

The Organization Man and the Archive: A Look at the Bentley Glass Papers

I never know how colleagues will react to the news that I have been spending my days immersed in the Bentley Glass papers at the American Philosophical Society (APS) in Philadelphia. Historians of biology are the first to perk up, rightly remembering Glass's central role in building the APS's rich collection in the history of genetics. Scholars well versed in Cold War politics typically look thoughtful as they try to remember what, exactly, it was that Glass did for the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), or whether he prosecuted or defended notions of intellectual freedom. My favorite reaction so far was from a historian of science (who shall go unnamed) who exclaimed, "Bentley Glass? He was an idiot!" Most simply have no idea who he was.

Bentley Glass (1906–2005) was no idiot, and for the record, the aforementioned historian later recanted. He was an organization man who made the mistake, from the perspective of historical memory, of getting involved with the history of science in his dotage. An administrator *par excellence*, Glass served as the president of numerous professional organizations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the American Institute of Biological Sciences, the American Society of Human Genetics, the American Society of Naturalists, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), *Biological Abstracts*, and the National Association of Biology Teachers; edited the *Quarterly Review of Biology* for over 40 years; spearheaded a major effort to reform American biology textbooks (the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, or BSCS); and ended his career as Academic Vice-President of the State University of New York at Stony Brook. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he was a key player in scientific and political debates surrounding fallout and atomic radiation, serving on both the Genetics Panel of the National Academy of Science's Committee on the Biological Effects of Radiation (1955–1964) and the AEC's Advisory Committee for Biology and Medicine (1955–1963, Chair, 1962–1963).

And these are only his professional activities. During a period when most American scientists either retreated to their laboratories or

attempted to influence public life through federal advisory channels, Glass maintained an active life as a public figure and defender of individual liberties. He served on the Board of School Commissioners for the City of Baltimore in the midst of battles over school segregation (1954–1958), led the Maryland Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union for 10 years (1955–1965), and advised the Democratic National Committee during the 1960 presidential election. He was a ubiquitous figure on the lecture circuit and in the op-ed pages. His political activities were not limited to the domestic arena: by 1958, he had become one of the leading American figures in the Pugwash Movement for international disarmament. Indeed, between 1957 and 1965, he was one of the most famous scientists in the United States, his notoriety in genetics surpassed only by that of his graduate school advisor, H. J. Muller.

Glass was also a packrat. In 2000, his personal papers – all 170 linear feet of them – were transferred to the APS, where they now make up one of the largest collections in the history of genetics archive that he himself helped build. Though still largely unprocessed, the Glass Papers are an extraordinary resource for scholars interested in history of postwar science. The documents in this collection are essential for scholars researching academic freedom, anti-Communism, science education, postwar eugenics, medical genetics, national science policy, nuclear disarmament, organizational politics, scientific publishing, or the radiation and fallout debates. Though less rich, the materials on civil rights, international development, space exploration, scientific humanism, and Vietnam-era university administration will doubtless prove useful for scholars interested in these topics.

Glass's correspondence reflects his reputation as a man who seemed to know everyone and apparently never slept. Between committee work, scientific correspondence, and chatty letters between friends, most figures in twentieth-century biology make at least a passing appearance. Scientists involved in the radiation debates, whether as scientific experts (for example, George Beadle, James Crow, Alexander Hollaender, H. J. Muller, James Crow, and Alfred Sturtevant), administrators (Warren Weaver and John Bugher), or political commentators (Linus Pauling and Eugene Rabinowitch), are particularly well represented. Nevertheless, the majority of Glass's correspondence deals with his identity as a public figure and scientific administrator. One could write a history of the life of a public intellectual, for example, based solely on Glass's requests for travel reimbursements. His "Calendar" folder for 1966 alone is almost an inch thick. Letters from members of the public, who perhaps sat in on one of Glass's lectures at the local YMCA or read

an account of his remarks in the newspaper, are surprisingly common, offering scholars a rare opportunity to uncover widespread attitudes about such controversial issues as loyalty oaths, the nuclear test ban, population control, and reproductive technologies. And as befits someone who threw himself into numerous political campaigns, Glass's papers include items from politicians, including a hand-signed thank-you letter from John F. Kennedy and the pen used by the mayor of Baltimore to sign that city's Civil Rights Ordinance.

