

2010

The Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research of Nova University: 1969-1980

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NSUWorks Citation

Bogorff, Robert, "The Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research of Nova University: 1969-1980" (2010). *NSU Archives Papers*. Paper 1.
http://nsuworks.nova.edu/nsudigital_glrcessays/1

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“The Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research of Nova University”

1969-1980

An Essay by NSU Archivist Robert Bogorff

The Leo Goodwin (founder of GIECO Insurance Company) Institute for Cancer Research (LGICR) was first known as the Lobund Institute of the University of Notre Dame and was founded by Dr. James Reyniers in 1942. Upon his retirement in 1959, he subsequently established the Germ-Free Life Research Center (GLRC) in Tampa, Florida, as a laboratory to apply his contributions in gnotobiology*, and several aspects of cancer research. The GLRC was incorporated in Hillsborough County as a non-profit, tax-exempt institution on May, 6, 1959. The GLRC has been supported by contracts with the National Cancer Institute, the Damon Runyon Foundation and numerous private sources. Dr. Joel Warren succeeded Dr. Reyniers in 1967.

The Germ-Free Life Research Center and Nova University were first linked together when President Warren Winstead (1964-1969) asked the Board of Trustees to authorize him to determine the possibility of acquiring the Germ-Free Life Research Center as the start of a Life Sciences program at Nova University. The date was July 15, 1968. He pointed out that the third floor of the Parker Building could accommodate GLRC in a cost of \$250,000, and that preliminary contacts were most outstanding. The Board approved his request “...provided such action does not entail expenditure of University funds.”

*Gnotobiology- The study of organisms or conditions those are either free of germs or associated only with known or specified germs.

A month later Board member William Horvitz stated that an outside source of money would be found to underwrite the costs of establishing GLRC at Nova. At the time it was stated “...this is one of the better opportunities the University has had and we should not let it slip through our hands.”

Also at this meeting President Winstead related that Mrs. Bernard Castro (Castro Convertible Sofas) had offered to organize a women’s group that would raise \$250,000 for the GLRC, over a period of five years. Leo Goodwin and Louis Parker (Board members) agreed to play a part in financing.

On February 17, 1969, Dr. Joel Warren, Director of the GLRC briefed the Trustees on the research being conducted by the GLRC.

It is interesting to note that Board member Louis Parker expressed concern over the fact that the University was committed to spending nearly \$350,000 to provide a facility for the GLRC without reciprocating commitment on the part of GLRC.

It was decided that an agreement be negotiated establishing the GLRC as an integral part of Nova University. This would become effective June 1, 1969.

President Winstead was in close contact with Leo Goodwin, Sr. and on February 4, 1969, received a letter from Goodwin stating that he appreciated being kept up to date

regarding the establishment of the Cancer Research Center at the University. He further stated “I believe you will get encouragement to a point where this under taking will be a very worthwhile organization, and I am pleased to have been in a position where I could lend guaranteed support to such an organization.”

It must be remembered at the exact time the Germ-Free Life Research Center was moving on to the Nova campus, the Nova Board was discussing some of the pro’s and con’s of an affiliation with other institutions, with the consensus “that some ardent and confidential screening should be done.” It was clearly stated “... that the Board of Trustees wish to go on record as favoring the exploration of the possibility of a merger between Nova University and other institutions.”

Chairman Farquhar was advised to contact MIT, Cal Tech, and Rensselaer to see if they would be interested in exploring the possibility of an affiliation.

President Winstead was not committed to the idea of a merger. He stated “While I am not prepared to make a recommendation regarding the proposal for a merger at this moment, I feel the Board should be keenly aware that any affiliation of this kind which removes the University from governing control of the Trustees is not in accord with the concepts of the University as set forth originally by this Board and should be given very careful consideration.”

One has to wonder if this was the right time to be moving a major institute onto campus.

There were four major research goals of the Institute:

1. Studies to determine the significance of viruses in human cancer.
2. The biological effects of tobacco and certain viruses in combination.
3. Growth of tumor cells in culture and their sensitivity to anti-cancer compounds.
4. Development of specialized equipment for germ-free research.

Cancer research at Nova University entered a new phase in 1972 as GLRC became the Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research, named for Leo Goodwin, Sr., founder of the GIECO Insurance Company, and a Fort Lauderdale resident.

President Fischler felt that the present name GLRC, which referred to the breeding of experimental animals in a germ-free environment, was misleading. The Life Sciences Center, the academic arm of the Institute, was teaching and doing research in areas other than oncology.

By 1972 financial problems were already becoming a problem. Warren wrote to Leo Goodwin, Jr. to discuss the long-range development of the Goodwin Institute and the immediate need for some type of predictable income in which to base the budget and plan for expansion.

Unfortunately, there were serious problems arising out of the general decline in the prospects for Federal funding and the Institute expanding operating costs. The Institute was supported almost entirely by two contracts with the National Cancer Institute. It is interesting to

note that already, 1972-73, Nova was underwriting the salary of two staff positions, two graduate students and their supplies, approximately \$50,000- 60,000. Warren stated the situation was so grave that the Institute might have to close within a year. He needed an endowment of unrestricted dollars. Evidently Goodwin came through, not with an endowment but with more than \$300,000 to pay off the debts of the Institute.

1. Nova would be more clearly identified as an institution actually engaged in cancer research.
2. Economies of cost and other administrative functions.
3. LGICR equipment would become the property of Nova University.
4. Auditing and allocation of funds would be simplified.
5. The Institute would be known as “Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research of Nova University.”

