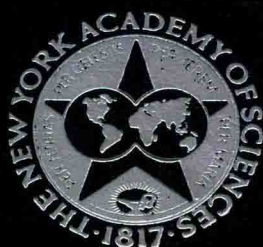


ANNALS OF
THE NEW YORK ACADEMY
OF SCIENCES

VOLUME 420

**DEFINED
IMMUNOFLUORESCENCE
AND RELATED
CYTOCHEMICAL
METHODS**



Editors

Ernst H. Beutner
Russell J. Nisengard
Boris Albin

PUBLISHED BY THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
ANYAA9 420 1-432 (1983)

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Edited by Ernst H. Beutner, Russell J. Nisengard, and Boris Albin



The New York Academy of Sciences
New York, New York
1983

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Main entry under title:

Defined immunofluorescence and related cytochemical methods.

(Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, ISSN 0077-8923; v. 420)

Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference

Defined Immunofluorescence, Immunoenzyme Studies and Related Labeling Techniques, organized by the Dept. of Microbiology, State University of New York at Buffalo, et al., held on June 8-11, 1982 in Niagara Falls, NY.

Includes bibliographies and index.

1. Immunofluorescence—Methodology—Congresses.

2. Immunochemistry—Methodology—Congresses. I. Beutner, Ernst H., 1923— II. Nisengard, R. J. III. Albini, B. IV. International Conference

Defined Immunofluorescence, Immunoenzyme Studies and related Labeling Techniques (7th: 1982: Niagara Falls, N.Y.) V. State University of New York at Buffalo.

Dept. of Microbiology. VI. Series. [DNLM: 1. Fluorescent antibody technic—Congresses. W1 AN626YL v.420 / QY 250 D313 1982]

Q11.N5 vol. 420a [QR187.I48] 500s [616.075] 84-4802

ISBN 0-89766-238-5

ISBN 0-89766-239-3 (pbk.)

Cover: Biopsy of rabbit kidney with immunofluorescent staining for bovine serum albumin. Antigen is localized in basement membrane only. Courtesy of B. Albini.

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 0-89766-238-5 (cloth)

ISBN 0-89766-239-3 (paper)

ISSN 0077-8923

ANNALS OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Volume 420



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DEFINED IMMUNOFLUORESCENCE AND RELATED CYTOCHEMICAL METHODS

DEFINED IMMUNOFLUORESCENCE AND RELATED CYTOCHEMICAL METHODS^a

Editors

ERNST H. BEUTNER, RUSSELL J. NISENGARD, AND BORIS ALBINI

CONTENTS

I. Background for Defined Immunocytochemistry

Recognition of Antibodies as Labeled Globulins. <i>By</i> MICHAEL HEIDELBERGER.....	1
Albert H. Coons. In Memoriam. <i>By</i> ASTRID FAGRAEUS.....	7
Introduction: The Nature of Defined Immunocytochemical Studies. <i>By</i> ERNST H. BEUTNER.....	9

II. Standardization of Immunofluorescence

Measurement of Variation and Significance in Serologic Tests. <i>By</i> ROGER N. TAYLOR.....	13
External Quality Control and Standardization in Labeled Immunoassay. <i>By</i> ROGER N. TAYLOR AND KAREN M. FULFORD.....	22
Prospects and Problems in the Definition and Standardization of Immunofluorescence. I. Present Levels of Reproducibility and Disease Specificity of Antinuclear Antibody Tests. <i>By</i> ERNST H. BEUTNER, SUSAN KRASNY, VIJAY KUMAR, ROGER TAYLOR, AND TADEUSZ P. CHORZELSKI..	28
Prospects and Problems in the Definition and Standardization of Immunofluorescence. II. A Quantitative Assay for Antibody Protein of FITC-labeled Anti-IgG Conjugates. <i>By</i> JAY G. HUANG, ERNST H. BEUTNER, AND VIJAY KUMAR.....	55
Standardization in Immunofluorescence. <i>By</i> E. J. HOLBOROW AND G. D. JOHNSON.....	62
Future Development of Immunologic Reference Preparations. <i>By</i> RENÉE NORBERG.....	65

