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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Interviews at Jackson Laboratory Following Bar Harbor Fire

Date: October 24, 1947

Recording number: D 16.81; CD 10, track 1

Length of recording: 11:38

[transcript begins]

HUNTER: This is Irving Hunter speaking to you from Bar Harbor. We now have our wire recording set up at the scene of the fire that destroyed almost entirely the Jackson Memorial Laboratory, famed throughout the world for its cancer research work, and we came down here with the express purpose of talking with some of those who were on the scene at the time of the fire and getting some clear idea of what this terrible loss means. We're going to start off first by talking to this gentleman over here. Can you come right over close, please, so we can keep the microphone handy. First of all, what is your name and what were your duties here before the fire?

DEJARDINS: The name is Richard Desjardins and I'm working with Dr. Snell as a research assistant.

HUNTER: And I understand that during the height of the fire, you were right in the middle of things here, moving records, and things of that nature, whatever you could save. Do you want to tell us about that in your own words, please?

DEJARDINS: Lots of the records and important documents have been placed in a fire proof section of the building excepting that there was quite a lot of smoke in there that would destroy the mice and the window panes are not exactly fire proof, and [we thought that?] the boxes that the mice were contained in are made of wood, and they might catch fire, so we have been moving most of these documents that couldn't be reproduced at all, trying to move them to the other bank of the laboratory in Hamilton Station.

HUNTER: Incidentally, as we're standing here talking some of the ruins are still smoldering and you spoke about losing the valuable mice that have been experimented on and there right before me is a huge pile of [inaudible] filled with the bodies of these dead mice and the whole business there is smoldering away, and incidentally you also mentioned saving some of the records. I'm glad that you brought out that point because reports that have reached us before this time, were to the effect that probably all the years of research that have been put in here at the Jackson Memorial Laboratory had been lost, but apparently you have saved many of the valuable records. Did you lose any of those records that you know of?

DEJARDINS: Most of the records have been saved and moved to the Hamilton Station.

HUNTER: And can you describe somewhat of the scene when the fire was at its height and you were removing the records and so forth?

DEJARDINS: The older part of the building was almost completely destroyed. The fire-proof part of the building was not in flames at all, of course.

HUNTER: I see. I can imagine that the whole scene was one of utter confusion at the time, and I want to thank you very much for giving us this information because, as I said before, we came down here with the express purpose of finding out just what had been lost down here and just what had been saved. Incidentally, just before I finish up with you here, I notice that there is a small section of the building here standing. I'm not too familiar with how much of it has been, because I don't remember how it looked before-hand. I've seen once or twice on the road going by sight-seeing, but I don't remember just what the situation was before the fire. What part of this building has been saved here? Is this of any value at all, or will it have to be torn down to start over again?

DEJARDINS: I think they can use the same, most of the same foundation and build up over again and the part of the new building they're beginning to make a new addition to the building. That has not been harmed at all, they can build right up on that.

HUNTER: I see, all right, so thank you very much. Now we're going to move along to one of the other gentlemen who are around here trying to straighten things out as best they can. Now, what's your name, sir?

LARDMAN: My name's John Lardman.

HUNTER: And what were your duties here at the laboratory?

LARDMAN: I was a research assistant to Dr. [Runner?] who is an experimental embryologist.

HUNTER: I see. And, uh, before the broadcast, we were speaking about some of the mice there and trying to figure out whether that particular part of the research work was a total loss. Of course, the mice have all been destroyed, I understand, is that correct?

LARDMAN: That's right. We saved maybe about 25 of 30 mice, but there's very little importance there now because really the majority of experiments were, uh, the mice were destroyed.

HUNTER: I see, and uh, were some mice [hidden?] away from this point, to other parts of the country, other parts of the world? I mean, will you be able to pick up some of the [federal?] research, from some mice that have been shipped off in the past to other parts?

LARDMAN: Yes, during the history of the laboratory they've shipped mice to every part of the world and consequently we'll be able to pick up most of the strains by taking back from those places that we have shipped these mice to and start to re-breed them. Of course, it will take a number of years but eventually it may build this place up.

HUNTER: Well, thank you very much and that clears up another point that we wanted very much to bring before the public, uh, as I said before, the original picture of the loss down here was one of total loss, but apparently in spite of the terrible ravages of the fire it is not a total loss as far as research is concerned and some of the threads may be picked up as time goes along.

Now we're going to move along, thank you very much for taking part in the broadcast, to another of the gentlemen here. Incidentally, most of these fellows are rather smoke-grimed and they need shaves, they've been working steadily here trying to do what they can and just to give you a little bit of a word picture of the scene here, it's almost impossible to believe that this once beautiful island could be such a scene of devastation. We came through the main part of Bar Harbor a while ago, and many of the huge estates are utterly destroyed, nothing left there at all but the brick chimneys and the foundation.

