

LEO KANNER (1894-1981) PAPERS ARCHIVES FINDING AID

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BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Leo Kanner was born on June 13, 1894, in Klekotow, Austria. The young Kanner proved to be an extraordinary student and began to write poetry when he was only ten. He graduated from the Sophien-Gymnasium in Berlin in 1913 and entered the university. After a period of service in the Austrian army in World War I, he resumed his studies at the University of Berlin, completing the Staatsexamen in 1919 and receiving his M.D. degree in 1921. He became a part-time assistant at the Charity Hospital and started a private practice with specialized interest in the new field of cardiology. Inflation in Germany in the 1920's was so rapid that one had to spend money as soon as one received it; by the following morning, it was worth little more than the paper it was printed on. An American physician in Berlin for post-graduate study persuaded the young internist to consider opportunities in the United States, and in 1924, Dr. Kanner took a position as Assistant Physician at the State Hospital in Yankton, South Dakota (where a Leo Kanner Memorial Building was dedicated in 1980).

At Yankton, he set about perfecting his English by doing the New York Times crossword puzzles, at which he became spectacularly proficient. His first published paper was on general paralysis among North American Indians, a contribution to the continuing debate about the antiquity of syphilis in North America; the rarity of the disease among Native Americans supported the contention that selection had contributed to host resistance. Two years later, he published a second paper on blood pressure response to adrenalin in functional psychosis and a monograph on the folklore of the teeth, a work based on dissertations he had supervised for dental students in Berlin.

He applied to the Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic and was interviewed by Adolf Meyer at the APA meeting in Minneapolis. In 1930, at the end of his three-year fellowship, Kanner's gifts were well known at Hopkins. When Edwards A. Park, the professor of pediatrics, and Adolf Meyer decided to inaugurate the first child psychiatry service within a pediatric hospital (the Harriet Lane Home) in the United States, they secured support from the Macy and Rockefeller Foundations and chose Kanner to start the enterprise in a small pediatric examining room equipped with a wash stand and table for an office. With no

more training in pediatrics or child psychiatry than he had received as a medical student, Kanner taught himself pediatric psychiatry--and went on to teach generations of students what he learned.

He published the first American textbook to bear the title "Child Psychiatry." In separate prefaces to the first edition, Adolf Meyer wrote, "it will serve as a safe starting point and an incentive to proceed from what is well tried to the ever-new ground to be conquered" and Edwards Parks added, "the book is full of wisdom and common sense, no other book is quite like it. It brings to the pediatrician much needed aid."

Dr. Kanner is best known for his delineation in 1943 of the syndromes he described as "autistic disturbances of affective contact" but later designated as early infantile autism (and known to many as "Kanner's syndrome"). Less well known but deserving of as much remembrance is Leo Kanner's concern for mentally retarded children at a time when most psychiatrists excluded them from the purview of their clinics. Presentation of a paper on this subject resulted in a double row of inch-high headlines across the Baltimore Sun on April 8, 1938 and led to community action to end a foul practice generated by the collusion of attorneys and judges over the valiant opposition of the superintendent of the Training School. The practice had been to obtain the release of patients using Habeas Corpus writs to secure unpaid domestic servants for the affluent by enterprising attorneys who charged substantial fees. Others were claimed by relatives to manipulate estates, and others were claimed by parents asserting their long neglected "natural rights." Clinical skill joined to social conscience generated a study with immediate benefit for the lives of a despised minority. Four years later, in a rejoinder to a prominent neurologist who advocated euthanasia for the feeble-minded, Kanner wrote, "Let us try to recall one single instance in the history of mankind when a feeble-minded individual or group of individuals was responsible for the retardation or persecution of humaneness and science. Those who caused Galileo to be jailed were not feeble-minded. They who instituted the Inquisition were not mental defectives.

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The great man-made catastrophes resulting in wholesale slaughter and destruction were not started by idiots, imbeciles, morons or borderlines'.