^aThis volume is the result of a conference entitled Seventh International Conference Defined Immunofluorescence, Immunoenzyme Studies and Related Labeling Techniques, organized by the Department of Microbiology of the School of Medicine and the Department of Periodontology of the School of Dentistry of the State University of New York at Buffalo and the International Service for Immunodermatology Laboratories (ISIL) with advice from the IUIS-WHO Subcommittee on Standardization in Immunofluorescence, held on June 8-11, 1982 in Niagara Falls, NY.

Quality Control of Fluorescein Isothiocyanate-labeled Reagents. <i>By</i> SHIREEN CHANTLER AND IRENE BATTY	68
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III. Immunoenzyme Methods and Their Application

Preparation of Monomeric Fab'-Horseradish Peroxidase Conjugate Using Thiol Groups in the Hinge and Its Evaluation in Enzyme Immunoassay and Immunohistochemical Staining. <i>By</i> EIJI ISHIKAWA, SHINJI YOSHITAKE, MASAYOSHI IMAGAWA, AND AKINOBU SUMIYOSHI.....	74
Neurotypy: The Heterogeneity of Brain Proteins. <i>By</i> NANCY H. STERNBERGER AND LUDWIG A. STERNBERGER	90
Description of Two Differently Distributed Central Nervous System Antigens with Single Monoclonal Antibody and Different Methods of Fixation. <i>By</i> B. ZIPSER AND C. SCHLEY	100
Paucity of HLA-A,B,C Molecules on Human Cells of Neuronal Origin: Microscopic Analysis of Neuroblastoma Cell Lines and Tumor. <i>By</i> LOIS A. LAMPSON AND JAMES P. WHELAN	107
Immunoenzyme Techniques and Their Application To Diagnostic Studies. <i>By</i> CLIVE R. TAYLOR	115
Single and Double Immunoenzymatic Techniques for Labeling Tissue Sections with Monoclonal Antibodies. <i>By</i> D. Y. MASON, Z. ABDULAZIZ, B. FALINI, AND H. STEIN.....	127
Immunohistochemical Markers for Prostatic Cancer. <i>By</i> MEHRDAD NADJI AND AZORIDES R. MORALES	134
Monoclonal Antibodies in Immunoenzyme Studies of Breast Cancer. <i>By</i> ROBERT D. CARDIFF, CLIVE R. TAYLOR, SEFTON R. WELLINGS, DAVID COLCHER, AND JEFFREY SCHLOM.....	140

IV. Substrate Processing for Immunofluorescence

Clinical and Experimental Study of the Immune Complex (Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1-IgM) in Herpes Encephalitis Brain. <i>By</i> KOZABURO HAYASHI, SHUICHIRO TAKAGI, NORIYOSHI SEKINE, AND IZUMI KURIHARA.....	147
Localization of LDL in Arteries: Improvements in Immunofluorescence Procedures. <i>By</i> HENRY F. HOFF, DAVID L. FELDMAN, AND ROSS G. GERRITY.....	159
Pre-Embedment Localization of Antigens by Immunofluorescent Methods. <i>By</i> RICHARD M. FRANKLIN	165
Immunohistological Demonstration of Serum Proteins and Structural and Viral Antigens in Paraffin Sections of Nervous Tissues. <i>By</i> HERBERT BUDKA.....	176
Identification of Rabies Antigen in Human and Animal Tissues. <i>By</i> PEGGY T. SVOVELAND AND KENNETH P. JOHNSON	185
Detection of Viral Antigens in Formalin-fixed Specimens by Enzyme Treatment. <i>By</i> TAKESHI KURATA, RYO HONDO, SHOICHIRO SATO, AKIRA ODA, YUZO AOYAMA, AND JOSEPH B. MCCORMICK	192