Now moving along to one of the other gentlemen here, what's your name, please?

STONE: My name is Bill Stone.

HUNTER: And how about your part in the work here in Jackson Memorial Laboratory?

STONE: I'm a research assistant under Dr. Paul Fallon who is an experimental geneticist in rabbit breeding.

HUNTER: I see, I didn't understand that they did that down here, so that brings up a new point. Incidentally, I am quite unfamiliar with many of the features of the work down here, and at this point, I'd like to suggest that if there's any information that I have left uncovered by not understanding some of it, would you bring that out?

STONE: Sure.

HUNTER: Without my questioning you, is there anything else to bring out in this discussion?

STONE: Well, we have here, unknown to many people, I believe, some rats, which are quite valuable that we use in experimental work, particularly those owned by Dr. Wooley, or that is, bred by Dr. Wooley, one type of which we managed to save, at least we hope we can save, a type of a hooded, dwarf rat which we hope to transport to section of the laboratory and save them. They're the only type of that particular breed existing in the world today, and we have only six remaining. We hope very much that we can save these rats because they are very important in solving many of the inheritance problems facing science today.

HUNTER: I see, sir, well, thank you very much for your part in the broadcast. Now we move along to the fourth and final gentleman, in the line-up here, and would you tell us your name, sir?

PARSONS: My name is Tote Parsons.

HUNTER: And your occupation here at the Jackson Memorial Laboratory?

PARSONS: Well, mine is the same as Bill Stone who spoke to you a minute ago, working with Dr. Fallon who is a geneticist with rabbits and guinea pigs and the unusual little animal from Syria the hamster. Of course those are located at the Hamilton Station which as yet has not been damaged and won't be damaged, we hope.

HUNTER: Incidentally, where is that other unit that you spoke of just then?

PARSONS: That's about 8 miles outside of Bar Harbor towards Bangor.

HUNTER: I see, and that's where you are sending what remains of the wreckage here.

PARSONS: Well, not exactly. Last night they took a lot of equipment to Hamilton Station but today we finally decided that it would be best if we left most of the equipment to stay here at the main laboratory at its present location because the Army has done a wonderful job in guarding the place and I don't think any of the equipment will be stolen or confiscated in that way.

HUNTER: That's fine, and have any plans been made yet, I presume it's a little bit early to try to think about the future, this catastrophe having just happened, but possibly there might have been some thought about the future, how about that?

PARSONS: I can't say for sure, as far as the money value of the lab is concerned, it's impossible to say. In the future, I think it will be at least a week or more before they have any significant plans as to what's going to happen in the main lab. I might say that there were about 175,000 to 180,000 mice in the laboratory and out of those we saved only approximately 25 or 30, so as far as the animals are concerned, it's a complete loss.

HUNTER: I see, and what about the loss as far as equipment is concerned, is that about the same percentages?

PARSONS: No, the equipment, those of the equipment that could be moved, like the microscopes, and portable microphones, have been moved to a safe place. The large equipment that was impossible to move is destroyed, but the equipment loss, I would say, was not hardly great at all. I think they will very easily use it again in the very near future.

HUNTER: Well, thank you very much, all of you gentlemen for taking part in this broadcast, and who is that who just drove up, by the way?

A FEW OF THE MEN: Dr. Scott... from the main laboratory, I mean Hamilton Station.

HUNTER: Do you suppose we could get him over here for a few words?

ONE OF THE MEN: I'll ask him for you.

HUNTER: All right, if you will, please... Yes, sir, now do come right over here to the microphone and take part in this broadcast. We're trying to gather authentic information regarding the Jackson Memorial Laboratory, so if you would tell us your name, sir, and make whatever statement you have, we would appreciate it very much.

SCOTT: My name is Dr. Jason Scott of the Division of Behavior Studies at Hamilton Station. It has, of course, been an enormous loss of research material and data at the main laboratory here, but we hope that it will soon be rebuilt and reorganized under the leadership of Dr. C. C. Little, the director of the laboratory. Dr. Little has been on the scene reaction, uh, a scene of action, and we hope that in a few months that we will be functioning normally again. Hamilton Station, the branch laboratory of the Jackson Laboratory, is intact and we have a nucleus of research animals there and research equipment. No threat of fire has been seen out in that area as yet, although of course no part of the island is safe. We hope that nothing will happen out in that area.

HUNTER: Thank you very much, sir. We have been doing an on-the-spot recording of the scene of the fire that has just ruined Jackson Memorial Laboratory in Bar Harbor.

[transcript ends]

For more information about this transcript, audio recording, or other materials in Special Collections at the University of Maine, contact:

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