

STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

June 20, 1977

J. William Hess
Associate Director
Rockefeller Archive Center
Hillcrest Pocantico Hills
North Tarrytown, New York 10591

Dear Mr. Hess:

This is further to our correspondence concerning Edward L. Tatum. The material that you sent me under cover of your letter of December 17, 1976 was indeed most useful in clarifying Tatum's earlier career.

I am now very nearly finished with the writing of the memoir, but am trying to leave no stone unturned to get a definitive account of the immediate history of the discovery of Neurospora as an experimental tool for biochemical genetics. There seem to be no records, that I have been able to find so far, for the critical interval of approximately December 1940 to June 1941. Even the simple matter of pinning a more definite date on the events has become problematical. Dr. Beadle has written some reminiscences, but they are not more precise; and both he and Dr. Tatum had told me that all of the ancillary documentation, letters and so forth, has long since been discarded.

One of the items you had sent me, of which I enclose a recopy, is particularly tantalizing. This refers to Dr. Weaver's visit to Stanford on February 17, 1941. This still refers only to the previous work on Drosophila, and makes no mention of Neurospora. Yet I have other information that suggests, but may be confusing, that Beadle and Tatum had already made a significant start with this new organism several weeks before the date of this memorandum. So I wonder, if it is not too much trouble, if you could scan the next few items in this file to dig out just when and how Neurospora was first mentioned in their reports to you, or noted during similar visits. Absent any

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other documentation, this material may be quite important in fixing the history of an extremely important turning point in modern biology.

I realize what a nuisance inquiries like this can be, but as I have circumscribed a fairly small interval of time, I hope it will be a very small chore. Needless to say, I would be happy to remit any expense involved.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Enclosure
JL:ek-f

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LKF

* private note - do not type!

Damberig ingenious. Several people have commented on the secrecy that attended these months, of which this is contributing evidence.