V. Fluorescent Tracing in Tumor Immunology

Lymphocyte Activation Studies by Fluorescent Probes. <i>By</i> R. C. NAIRN	208
Fluorescent Lymphocyte Probes for Cancer Detection. <i>By</i> J. M. ROLLAND, G. R. HOCKING, AND R. C. NAIRN	215
Fluorescent Probes for the Detection of Malignant Disease. <i>By</i> J. A. V. PRITCHARD, W. H. SUTHERLAND, J. E. SIDDALL, A. J. BATER, I. J. KERBY, AND T. J. DEELEY	219
Immunofluorescence Study of the Antigens of the Basement Membrane and the Peritumoral Stroma in Human Colonic Adenocarcinomas. <i>By</i> P. BURTIN, G. CHAVANEL, AND J. M. FOIDART	229
Detection of Human Malignant Melanoma Antigens by Immunofluorescence and Autologous Postimmune Antimelanoma Sera. <i>By</i> STANLEY P. L. LEONG	237
Typing of Leukemic Cells with Monoclonal Antibodies. <i>By</i> W. KNAPP, O. MAJDIC, P. BETTELHEIM, K. LISZKA, W. ABERER, AND G. STINGL	251
S-100 Protein: A Marker for Melanocytic Tumors. <i>By</i> DUAN-REN WEN, SUNITA BHUTA, HARVEY R. HERSCHMAN, RICHARD B. GAYNOR, AND ALISTAIR J. COCHRAN	261

VI. Autoimmunity and Immunopathology of Skin and Kidney

Basement Membrane-Producing Tumors as Antigenic Substrate for the Demonstration of Anti-Basement Membrane Antibodies. <i>By</i> G. WICK, V. MUNRO, W. GEBHART, AND R. TIMPL	267
Recent Advances in the Study of Autoimmune Endocrine Diseases by the Use of Immunofluorescence. <i>By</i> G. F. BOTTAZZO, W. A. SCHERBAUM, AND T. HANAFUSA	275
Immune Complex-Mediated Disease and Immunofluorescence. <i>By</i> B. ALBINI, E. PENNER, A. FAGUNDUS, D. KATZ, AND C. NEULAND	281
Auto-antibodies to Actin: Recent Findings. <i>By</i> A. FAGRAEUS, R. NORBERG, R. THORSTENSSON, G. UTTER, AND C. ÖRVELL	297
The Value of Immunofluorescence in the Study of Renal Disease. <i>By</i> ROBERT T. MCCLUSKEY AND A. BERNARD COLLINS	302
Rectification of Immunological Abnormalities and Lupus Nephritis by the Transfer of Bone Marrow Cells. <i>By</i> MASAKI SHIRAKI, MICHIO FUJIWARA, AND KYOICHI KANO	309
Methodological Aspects of Immunofluorescence Applied to Nephrology. <i>By</i> F. SHIMIZU, S. SAEGUSA, AND A. KAWAMURA, JR.	315
The Brush Border of Proximal Tubules of Normal Human Kidney Activates the Alternative Pathway of the Complement System <i>In Vitro</i> . <i>By</i> GIOVANNI CAMUSSI, CIRO TETTA, GIANNA MAZZUCCO, AND ANTONIO VERCELLONE	321
IgA Class Endomysium Antibodies in Dermatitis Herpetiformis and Coeliac Disease. <i>By</i> TADEUSZ P. CHORZELSKI, JADWIGA SULEJ, HANNA TCHORZEWSKA, STEFANIA JABLONSKA, ERNST H. BEUTNER, AND VIJAY KUMAR	325

