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Guide to the Nicolas Rashevsky Papers 1920-1972



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.RASHEVSKYN
Title	Rashevsky, Nicolas. Papers
Date	1920-1972
Size	17.25 linear feet (34 boxes)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract The collection contains the papers of Nicolas Rashevsky (1899-1972), a theoretical mathematician and biologist. He founded the first organized group on Mathematical Biology in the world and established the field of Mathematical Biology as an organized and recognized science. The collection includes correspondence, material pertaining to Rashevsky's research and writing, and material relevant to his professional activities and grant applications. The majority of the collection is from the period in which he served as a professor at the University of Chicago (1934-1964).

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research, with the exception of material in Series VIII.

Financial materials in Box 33 are restricted for 50 years from date of record creation.

Letters of reference and student evaluations in Box 34 are restricted for 80 years from date of record creation.

Medical records in Box 35 are restricted indefinitely.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Rashevsky, Nicolas. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Biographical Note

Nicolas Rashevsky was born in Chernigov, Russia in 1899, the eldest son of a wealthy sugar factory owner. He studied theoretical physics at the University of Kiev, obtaining his doctorate in 1919. Having fought in the White Army during the Revolution, he faced increasing tensions in Russia and in 1920 he emigrated with his wife, Emily. They moved first to Constantinople, where he taught physics at Robert College, and then to the Russian University in Prague. In 1924 he immigrated to the United States to work at Westinghouse Research Laboratories in Pittsburgh. His work during this period dealt mainly with quantum mechanics, relativity theory, and thermodynamics. During the 1920's Rashevsky also began to develop the concept of a systematic and quantitative approach to mathematical biology that would work in conjunction with experimental biology.

His applications of physico-mathematical techniques to biology attracted the attention of Warren Weaver, then director of the Natural Sciences Division and the Rockefeller Foundation. As a result, Rashevsky moved to Chicago in 1934, as a Rockefeller Fellow in the Department of Physiology at the University of Chicago. After his fellowship year he continued to teach and research in the departments of Psychology and Physiology until 1964. He dedicated his career at the University of Chicago to instituting Mathematical Biology as a recognized science.

In 1939 he established the *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics*, the first journal devoted specifically to mathematical biology. During its first decade of publication almost all contributions were made by Rashevsky and his students. However, after 1950 the bulletin became the principal publication outlet for a rapidly expanding group of mathematical biologists around the world. Rashevsky served as editor of the *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics* for thirty three years until his death in 1972. The journal was re-titled *Bulletin of Mathematical Biology* the following year, under which title it is still published.

During the 1940s, Rashevsky published primarily on cell division, cancer, and the central nervous system. In 1940 he founded the Section of Mathematical Biophysics within the Department of Physiology at the University of Chicago, which became the first Ph.D. granting program in mathematical biology in the world. In 1947 the group was developed into the Committee of Mathematical Biology in the Division of Biological Sciences, of which Rashevsky became Chair. He expanded his areas of research during the 1950s to incorporate metabolism, brain, and cardiovascular functions, and areas outside physiology, including sociology, psychology, and history.

During this period he faced some difficulties due to his birth nationality and the Cold War. While never a Communist himself, he refused to sign a loyalty oath both on the grounds of personal liberty and in order to protect members of his department who had some early involvement with communist organizations. As a result of this refusal, the Committee of Mathematical Biology was reduced to Rashevsky and his fellow tenured faculty member, Herbert Landahl, for several years. By the early 1960s, however, Rashevsky had rebuilt the Committee to its original size.

In 1965, a year before his scheduled retirement, he resigned from the University of Chicago and moved to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, to become Professor of Mathematical Biology at the Mental Health Research Institute. He continued to write and publish actively there until his death in Holland, Michigan on January 16th, 1972. His final book, *Organismic Sets: Some Reflections on the Nature of Life and Society*, was published posthumously.

Rashevsky published widely on the subjects of mathematics, biology, and physics including: *Mathematical Biophysics: Physico-Mathematical Foundations of Biology* (1938); *Advances and Applications of Mathematical Biology* (1940); *Mathematical Theory of Human Relations* (1947) and *Mathematical Biology of Social Behaviour* (1951).

Scope Note

The Nicolas Rashevsky papers are organized into eight series; Series I: Personal; Series II: Correspondence; Series III: Writings; Series IV: Writings by Others; Series V: Academic and Professional Service; Series VI: Grant Applications and Funding; Series VII: Oversize; and Series VIII: Restricted.

Series I, Personal, contains newspaper clippings relating to his professional work, a biography, and a brief curriculum vitae.

Series II, Correspondence, contains outgoing and incoming correspondence arranged alphabetically by correspondent. The majority of the series relates to Rashevsky's published work and professional activities, though some personal correspondence is contained in Box 13. Of particular note is the correspondence with fellow members of the Committee of Mathematical Biophysics, including Herbert Landahl, George Karreman, and Anatol Rapoport.

Series III, Writings, contains materials pertaining to Rashevsky's published and unpublished research. The majority of the series is a mixture of correspondence and typescripts, with some annotated manuscripts and diagrams. The series is divided into four subseries: Subseries I: Books; Subseries II: Articles and Chapters in Edited Volumes; Subseries III: Lectures, and Subseries IV: Offprints and Reprints.

Subseries I, Books, contains correspondence and drafts of Rashevsky's published volumes. Of particular interest are several drafts and related diagrams for a volume entitled "Of Cells, Men and Mathematics" which was published after Rashevsky's Death under the title *Organismic Sets* (1972). Subseries II, Articles and Chapters in Edited Volumes, contains manuscripts and typescripts for Rashevsky's published research, organized by title. Subseries III, Lectures, contains a small number of speeches made by Rashevsky, mostly during the 1960s. Subseries IV, contains

offprints and reprints of Rashevsky's published work. Offprints are organized chronologically; reprints are organized by journal title and then chronologically.

Series IV, Writings by Others, contains typescripts of articles by mathematicians, biologists, physicists, and historians contemporary to Rashevsky. The majority of the materials were composed by members of the Committee of Mathematical Biology. Copies of the Australian Journal of Experimental Biology, 1970-1972, are also included in this series.

Series V, Academic and Professional Service, contains materials pertaining to Rashevsky's professional activities on committees, with scientific organizations, and at conferences. The majority of the collection is correspondence and administrative and financial documents relating to the Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics between 1944 and 1965.

Series VI, Grant Applications and Funding, contains national and university-level applications for funding, grant reports and donor correspondence for Rashevsky's research and for the Committee of Mathematical Biology.

Series VII, Oversize, contains various early manuscripts and correspondence. These materials are all in Russian.

Series VIII, Restricted, contains restricted correspondence and student materials. Financial materials in Box 33, are restricted for 50 years from date of record creation. Letters of reference and student evaluations in Box 34 are restricted for 80 years from date of record creation. Medical records in Box 35 are restricted indefinitely.

Related Resources

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

Lillie, Ralph S. Papers, 1907-1942

Subject Headings

- Rashevsky, N. (Nicolas), 1899-1972
- Rapoport, A. (Anatol), 1911-2007
- Weaver, Warren, 1894-1978
- University of Chicago
- Rockefeller Foundation
- Mathematical Biology

- Mathematicians--United States--History--20th century

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