1 record storage box, 3 items, .25 linear feet

Processed By:

Date Completed:

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Biographical Note

Dr. Frederick Bernheim was born in 1905 in Long Branch, N.J. He graduated with an AB degree from Harvard in 1925 and received his PhD from Cambridge in 1928. He married Mary Hare in 1928. He studied for two years in Munich and at Johns Hopkins as a postdoctoral fellow, and then he and Mary joined the newly formed medical school at Duke University, in 1930, both becoming members of the original faculty. Also in 1930, Dr. Bernheim was named a fellow of the National Resource Council.

His work focused on the effects of drugs on cells, and he contributed in this area from the very beginning of biochemical pharmacology through its growth into one of the primary components of biological science. His research opened up new avenues of investigation for the field, and he would become a Nobel-nominated researcher.

For his work, he was named fellow of the Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences. He was also named James B. Duke Professor of Pharmacology in 1964. He served as president of the Duke chapter of Sigma Xi, editor of the Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, and a consultant for the Biology Division of the Atomic Energy Commission and the pharmaceutical industry.

He read widely and was interested in classical languages, chamber music, European and American history, politics, play reading and discussion groups, the University Senate, tennis, and flying.

Dr. Mary ("Molly") Bernheim was born Mary Hare in 1902 in Gloucester, England. She spent her childhood in India. She received a BA, MA, and PhD from Cambridge in England, the latter in 1928. She also married Dr. Frederick Bernheim in 1928. Mary Hare, while a graduate student, also in 1928, discovered the enzyme tyramine oxidase. The enzyme was eventually renamed monoamine oxidase (MAO) and was later found to play a significant role in mood regulation. In 1975, the CIBA foundation held a symposium and published a book of papers of papers, called Monoamine Oxidase and its Inhibitors, in honor of Dr. Mary Bernheim's discovery, which Theodore Slotkin calls "one of the seminal discoveries in twentieth century neurobiology."

The Doctors Bernheim both would become members of the original faculty of Duke Medical School beginning in 1930, Mary Bernheim in the Department of Biochemistry, and she often was the lone woman in the department. She would become a full professor in 1962. When she passed away at the age of 95, she was the last surviving member of the original faculty of the medical school.

She continued her study of liver enzymes and nitrogen-containing compounds while at Duke and published over sixty papers. She taught nutrition courses as well as biochemistry courses, and was far ahead of trends in warning against eating fat and against fad diets. She became an enthusiastic aviator and compiled a book about the subject called

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A Sky of My Own

, which was nominated in 1959 by the North Carolina Board of Award for literary competitions. She was also an avid gardener and naturalist.

[Collection Overview](#)

Contains audiotape and transcript of an oral history interview with Frederick Bernheim and Mary ("Molly") Bernheim, original faculty members at Duke University School of Medicine.

[Online Catalog Headings](#)

Bernheim, Frederick, 1905-

Bernheim, Molly.

Duke University.

Duke University. Medical Center.

Duke University. Medical Center. Dept. of Biochemistry.

Duke University. Medical Center. Dept. of Pharmacology.

Duke University. School of Medicine.

History of Medicine -- North Carolina -- Personal Narratives.

Oral histories.

Interviews.

Transcripts.

[Related Material](#)

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Detailed Description of the Collection

Interview on 7 March 1984

Frederick and Mary ("Molly") Bernheim speak about their backgrounds, respectively; how they met; their work, respectively, when they were getting their doctorates; time spent together in Germany in 1929; Frederick Bernheim's work at Johns Hopkins; coming to Duke as members of the original faculty; Dr. George Eadie, who recruited Frederick Bernheim; Frederick Bernheim being asked to teach pharmacology when his field had been primarily biochemistry; Frederick Bernheim's work in trying to integrate pharmacology and biology, which was new field at the time; Mary Bernheim's enjoyment of teaching; Dr. William Perlzweig, who recruited her; Dr. Perlzweig's temperament; teaching in the lab; Frederick Bernheim working on tuberculosis (TB); the small departmental budget and no grants to support research in the early 1930s; how World War II affected their work; many of the preclinical faculty staying to teach as opposed to the clinical faculty, who went overseas as doctors; the Bernheims keeping two English children during wartime; the difference between the general feeling in America about World War II and the Vietnam War; teaching people who came back from World War II; the ample supply of grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) when James Shannon was its director; Frederick Bernheim's research; Mary Bernheim's work in and commitment to the field of nutrition; others at Duke in their respective fields who made contributions; Frederick Bernheim on the academic council; other important Duke contributors in the basic sciences; the development of the curriculum; the numbers of graduate students over the years; Dr. Philip Handler and Dr. Eugene Stead; and the overworking of the medical student.

Box 1

Interview tape [1 audiotape (1 hour total)]

Transcript [24 pages]

Release form