A Functional Assay for Complement-Activating Antibodies to the Cutaneous Basement Membrane Zone. <i>By</i> W. RAY GAMMON AND CAROLYN C. MERRITT	335
Experimental Production of Intercellular Antibodies in Monkeys. <i>By</i> SUSAN A. KRASNY AND ERNST H. BEUTNER	343
Pemphigus and Pemphigoid in Dogs, Cats, and Horses. <i>By</i> D. W. SCOTT, T. O. MANNING, C. A. SMITH, AND R. M. LEWIS	353
Immunofluorescence Studies in Psoriasis: Detection of Antibodies to Stratum Corneum in Psoriatic Scales. <i>By</i> VIJAY KUMAR, PAMELA JONES, ERNST H. BEUTNER, AND STEFANIA JABLONSKA	361

VII. Immunochemical Procedures in Virology, Bacteriology, and Parasitology

Use of Immunofluorescence in the Study of the Pathogenesis of Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection. <i>By</i> ROBERT C. WELLIVER AND PEARAY L. OGRA	369
Immunofluorescence in Diagnostic Virology. <i>By</i> KENNETH MCINTOSH	376
Enzyme Immunoassays for the Diagnosis of Viral Infections. <i>By</i> ROBERT H. YOLKEN, FLORA LEISTER, LORA WHITCOMB, DAWN DAVIS, AND MARY JANE MEARS	381
Negative Staining and Immune Electron Microscopy as Techniques for Rapid Diagnosis of Viral Agents. <i>By</i> M. RIEPENHOFF-TALTY, H. J. BARRETT, B. A. SPADA, AND P. L. OGRA	391
Immunologic Cross-reactivity Between <i>Streptococcus mutans</i> and Mammalian Tissues. <i>By</i> RUSSELL J. NISENGARD, MURRAY W. STINSON, AND LYNN PELONERO	401
Trends in the Localization of Bacterial Antigens by Immunoelectron Microscopy. <i>By</i> P. D. WALKER AND J. E. BEESLEY	410
The Use of the Solid Phase Indirect Immunofluorescent Assay (FIAX®) in the Serodiagnosis of Amebiasis. <i>By</i> K. W. WALLS AND M. WILSON	422
Index of Contributors	431

The New York Academy of Sciences believes it has a responsibility to provide an open forum for discussion of scientific questions. The positions taken by the participants in the reported conferences are their own and not necessarily those of The Academy. The Academy has no intent to influence legislation by providing such forums.

Recognition of Antibodies as Labeled Globulins

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As early as the end of the nineteenth century it was widely suspected that antibodies were proteins, since they normally were found in the globulin fractions of serum or plasma. Proof of their nature was, however, impossible because of the merely qualitative, comparative, and often misleading dilution titers by which antibodies were presumed to be measured.⁴ As a result, the belief persisted that antibodies might be substances of unknown nature merely adsorbed to globulins. Even as late as 1922 or 1923 a "protein-free antibody" could be had for the treatment of pneumococcal pneumonia: O.T. Avery and I found that "antibody-free protein" was more descriptive.

Announcement of the precipitin reaction between antigen and antibody by R. Kraus in 1897 stimulated speculation as to whether antigens rendered antibodies insoluble by denaturing them, and whether the precipitates formed contained antigen. This led to the first recorded use, in 1902, of labeled antigens. Von Dungern raised antibodies in rabbits with crab blood containing the copper-protein hemocyanin.¹ The antigen-antibody precipitate turned blue when shaken with air, proving the presence of hemocyanin. P.T. Müller used the phosphoprotein casein as antigen and reported a much higher content of phosphorus in the immunoprecipitate than in a volume of serum equal to that taken for precipitation.¹⁹ Labeled antibodies entered the picture much later, as we shall see, although antibodies in their native state are already labeled globulins separable from accompanying proteins by their combining groups for homologous antigen.

