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# FROM THE ARCHIVES

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EDITOR: STEVE STOCKDALE

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*Steve Stockdale, Trustee of the Institute of General Semantics, recently spent ten weeks working in the Institute's archives in Closter, NJ. This effort begins an ongoing project to organize and catalog the Institute's archives so that they might prove useful for individuals wishing to research the history and development of general semantics. In this series, he will relate some of his 'discoveries' (in some cases, 'un-coveries') with hopes that students of general semantics might find in them something informative, interesting, applicable, etc.*

## **SNOOPING AROUND THE TIME-BINDING ATTIC**

STEVE STOCKDALE\*

**T**HE "ARCHIVES" of the Institute of General Semantics contain three generations of history — not only in terms of the institution and "the work" of general semantics, but also as a fascinating slice of 20th century American living. If you've ever snooped through (or "investigated," for those more scientifically-inclined) your grandparents' attic or garage, you might easily imagine what's in the IGS archives. (Or, to pay homage to our late friend Dave Bourland, who played *e-primary* roles in the history of both the Institute and the International Society, you might easily imagine what "*locates*" in the IGS archives.)

\* Steve Stockdale serves as Director for Programs and Archivist for the Institute of General Semantics. He has established The Dallas-Fort Worth Center for General Semantics ([www.dfwcgs.net](http://www.dfwcgs.net)), which will house the Alfred Korzybski Research and Study Center beginning June 2002. He lives and practices general semantics in Fort Worth, Texas.

On a generalized *descriptive* level, the archives consist of:

- A library with approximately 2,500 books, including several hundred from Alfred Korzybski's personal collection. Some of the books bear inscriptions and signatures by the author, such as Bertrand Russell's *Principia Mathematica*. We also have editions from each printing of *Manhood of Humanity* and *Science and Sanity*, including some inscribed by Korzybski to his wife Mira and co-workers.
- Three credenzas filled with 1,100 recordings on various media, including wire recordings, SoundScriber tapes, reel-to-reel tapes, cassette tapes, 16 mm movie films, and videotape.
- Twenty-three file cabinets and about 40 storage boxes containing all manner of printed materials — personal correspondence of Korzybski, Kendig, and others; 'official' Institute correspondence, financial reports, and administrative items; minutes of Trustee meetings; seminar notes, transcripts, and records; reprints of more than 175 articles by 300 different authors dealing with general semantics or used in seminar-workshops; hundreds of newspaper clippings and photographs; and etc. *Lots of "etc."*
- Many of Korzybski's personal items, including: his cane; a photo of himself and the future General George S. Patton and their wives engaging in what appears to be late-night frivolity involving a World War I tank; one of his hand-made mahogany Structural Differential models (he made and sold at least 54 of them); his leather monogrammed cover for *Science and Sanity*, which included a detachable version of the Structural Differential affixed to the inside of the back cover; and most of the items on and around his desk at the time of death on March 1, 1950, including four copies of the *New York Times* dated the last week of February.

Beyond this *descriptive* level, any attempt on my part to convey something about the *significance* of the archives, or the meanings of any individual piece or collection of pieces, or speculations as to "what happened," or *assessments* of "what so-and-so was like," would, of course, be biased by my own specific-to-me abstracting. Even as I endeavor to accurately *report* "what's there" in the archives, these biases (or you might say my general *orientation*) will undeniably influence what I select to report, and what I select to *not* report. In any event, to "*objectively* report" represents, for me, a

physio-and-logical oxymoron, without respect to its seemingly innocuous linguistic possibility.

Let me add to that the usual general semantics caveat that “more can always be said,” and I’ll begin this series by relating a few historical items pertaining to the principal function of the Institute of General Semantics — to educate and train individuals to apply the methodology of general semantics in their daily living.

### IGS Seminars

Alfred Korzybski established the Institute of General Semantics in Chicago in 1938, after the publication of his *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* in late 1933. (Note the often overlooked sub-title: “An” — singular — and “Systems” — plural. Due to its dark blue binding, Korzybski sometimes referred to *Science and Sanity* as “The Blue Peril.”) Until he formed the Institute, Korzybski traveled the country to ‘promote’ (used guardedly here) the book, lecture, and offer seminars to train readers (or more appropriately, “students”) to actually apply *in practice* the theoretical formulations.

