@UIowaNeuro Notes

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This weekend the university celebrates its 175th anniversary with the installation of President Barb Wilson on Friday and a special three-part Presidential Lecture on Sunday, among other events.

We can be proud that neuroscience is deeply entwined in more than 100 years of that history, beginning with the founding of the Psychological Laboratory in 1890 and the opening of the Department of Neurology in 1919. That same year, the Iowa General Assembly appropriated funds to build the Iowa Psychopathic Hospital, which opened in 1921. Both were the first west of the Mississippi River.

Group of Psychologists at Clark Conference of 1909.

From the earliest days, Iowa neuroscientists were leaders in the field. Carl Seashore (psychology) was among the US scientists invited to meet Sigmund Freud on his one and only trip to the United States in 1909. Adolph Sahs (neurology) co-founded the American Academy of Neurology. Kenneth Spence (psychology) was a founding father of one of two dominant theories of animal learning in the mid-20th century. Arthur Benton (neurology) was a pioneer in the field of neuropsychology, bringing together psychologists and physicians to merge behavioral and biomedical approaches. Our Benton Laboratory of Neuropsychology in the Division of Behavioral Neurology carries out his legacy. George Winokur (psychiatry) is known as the "father of the DSM," which transformed the way we diagnose psychiatric disease.

They started us on an important path of asking "big questions" about how the brain connects to behavior and disease. Seashore was known for his study of how the brain processes music and worked with colleagues in physics to develop one of the first audiometers. To this day, audiology at Iowa is one of the top programs in the country, along with speech-language pathology and otolaryngology.

Hanna and Antonio Damasio were at Iowa when they began thinking about the role emotion plays in cognition, which challenged long-accepted principles. With their UI research team, including then-graduate student Dan Tranel, they pioneered the use of imaging technologies in the study of brain lesions and created an unparalleled resource for inquiry in the Iowa Neurological Patient Registry.

At the same time, Nancy Andreasen was exploring the brain functions that drive creativity. This was something not many people were inclined to ask but Nancy's unique "double doc" – PhD in English along with her MD and psychiatry training – gave her insights few could hope to match. She developed the first scales to measure the positive and negative symptoms of schizophrenia and conducted the first study combining genomic and neuroimaging techniques.

I felt that "big question" energy as soon as I came to Iowa. It infuses the whole university and brings us together even across seemingly disparate fields. As neuroscientists we benefit from our connections with other creative thinkers, and in Iowa City, we're just as likely to strike up a stimulating conversation in the dog park or the grocery store as in a formal campus setting.

Regardless of the paths that brought us to Iowa, we are all part of the university-wide tradition of inquiry and creativity that we celebrate this weekend.