As a chemist suddenly exposed to immunology in the early 1920s, I marveled at the progress that had been made with the primitive, purely relative methods of titration then available to the immunologist, progress that often depended upon a brilliant idea or a shrewd guess rather than sound scientific evidence. Yet such fundamental questions as whether antibodies were proteins, whether precipitins, agglutinins, and protective antibodies were the same or different, and whether complement was merely a colloidal state of fresh serum (Bordet) or a substance (Ehrlich) could not be approached with methods as subjective and grossly inaccurate as those in use. After fascinatedly reading Bordet's *Traité d'Immunité*, papers by Ehrlich, and Arrhenius and Madsen's *Immunochemistry*, I resolved to try to end the polemics that were plaguing immunology by applying the rigid criteria of microanalytical chemistry. This had been attempted previously by Wu *et al.*²¹ who used hemoglobin and iodinated egg albumin as labeled antigens, but the results were equivocal.

The time was ripe for such an effort, for new tools had become available. Avery and I, later with W.F. Goebel, had established that the capsular slimes of types II and III pneumococci were chemically different, nitrogen-free polysaccharides,^{5,6} so that any nitrogen found in their precipitates with homologous antisera would necessarily come from the sera. Even partially purified antibodies were available, for Felton had found that when potent antipneumococcal horse sera were poured into water most of the

antibodies precipitated with the so-called euglobulins, leaving most of the other proteins in solution.² With these materials, Forrest E. Kendall and I were able to measure accurately in units of weight, mg per ml, the actual content of precipitating antibodies in antipneumococcal sera⁹ and to develop a quantitative theory of the precipitin reaction that explained much, and from which useful predictions could be made.¹⁰ When a single polysaccharide antigen was involved, precipitins, protective antibodies,¹⁴ and agglutinins⁷ were found to be identical and the intractable dispute as to complement was decided in favor of Ehrlich's view³: complement was found to have weight.

But most antigens are proteins, and so it became necessary to distinguish between antigen nitrogen and antibody nitrogen. Yellow to orange azoproteins were known, but as quantitative colorimetric estimations were to be made, it seemed desirable to strive for deeper colors. Accordingly, benzidine was tetrazotized and combined on one side with R-salt, the salt of 2-naphthol-3,6-disulphonic acid, known to yield red dyes, and on the other side with crystalline egg albumin (Ea).¹⁸ The resulting dark purplish-red protein was rather drastically purified until it reacted only faintly with anti-Ea, as we did not want it said that any antibodies due to DEa were actually only anti-Ea.

DEa was antigenic in rabbits and yielded precipitates with the dye that were pink to red depending upon the proportions in which dye and antiserum were mixed.^{11,15} For analysis, the washed precipitates were dissolved in alkali, quantitatively rinsed into a colorimeter cup, and compared with an alkaline solution of DEa of known content of nitrogen. This had to be done visually, for photoelectric colorimeters had not yet been invented. The solutions of the precipitates were then quantitatively rinsed into micro-Kjeldahl flasks and analyzed for total N from which the colorimetrically determined antigen N was subtracted to give antibody N. Study of the characteristics of this precipitin reaction made it possible to extend our quantitative method to colorless native proteins.¹² Although Ea precipitated anti-DEa, the quantitative reaction curve was like that expected for a cross-precipitation and totally different from that of a homologous reaction.^{12,13}

With the polysaccharide-antibody system we showed, with Torsten Teorell, that strong salt solutions shifted the equilibrium toward precipitates containing less antibody.¹⁶ This release of antibody theoretically promised a means of isolating pure antibody and the conditions for accomplishing this were found after some difficulty. Analytically pure antibody, 100% precipitable or agglutinable, proved to be a typical globulin,⁸ settling the old dispute once and for all and putting immunology on a firm scientific basis. Once the chemical nature of antibodies was proven, immunologists could begin to ask where and how they were elaborated, starting a tremendous, continuing expansion.

Kendall, Kabat, and I also began tentative attempts to label antibodies with R-salt or with malachite green, but the products tended to become insoluble and were not intensely enough colored to use in a projected study of phagocytosis. It remained for Albert Coons to think of fluorescence.