So far as I’ve found, the first seminar was conducted at the Barstow School for Girls in Kansas City, from January 20th to February 20th, 1935. The school’s first-year Director, Marjorie Mercer Kendig, had read *Science and Sanity* immediately after its publication. Thirty-one years later, Kendig (as she was known by intimates) recounted her first encounter with Korzybski:

On Wednesday afternoon, eight August, 1934, in an old brownstone house at 321 Carlton Avenue, Brooklyn, I climbed four flights of stairs and, looking up, saw my first glimpse of Alfred Korzybski — round face, shaven head, thin, khaki-clad, leaning on a cane, beaming down at me over the bannister. More stairs and he was greeting me continental fashion with a kiss-the-hand and warm thank-yous for coming to see him. A few more stairs, out a door, across a roof and into a little shack — the so-called ‘penthouse’ — which had been his ‘home base’ for years. We sat at the desk in his ‘corner’ where he wrote the last drafts of *Science and Sanity*, corrected galleys and page proofs, and finally put it to press in 1933. We talked for hours about the revolution I wanted to bring about in the school of which I had recently been appointed Director. I hadn’t the faintest notion then that the revolution would be in me and be far more fundamental and lasting than anything I was able to do with Korzybski’s teachings and with his help at the school.

Four years later, after three years at the Barstow school, Kendig joined Korzybski in Chicago to establish the Institute and became its Educational Director.

Between January 1935 and the first seminar offered by the Institute in July 1938, Korzybski delivered seminars or lectures at twelve colleges and universities (University of Kansas, Washington State Normal School which hosted the First American Congress for General Semantics in March 1935, University of Washington, Williams Institute in Berkeley, University of Michigan, Olivet College in Michigan, the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia, the Galois Institute of Mathematics at Long Island University, Columbia, Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and Harvard); three hospitals (the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, New Jersey's Marlboro State Hospital, and Peoria, Illinois, State Hospital); and at conferences and privately-organized seminars in St. Louis and in Los Angeles.

In the summer of 1935, Korzybski spent three weeks lecturing at the Williams Institute, founded by his close acquaintance, Cora Williams, in Berkeley, California. A young Williams student named Lloyd Morain drew the assignment of "tending to" Korzybski during his stay — delivering meals to his room, bringing his mail, running errands, etc. One of his assignments, according to Morain, was to ensure that the school's distinguished guest lecturer be served only one bottle of wine in the evenings. (1)

Several of Korzybski's lectures were recorded, either by shorthand notes or recording device, then transcribed. The earliest transcription, probably taken from shorthand notes, is from his opening lecture on July 9, 1937, at Northwestern University. He began that seminar with this introduction:

At this seminar we get a glimpse of several important problems connected with what might be called 'human adjustment' to human conditions of life as they come. You all have your personal lives and you have your personal orientations to conditions in your personal lives, don't you? The whole lot of us have certain conditions under which we live. Are we adjusted to these conditions or are we not? That is the main problem.

The Institute officially opened in May 1938, thanks to initial funding by Mr. Cornelius Crane, in a rented apartment located at 1330 E. 56th Street in south Chicago, two blocks from the University of Chicago. A year later, the Institute moved one block west to a more accommodating apartment at 1234 E. 56th. (Some students referred to this as the "magic house." One critic of Korzybski accused him in writing of being a numerologist and implied he lobbied to have the address of the building changed just to gain this

“magical” 6-numeral sequential address. The critic apparently didn’t understand that, in this case, the ‘map’ moved as the ‘territory’ moved.)

The first seminar sponsored by the new Institute began on July 6th, 1938, a Wednesday evening, at 7:30 p.m. The seminar included twelve lectures, meeting on Monday and Wednesday evenings over a six-week period. His students generally evaluated Korzybski as an exceptional teacher, but his style was strictly lecture. He did make effective use of anecdotes, examples, humor, surprise, diagrams, and models, and he used language that might charitably be termed “blunt” and “matter-of-fact.” Due to his difficulty in hearing, he discouraged students from interrupting lectures with questions. Instead, his ‘final’ seminar included a question and answer session in which he took written questions from students. Tuition was \$15 — roughly \$150 or so in today’s dollars. Forty students registered for this first IGS seminar. Seating was assigned — shortest to tallest, front to back.