The one man, Schicklgruber, whose IQ is probably not below normal, has in a few years brought infinitely more disaster and suffering to this world than have all the innumerable mental defectives of all countries and generations combined." How appropriate, then, that he was to receive awards from the National Association for Retarded Children and the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., Foundation and the C. Anderson Aldrich Award for the American Academy of Pediatrics.

During the years of Nazism, he pledged personal bond, found jobs, and provided guidance for several hundred German refugee physicians whom he rescued from the Holocaust. This was at a time when many of his confreres were too preoccupied with their own careers to heed the pleas for help and when others urged caution on him lest an influx of Jewish refugees arouse domestic anti-Semitism. He raised funds to support the democratically elected Spanish Loyalist government against the invading Falangist armies. In so doing, he earned himself a place on the honor roll of "premature anti-Fascists" compiled during the McCarthy era.

Leo Kanner became an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins in 1933 but was not elevated to the rank of Professor of Child Psychiatry until 1957, 2 years before he became Emeritus. Hopkins, like other medical schools, did not change the tradition of a single professor in each department until the 1950's.

In his retirement, he served as Visiting Professor at the Universities of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Stanford, and maintained an active consulting practice until a few years before his death. He was the first child psychiatrist invited to deliver the Maudsley Lecture in London in 1958. He received the Stanley Dean Research Award from the Fund for the Behavioral Sciences in 1965 from the Agnes Purcell McGavin Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Prevention of Mental Illness in Children from the APA in 1967.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS

The papers of Leo Kanner came to the Archives of the American Psychiatric Association in five groups between 1971 and 1981. The collection totals 4.25 linear feet and is divided into three series (as Dr. Kanner had): miscellaneous, alpha files and geographical files. The miscellaneous files are a general group of materials separated out from the other two groups by Dr. Kanner. (Why he did this is not apparent as the materials are like those in the alpha files.) The alpha files represent the bulk

of Dr. Kanner's personal and professional correspondence. The geographical files deal mostly with his professional engagements, teaching, lecturing, visiting professorships, meetings, etc. The major portion of each series falls between 1940 and 1960.

SERIES: Miscellaneous

Archives Box 100695

Folders

1. American Child Guidance Foundation, 1953-1959
2. Autism, 1968-1977
3. "Autism & Childhood Schizophrenia, Journal of...", 1970-1973
4. Autobiography (1) manuscript copy
5. Autobiography (2) manuscript copy
6. Autobiography (1) typed copy, pp. 1-209
7. Autobiography (2) typed copy, pp. 210-392 (Includes extra pages at end)
8. Bibliography and oral history materials, 1966
9. "Child Psychiatry," 1933-1964 and "In Defense of Mothers," 1940-1964. Correspondence, etc.
10. Conference on Psychiatry/McGregor Fund, 1942-1947
11. Current Medical Digest, 1961, 1978
12. Ebaugh, Franklin, correspondence with, 1931-1950
13. Farrar, Clarence B., correspondence regarding AJP, 1939-1964
14. "Folklore of the Teeth," correspondence, etc., 1925-1970
15. Habeas Corpus releases, 1937
16. Historical perspective, 1954
17. "History...Mentally Retarded," 1963-1966
18. Illustrations, ND.
19. "Introduction to Morale" (poem), 1941-1943
20. Last Will and Testament, Deed of Trust, 1970
21. Linwood, 1968 (see also "Linwood" under alpha files heading)
22. Meyer, Adolf, correspondence with, 1928-1948, Kubie-Meyer correspondence, etc.
23. Miscellaneous: diplomas, papers @ L.K., notes, etc.
24. "Nervous Child," editorial correspondence, etc. (1), 1941-1953
25. "Nervous Child," editorial correspondence, etc. (2), 1941-1953
26. Richards, Esther L., correspondence with, 1942, 1945
27. Rimland, Bernard, correspondence with, 1960-1971
28. "Walter Petrse," by Edward D. Dekker. transl. by L.K., pp. 1-175
29. "Walter Petrse," by Edward D. Dekker. transl. by L.K., pp. 176-344
30. Whitehorn, John C., correspondence with, 1941-1973