Nova offered the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Biological Science. Specialization in experimental oncology, biochemistry and experimental chemistry was available.

The Center’s 1972 budget ranged from between \$350,000 and \$400,000 a year. Leo Goodwin, Jr. also provided the Institute with an electron microscope, the first in Broward County, cost, \$50,000. Additional funds would be needed, however, for the microscope would require a full time technician.

Cancer research was the major concentration of the Life Sciences Center. The Center taught and integrated the disciplines of modern biology, microbiology, biochemistry, virology and related disciplines culminating in an understanding of molecular oncology. The major component of the center was the Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research. It was the only Germ-Free Research Center in the Southeastern United States.

In the summer of 1973, Dr. Albert Sabin arrived at Nova University. He and Dr. Warren had been friends for many years and Dr. Sabin had agreed to spend some time at Nova during the summer months.

Dr. Sabin received his medical degree at New York University. During WWII he developed a vaccine against dengue fever, a virus transmitted by mosquitoes. He held posts at the Rockefeller Institute in New York City, and at the University of Cincinnati Medical School, where he was a professor of research pediatrics.

After the war, Dr. Sabin began his research on polio. Eventually he perfected using a live virus as a polio vaccine, as it gives longer lasting immunity and is capable of being given orally.

Dr. Sabin much more approachable than Dr. Warren, he would often come to the science library and chat about his experiences during the war and his great “adventure” as he phrased it, in developing the oral vaccine. Somehow, his conversations made the complex at least understandable. All great teachers have this ability. This was heady stuff for a young

librarian, and I always enjoyed his frequent visits. I am not sure how long he stayed but I imagine it was no longer than a month.

In 1974, it was becoming clear that money was to be an ongoing problem. After giving them a \$50,000 electron microscope, Leo Goodwin, Jr. was now being asked to pay the duty on the instrument, \$2500.

In the same year, an agreement was signed by Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research, Inc. and Nova University combining LGICR with the Life Sciences Center of Nova University. Most of the equipment and supplies in the Parker Building were owned by the LGICR, the building was owned by the Nova University. Certain facilities were jointly owned. The Director for both the LCIRC and the Life Sciences Center was Dr. Joel Warren. It was felt that certain benefits could accrue to both institutions by consolidating certain functions.

In 1975 new problems arose. The Institute was desperately in need of space. The idea was to use trailers to house the animal rooms, thus freeing up space for more convention research. The National Cancer Institute would not permit the animals being put into trailers. They did however approve moving the operating isolators there. It was imperative that they immediately acquire the facilities needed for expansion.

It was clear that the Institute had to purchase the trailer units needed. Costs involved \$32,900. They would have to borrow \$30,000 from each bank at a rate of 9 1/2%. As collateral for the loan, they proposed the electron microscope.

President Fischler referred the proposal to the Board of Trustees. This decision was delegated to the Executive Committee with the understanding “that other alternatives for providing the space be explored and the permission be secured from the donor to use the microscope as collateral.”

Warren was not a man who engaged in easy or informal conversation. In the ten years I knew him, we probably had less than a dozen conversations about things other than budgets, journals, etc. There was, however, a theme he returned to over and over again; governance and structure of cancer centers. His example was always the same, The Wistar Institute, located on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. It is independent and has its own Board and Administration. He knew there were both advantages and disadvantages, but believed the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. The primary advantage is that an independent research center is the master of its own destiny. It is not part of a parent institution which has a much broader agenda. It is not bound by traditions. It allows policies and procedures to be developed which serve the needs of scientific programs and are not compromised with any other institutional needs.

The other side of the coin was not often discussed; its vulnerability to the changing funding patterns of those agencies, charities, etc. from which it derives its support. The word which was never spoken was of course endowment. Warren knew this was not going to happen.

It takes a certain amount of audacity and imagination and a great deal of exceptional research to achieve a breakthrough discovery in the field of cancer research. Fundamental

scientific research into the mechanism of cancer continues to be a problem thirty years after the LGICR left Nova University.

Although there were high expectations, the Institute was never able to recruit the staff of talented young scientists, whose credibility and productivity would put LGICR on the scientific map and enhance its reputation for excellence in cancer research. It takes time, talent, dedication and resources to continue to advance toward an understanding and eventually a cure.

Whether LGICR had the talent I cannot say. I can say it never had the resources. There was never a dynamic environment which is how scientific disciplines can come together and collaborate in very powerful ways.

Dr. Warren's vision to establish a top notch research institute was never realized. To this day the fundamental causes of malignancy and related diseases are not entirely understood.

In January of 1978, Leo Goodwin Jr. died at the age of 63. Goodwin had filed a bankruptcy petition in Federal Court in 1976. He asked the court to allow reorganization of his financial holdings. His son, Leo Goodwin III died in June of 1977 of a drug overdose.

By September of 1978 letters were going out to the faculty which began "I have been advised by the President and Administrative Council that the contracts of all faculty members in the Life Sciences Center will be terminated on their anniversary date unless funds become available for their support." Dr. Warren remained convinced that the center would be able to

acquire financial stability through their own efforts. He felt it was not in the best interests of the University but admitted “the critical condition of our finances leaves it with no alternative.”

Unfortunately, many of the faculty was also receiving letters which began “We regret to inform you that your grant application was not recommended for approval.”

In March of 1979 the end was near. President Fischler’s announced the dissolution of the Life Sciences Center and to completely sever relations with the Goodwin Institute. Dr. Joel Warren promptly resigned as both Director of the Life Sciences and professor of Biology effective June 30, 1980.