

Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine

Symposium
New Orleans, Louisiana
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Cellular and Molecular Bases for the Influence of Nutrition on Aging and Longevity

Chairman: Robert A. Good, PhD, MD

Co-chairman: B. Connor Johnson, PhD

Opening Remarks:

Reminiscences of Nutrition Research with Dr. Clive McCay at the Close of World War II (42980)

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One day in 1945 at the close of World War II, this patrician, a soft-spoken Naval Commander with short-cropped black hair, high cheek bones, slightly stooped, toured the Protein Chemistry Laboratory at the University of California, Berkeley, with the then acting department chairman, Professor David Greenberg. Mrs. Brown and I had enrolled in Dr. Greenberg's course in physical chemistry of proteins while waiting for my ship, a supply vessel, delayed by a Pacific typhoon. After introductions we talked, Dr.

Dr. Clive M. McCay (1898–1967) was born in Indiana, received his Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Illinois, a Master of Science degree at Iowa State University, Ames, his doctorate, a PhD, at the University of California, Berkeley, and beginning in 1927 was a 2-year National Research Council Fellow with Lafayette B. Mendel at Yale. Afterward, he was for many years professor of Animal Nutrition at Cornell University with an interim to serve the Navy during World War II.

McCay and I, of Mendel and later Vickery's work with proteins and their structure. We found many thoughts in common and soon I was assigned to the Nutrition Unit of the Naval Medical Research Institute at the National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda where he was chief of the nutrition section with the late Ross Gortner. He had been in charge also of nutrition for the Naval forces in the Pacific. I was fortunate to be asked to work on one of his strong interests, namely, providing good nutrition by tube feeding for servicemen with central nervous system injuries; especially those unable to swallow who deteriorated through emaciation despite the best nutritional efforts of the time. In 1946 when we both had left the Navy, these photographs (Figs. 1–4) were taken on a visit to Cornell regarding continuation of that work. He had sent a map where his farm was located in Ithaca, pointing out that it would be easy to find since Plutonium, whom I of course did not know, lived very close by. On arrival he was brilliant, but humble and unpretentious, living with his attractive, congenial and equally unassuming wife,



Figure 1. Dr. Clive McCay on the "carrot digging afternoon."



Figure 2. Mrs. Julie Brown, Dr. Clive McCay, and Mrs. Jeanette McCay.



Figure 3. The McCay farmhouse. The author is digging by the side of the porch.

Jeanette. We had arrived in a new Ford car and Dr. McCay smiled good naturedly with the remark, "My, such prosperity." The farm house was simple but elegant in its good taste. He had many interests and responsibilities there, one being a large colony of beautiful great danes whom he studied because of what was thought to be an inherited neurological lesion giving some of them weak hind quarters, a condition he also thought might be ameliorated nutritionally. On Saturday afternoon an important Cornell football game was scheduled. When asking him to attend, he noted that the carrots had yet to be dug from the garden. We all pitched in digging them, having a wonderful time. That was a fine lesson that things other than football, even perhaps more important things, occurred on Saturday afternoons.

In the laboratory, he, Professor Leonard Maynard, who was also chairman, and a strange, quiet, tall, one-armed man whom Professor McCay introduced as his brother-in-law, professor of biochemistry, were the entire senior faculty of the facility. This latter imposing person suddenly drew a test tube of a blue solution

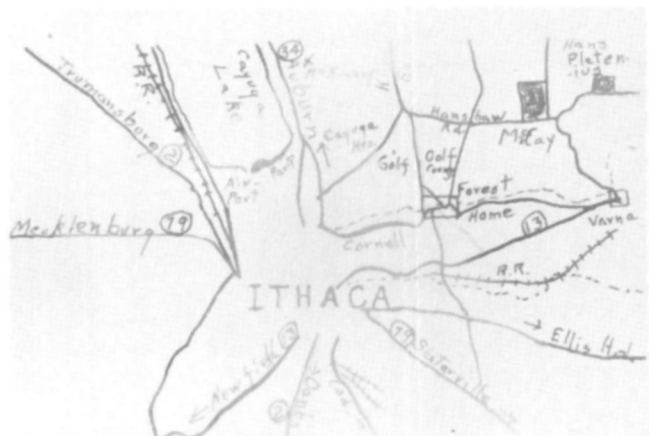


Figure 4. Dr. McCay's map drawing of the location of their farm in Ithaca showing its position next to the Plutonium farm found to the reader's right and just above the McCay farm.

from the breast pocket of his coat, held it to the light for us, saying it contained catalase and that it was very hard to get good help, then walked away. Three weeks later that intense man went to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize. He was James B. Sumner, the first to crystallize an enzyme, i.e., urease, from the jack bean, in 1928. Parenthetically, it might have been any of that "troika" or threesome who received that award, their individual work being of that caliber.

Dr. McCay was a truly unique and selfless person whom I was privileged to know through much of my

early career until his retirement. In addition to his other attributes, he was a bibliophile and a great teacher of history as his lectures collated as a book, *History of Nutrition*, published posthumously, attest. His magnificent scientific work will not be reviewed here since it is the symposium topic. Let it just be said that the only things surpassing his work in their quality were the wonderful character and kindness of both he and Mrs. McCay.

Thank you for asking me to share a personal note at the opening of this symposium.