Because Glass served as either president or chairman of the board of so many different organizations, institutional records make up the core of the collection. Historians of biology may be particularly interested in the small collection of materials related to Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (three boxes) and the much larger set of materials dealing with the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (approximately three dozen boxes). Scholars interested in the history of the information sciences might profit from an exploration of the *Biological Abstracts* materials, particularly the raw data from a 1950s-era survey of scientists' reading and journal-browsing habits (collected at a moment when many scientists and policymakers were concerned about keeping up with the supposedly exponential growth of scientific knowledge). Though highly disorganized, the boxes of agendas, committee reports, and correspondence related to Glass's tenure on the AAAS Board of Directors (1959–1970) represents a treasure trove of that organization's politics and policies; the boxes relating to the AAUP's investigation of academic freedom cases are equally rewarding and in much better shape.

Given the potential for institutional arcana, it bears repeating that these organizational records are truly exciting. Glass had an uncanny ability to be at the right place at the right time. His tenure as Chairman of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Board, for instance, coincided with the decision to hire James D. Watson as director. When the AAAS Board of Trustees wanted to persuade Glenn Seaborg to withdraw his presidential nomination to avoid student protests at the 1970 annual meeting, they sent Glass to do the job (he failed). When the leaders of Phi Beta Kappa decided that the national honor society needed to become more diverse to maintain relevancy in the 1970s, they appointed Glass, who had served as the society's president from 1967 to 1970, to head the study. True to form, Glass not only formed a committee but also secured a \$10,000 grant with which to conduct a nationwide survey of college students' attitudes toward achievement, service, and the role of the university in American society. These examples are typical. More likely than not, if something interesting happened in one of the

organizations that counted Glass as a member between 1950 and 1980, Glass participated – and if he participated, he almost certainly kept the records.

Of course, fame and administrative acumen do not equal brilliance. Although his Johns Hopkins University laboratory received funds through the AEC and the Public Health Service until his move to SUNY–Stony Brook in 1965, Glass largely abandoned his own scientific work sometime in the late 1950s. As American cultural currents shifted in the late 1960s and 1970s, Glass's mainstream 1950s-era liberal views came to seem increasingly stodgy. His habit of suggesting that it might someday be illegal for carriers of hereditary diseases to reproduce, while simultaneously indicating that he, personally, did not endorse such views, demonstrated a tin ear for reproductive politics in the 1960s and beyond. Similarly, his insistence that mainstream genetics had little to nothing to do with eugenics encountered skepticism, at best, from historians of biology. One gets the distinct impression that Glass might be better remembered had he ended his professional activities about a decade earlier than he did.

Whatever his contributions to scientific knowledge, Bentley Glass left a deep impact on the culture and institutions of postwar science. The opening of his papers at the APS will allow scholars a glimpse not only of these scientific practices, but also of the myriad ways that scientists participated in political and public debates. With the support of a grant from the National Science Foundation, I have recently completed a survey of the entire 241-box collection. The resulting folder-level finding aid is available to interested scholars upon request. Researchers are advised that the finding aid is essential to make sense of the collection in its current state: while some individual folders are surprisingly well organized, the distribution of the folders themselves shows little discernable order. It is hoped that this finding aid will not only make this remarkable collection accessible to other scholars, but will also assist the APS in processing the collection. Interested researchers wishing to learn more are invited to either contact me directly (audrajwolfe@gmail.com) or write to the Charles Greifenstein, Manuscripts Librarian at the APS, at manuscripts@amphilsoc.org.

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