As labeled proteins, antibodies served well in a collaborative study with Rudolph Schoenheimer, Sarah Ratner, and David Rittenberg^{17,20} who were using the uptake and release of ¹⁵N in their physiological studies of protein behavior. Because of the rapid shuttling in and out of ¹⁵N, Schoenheimer proposed that amino acid linkages were labile, opening and closing readily. It was Henry P. Treffers' idea to test this hypothesis with two different immune labels. We immunized a rabbit with killed type III pneumococci, gave it a diet containing ¹⁵N, and also injected antiserum to type I pneumococci from another rabbit. Repeated quantitative type I and type III precipitin analyses showed that only the type III antibody, which the rabbit was synthesizing, had taken up ¹⁵N—the type I precipitates contained virtually none. Schoenheimer greeted

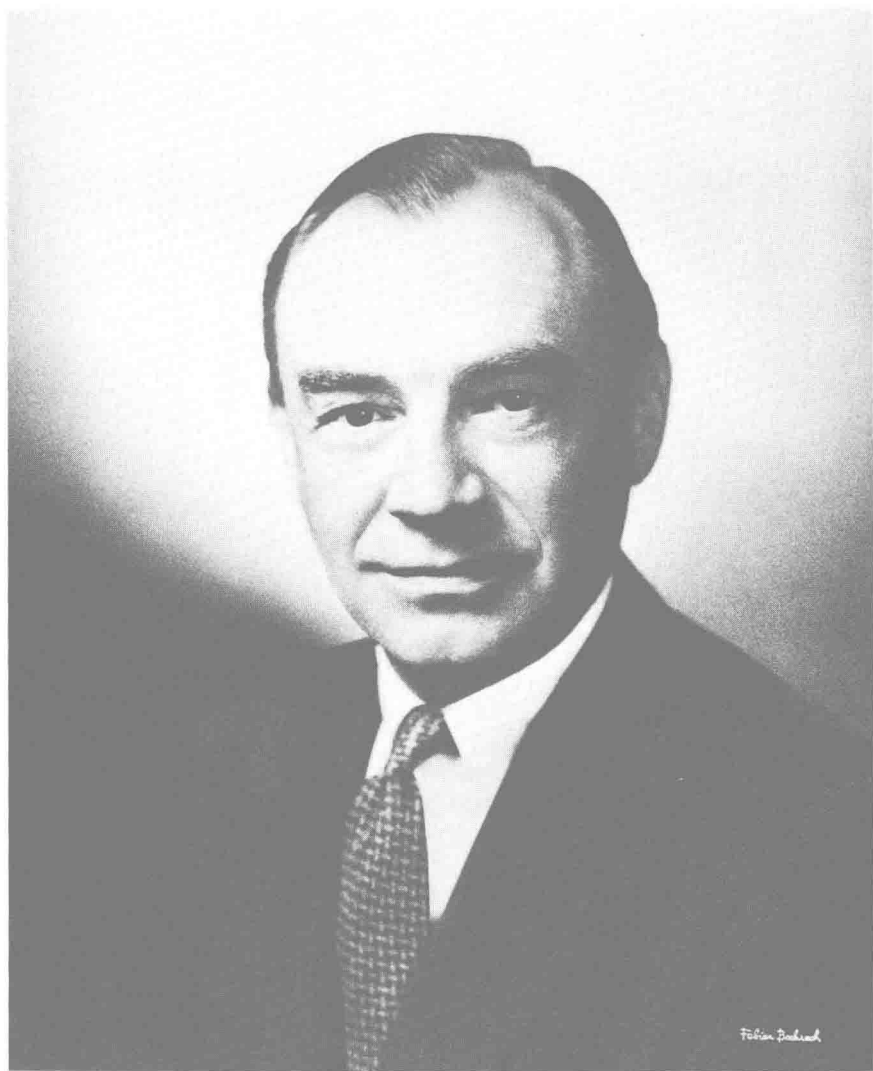
the data with "O Weh!," for the antibodies with their specific markers had required an alteration of his hypothesis.