Korzybski began the first Institute seminar with this explanation of “what is general semantics?”

What is ‘general semantics’? Why GS? You should get from the beginning a *type* of reaction. One of the main points is how the reaction can be molded. When we come to the problem on meaning — *significance* — we are up against every kind of human difficulty.

In revising semantics, I am adding the word ‘general,’ and also have enlarged the meaning in the sense that it turns out to be a general theory of values — *evaluation*. You will hear quite a bit about mathematics, but you should not be frightened. You probably had poor teachers, etc. We hear it spoken frankly that they often make difficult the things which are simple. So don’t be afraid of mathematics. In connection with language and meanings, we must start with something which is the simplest — mathematics is the very simplest.

In our seminars we will investigate the factors of evaluation. If evaluation of any subject is correct, could you have then *predictability*? (When I ask the class a question, I expect you to answer; it goes deeper into you if you do.) Have you a sort of feeling or orientation of what it would mean to you in your private life if you could predict that if you did so and so, such and such would happen? Don’t you begin to see that your future happiness depends on whether we can have predictability? In mathematics we have a great deal of predictability, also in astronomy, etc.

When you calculate a bridge, you are actually talking to yourself about the bridge; you automatically get predictability about your bridge. Then our bridges do not collapse. Usually we consider mathematics as something special, not realizing that mathematics is a specialized language which as yet is the best in existence, and brings results.

Now, can we do something of that sort in ordinary life? This is a very serious thing because, if we can, then we will have great benefit. If so, we can handle our lives as well as our bridges and sky scrapers. Why is it that our bridges do not collapse, but our private lives do? If we are not foolish about our bridges, why are we foolish about ourselves? The question is — *do we know how to handle our brains?*

A few days later, he began a lecture by reinforcing a message he continually emphasized:

To repeat — one of the main difficulties in applying general semantics is that although the theoretical issues are very complex, the practical issues are childlike simple. People of your level are not willing to accept something which is too simple, because you fancy you are grown up. I am sorry, you are not grown up.

Among the forty “not grown up” students hearing these words in the summer of 1938 was a 27-year-old Radcliffe graduate who had just recently completed her M.A. in Political Science at the University of Chicago — Mary Stone Dewing. A few weeks after completing the seminar, the socially-conscious daughter of Dr. Arthur Stone Dewing (a Harvard professor who helped develop what became known as the Harvard “case method” of business evaluation) traveled to California. She accepted an invitation offered by Mr. Donald McLean to speak to the Los Angeles Society for General Semantics. After her talk, she met the young gentleman tending the door, who had collected the admission fees for the evening. A few years later she and Lloyd Morain would marry. (1)



Mary Morain, 1938

In 1984, Mary Morain edited a collection of articles selected from the first forty years of *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. Perhaps consciously, or perhaps subconsciously, she recalled Korzybski’s seminar lecture in titling her collection, *Bridging Worlds Through General Semantics*.



The August 1939 seminar class. First row seated on the ground: S. I. Hayakawa far left, Charlotte Schuchardt next to him, William S. Burroughs second from right. Second row seated: Pearl Jonescheck third from right. First row standing: Irving J. Lee far left, Kendig next to him, Edna Johnson fourth from left, Korzybski in center, Willard V. Quine to his right, Wendell Johnson to his left. Back row: Elwood Murray far right.

Perhaps the most 'semantically-noteworthy' seminar class was that which convened in August 1939 during the summer "intensive" seminar. The "intensive" seminar was scheduled over eight consecutive days, from ten o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night, with a dinner break. Students were encouraged to walk to restaurants within a few blocks of the Institute and eat in groups to discuss what they were learning.

