



# THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

1230 YORK AVENUE

NEW YORK, NY 10021

September 22, 1988

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. Michael I. Sovern  
President  
Columbia University  
in the City of New York  
New York, New York 10027

Dear Mike:

I was going to talk to you about this over the phone but I thought it would be more helpful if you had some chart in front of you. Next to Mendel's garden in Brno there is probably no site more important in the history of genetics and therefore of modern biology than the "fly room", the old "Room 613 Schermerhorn" on the Columbia campus. Here from 1911 to 1928 T.H. Morgan and a host of associates, everyone of them stellar, "invented Drosophila" and the experimental genetics of the 20th century. I gave a talk on that history at Woods Hole this summer and it occurred to me to recall what had happened to that location. (It was very familiar to me, although already in disuse, at the time I was an undergraduate in 1941, and spending most of my time in Schermerhorn Hall.

By an unusual stroke of fate that room still exists: it is now numbered 920, despite the extensive renovations that have been made in that building and the removal of the zoology department to Fairchild. In fact that area, 920 seems to be one of the last pieces of real estate in Schermerhorn still controlled by the biology department -- it is used as a prep room.

I was reconnoitering there the other day and can locate it on the floor plan from the original construction of Schermerhorn 90 years ago: just that central north side of the building on that floor has been left reasonably intact.

There would be a great deal of retrospective regret if there were not some memorialization of that site: at least a plaque and a showcase with some photographs of the principals and of the central hero, namely *Drosophila melanogaster*. I hope you will be hearing from some other members of the biology department about this; but I wanted you to know that I was the instigator and prepared to help in any way in materializing that

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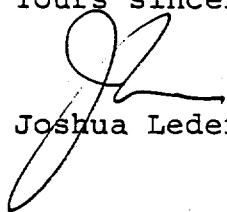
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project. If there is any question of the \$1,000 or so that may be needed for this huge effort I could, if you wish, bring the matter to the Genetics Society of America. But before doing that I thought that it ought to be Columbia's privilege to remember its very own.

Of course there are hundreds of historic sites in every field of learning strewn over the Columbia campus; but I do not think it is following a bad precedent to try to remember them. And certainly this one stands out above all others.

The fly room is referred to in half a dozen memoirs, which I do not now burden you with. These only affirm what I have been summarizing in this letter and they could of course happily be elements in the commemorative display I suggest.

Yours sincerely,



Joshua Lederberg