SERIES: Alpha Files

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Folders

- 31. A, 1930-1966
- 32. American Orthopsychiatric Association, 1950-1967
- 33. Ba - Be, 1931-1968
- 34. Bi - Bo, 1926-1958
- 35. Br - Bz, 1927-1959
- 36. C (1), 1930-1958

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- 37. C (2), 1930-1958
- 38. Child Life Program, 1961-1966
- 39. Child Study Association of America, 1931-1960
- 40. Children's Guild, 1960-1976
- 41. Children's Theatre, 1960-1962
- 42. Comprehensive Textbook..., 1965
- 43. D, 1935-1965
- 44. Dean Award, 1965-1973
- 45. Drawings, n.d.
- 46. E, 1937-1968
- 47. F (1), 1932-1958
- 48. F (2), 1932-1958
- 49. G, 1922-1963
- 50. Grieg, Agnes B. School and Center, 1942, 1970
- 51. H, 1932-1967
- 52. I, 1939-1957
- 53. J, 1938-1959
- 54. Josiah Macy Foundation, 1931-1935
- 55. Ka - Ki, 1930-1970
- 56. Kl - Kz, 1924-1965
- 57. La - Lk, 1935-1970
- 58. Ll - Lz, 1934-1966
- 59. Langford, William S., 1935-1976
- 60. League for Emotionally Disturbed Children, 1951-1959
- 61. Leo Kanner Day, 1970-1971
- 62. Linwood, 1965-1968. (see also "Linwood" under miscellaneous heading)
- 63. Mac - Mai, 1932-1959
- 64. Maj - Me, 1937-1966
- 65. Mi - Mz, 1935-1966
- 66. N, 1938-1966
- 67. O, 1931-1947
- 68. P, 1934-1959
- 69. Park, Edwards A., 1934-1973
- 70. Paton, Stewart, 1931-1967
- 71. Post-graduate medicine, "debate," 1958
- 72. Publications (lists), n.d.
- 73. Ra - Rh, 1934-1957
- 74. Ri - Rz, 1930-1959

75. Sa - So, 1928-1970

76. Sp - Sz, 1922-1970

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Folders

- 77. T, 1932-1959
- 78. Teaching, 1953-1977
- 79. Testimonial Banquet, 1955
- 80. Thomas, Charles C. (publishers, I) 1933-1936
- 81. Thomas, Charles C. (publishers, II) 1937-1945
- 82. Thomas, Charles C. (publishers, III) 1946-1950

Folders

- 83. Thomas, Charles C. (publishers, IV) 1951-1956
- 84. Thomas, Charles C. (publishers, V) 1957-1973
- 85. U - V, 1935-1958
- 86. Wa - We, 1933-1953
- 87. Wf - Wz, 1921-1966
- 88. Woods Schools, 1943-1972
- 89. X - Z, 1934-1955

SERIES: Geographical Files

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Folders

- 90. Argentina (includes photographs), 1968-1975
- 91. Brazil, 1941-1969
- 92. Canada, 1955-1959
- 93. Chile, 1941-1951
- 94. European Trips (general), 1957-1962, 1972
- 95. France, 1947-1980
- 96. Germany, 1970-1977
- 97. Great Britain, 1957-1968
- 98. Holland, 1934-1978
- 99. India, 1950-1957
- 100. Japan, 1957-1979
- 101. Norway, 1946-1947
- 102. Switzerland, 1956-1975
- 103. U.S., A-C, 1937-1976
- 104. U.S., D-H, 1941-1966
- 105. U.S., I-L, 1935-1973
- 106. U.S., M-Mb, 1932-1976
- 107. U.S., Mi-Mz, 1942-1973
- 108. U.S., N (except New York), 1949-1975
- 109. U.S., New York, 1936-1974
- 110. U.S., O-R, 1941-1974
- 111. U.S., S-Z, 1941-1959