So, if you had registered for the seminar in August 1939, you could have found yourself seated next to, or going out to dinner with, your fellow 'students': Doctors Irving J. Lee from Northwestern, Elwood Murray from the University of Denver, Dr. S. I. (Don) Hayakawa from the Armour Institute in Chicago, and Wendell Johnson from the University of Iowa, with his wife Edna. (2)

You undoubtedly would have met and enjoyed the acquaintance of the young personable dancer named Charlotte Schuchardt, who would join the Institute's staff the following month as Korzybski's literary secretary and further develop his techniques for "semantic relaxation." (In 1953, Char-

lotte Schuchardt married the well-known lexicographer Allen Walker Read, and she has continued her selfless service to the Institute and "the work" for now over 62 years. Her notebook from her first seminar in 1936 locates in the archives. Of the 212 seminars for which we have records, I believe Charlotte has participated in about 180 — give or take a dozen.)

You might have overlooked one of the students, a gangly young man from Clayton, Missouri. I inferred from the seminar records that William S. Burroughs tended to keep quietly to himself.

(Had you attended the prior seminar, in June 1939, you would've met Robert A. Heinlein and his wife. Heinlein, then a naval officer, later to write science fiction including *Stranger in a Strange Land*, and his wife attended two seminars with Korzybski. And while I'm parenthetically name-dropping, I might mention that Steve Allen attended several days of the 1961 seminar in Santa Barbara, California. He considered general semantics such a worthwhile endeavor that he included a chapter on it his book *Dumbth: And 81 Ways to Make Americans Smarter*.)

In 1944, Kendig modified the structure of the seminar to include additional sessions that she termed the "Workshop." From the announcement for the July 6-28, 1944, seminar-workshop:

The Seminar will consist of thirty-six hours of class lectures by Alfred Korzybski, director of the Institute and author of *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*. These lectures will be scheduled in the afternoons and evenings during the first ten days, and in general will follow the pattern of the intensive seminars previously given at the Institute.

The Workshop will be directed by M. Kendig, educational director of the Institute, assisted by visiting lecturers and consultants in various fields, who will be invited to conduct lecture-discussion periods and assist individuals and small groups in working out special problems and materials. Some fifty hours of directed work will be scheduled in the mornings, afternoons and evenings.

Kendig's Workshop segment of the seminar-workshop drew an impressive list of guest lecturers throughout the 1940s and 1950s, including names such as Buckminster Fuller, Abraham Maslow, J. Samuel Bois, Allen Walker Read, Norman T. Newton, Buryl Payne, and others.



A classroom photo of Korzybski and Kendig, probably taken at Yale in February 1949. He used a variety of diagrams neatly printed on these blackboards throughout his seminars. Note the recorder.

### Looking Ahead

Next time I'll relate something about a few of the leading "first generation" of general semantics students. (Korzybski and Kendig, in particular, eschewed the use of labels such as "general semanticists" or "GS'ers." They preferred "students" and its implication of "more to learn.") I'll also include some revealing comments from attendees at the 1950 summer seminar-workshop — the first seminar after Korzybski's death.

The Institute's next summer seminar-workshop is scheduled for July 15-19, 2002, on the campus of Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Contact the Institute ([institute@general-semantics.org](mailto:institute@general-semantics.org)) if you'd like to participate in the next phase of the Institute's history.

If you have any particular area of interest you'd like to read about concerning the development of general semantics and/or the Institute, or if you have questions, you can email me at: [steve@dfwcgs.net](mailto:steve@dfwcgs.net).

## NOTES

1. Accounts of Lloyd and Mary Morain's experiences with Korzybski, their first meeting, and Dr. Dewing come from an interview with Lloyd videotaped by Greg Sawin on May 27, 2000. Dr. Dewing served as an Honorary Trustee of the Institute. Students of general semantics and readers of *ETC* may recognize the Morain's as longtime supporters not only of general semantics, but also of such socially-conscious causes as humanism and population control. Mary died in 1998.
2. Lee, Murray, Hayakawa and Johnson became some of the most recognized first-generation students of Korzybski. They were among the founders of the Chicago-based Society for General Semantics in 1942, which a few years later changed its name to the International Society for General Semantics. Some of their interpretations and presentations of general semantics are available from the ISGS and the IGS, including Lee's *Language Habits in Human Affairs* and Johnson's *People In Quandaries*.

To Miss M Mercer Kendig  
with warmest best  
wishes and remembrances  
Aug. 8. 1934. Korzybski

Alfred Korzybski's inscription to Kendig inside her first edition of *Science and Sanity* on the day of their first meeting.