It is apparent, then, that the specificity of the combining groups of antibodies has served as an adequate label for many purposes. Antibodies even possess a second marker, idiotypy, which has given rise to a whole literature and may even be awaiting further exploitation. However, the conjugation of antibodies with enzymes or radioactive elements or substances has enormously increased the sensitivity of their detection and the advantages of their use, as the preceding conferences of this series and the present one have demonstrated.

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ALBERT H. COONS

Albert H. Coons

In memoriam

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As we are gathered here it is my privilege to take you back some years in remembrance of Albert Coons. Since I am his oldest friend in this society, I have been asked to bring homage to his memory. It is exactly 30 years and 30 days since I met him the first time at Harvard.

As we all know his scientific achievements starting in 1942 with the finding of pneumococci in tissue by fluorescent antibody technique, I am not going to discuss his scientific contributions. I will instead give some personal glimpses. Albert Coons was a Harvard boy, or let us rather call him a Harvard gentleman. He graduated from Harvard in 1937. He was a classmate of another famous research worker, Lewis Thomas. In his book *The Medusa and The Snail*, Thomas has a chapter, "Note on Medical Economics." Albert Coons, like the majority of his class that later went into research and teaching, was quite sure when he graduated he would be a practitioner. Harvard graduates were better paid because they were better physicians than graduates from other schools; that was what they told themselves. Coons also wanted to practice. He chose internal medicine. He wanted to do something socially important and not just earn money like many of the other graduates. We are grateful that he did not set up this practice.

Indeed, Coons did do something essential in research—and perhaps he did not earn so much money, at least not to start with. One example: In June 1952, I visited Albert Coons who demonstrated the brand new sandwich technique on cells forming antibodies to diphtheria toxoid. In 1953, during the Sixth International Congress of Microbiology in Rome, I was asked to arrange a symposium on antibodies. I was glad to succeed in the end to have Albert Coons present, to explain his immunofluorescent technique to a larger international audience. "In the end"—that is where the money comes in again—Albert Coons got no governmental money for travelling. His father's economic support made the participation in the Rome congress possible. Things were more difficult in those days and Albert Coons was a very modest, self-critical man, not very clever in selling himself. But not even his modesty could stop the fantastic success of his technique. He initiated a new field of study in pathology, cell biology, microbiology, and, of course, in immunology.

In 1961, Albert Coons gave a presidential address to the American Association of Immunologists. To read this address is to learn what qualifications make a great pioneer research worker. He finished his address by giving what might be called a scientific will. It concerned the education of young people in laboratory research work and reflects his own life experience. Firstly, the problem you attack, Coons said, should be a principle one; secondly, it is no doubt better and more stimulating to work on a problem of your own than to carry out a set task. Albert Coons found his own research problem and he never gave up the idea he got in 1939 while sitting alone in a room in Berlin: to label antibodies for the study of Aschoff's nodules. He returned in 1940 to Harvard Medical School with this idea hammering away in his mind. At Harvard he

had a most stimulating environment. People listened, as for example John Enders, who told him that he did not believe that Coons should solve the rheumatoid disease problem by hooking a fluorescent dye on antibodies but that the idea was very good for many other purposes. Enders also introduced him to chemists working with isocyanate for other purposes. Coons thus was fortunate to carry on his pioneer work in an outstanding environment, but his success depended on his character. He had scientific imagination; he could create enthusiasm in workers in other research fields and he could cooperate. He was keen on giving credit to his co-workers and was absolutely loyal to Harvard until his death. Last, but not least, he never gave up and he was himself a hard worker. He was in the lab most weekends and holidays. One of his maxims was the Greek saying "Strive for grace under pressure." But in spite of being so scientifically involved he had time for his large family, he was interested in music, especially the chamber music of Beethoven, and in poetry. He had many good friends who appreciated his sense of humor and listened to his laughter around a good dinner table. We are grateful to have known him.