



## **Donald A. Dewsbury: *Monkey Farm. A History of the Yerkes Laboratories of Primate Biology, Orange Park, Florida 1930–1965***

**Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, PA, 347 pp., 2006, \$55.00 (hardback)**

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Published online: 31 July 2007  
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The Yerkes National Primate Research Center of Emory University is one of the 8 officially recognized and federally funded National Primate Research Centers in the United States. Originally founded as the Laboratories of Comparative Psychobiology of Yale University, it later became known as the Yerkes Laboratories of Primate Biology (YLPB). *Monkey Farm* is a history of the first 35 years of the institution, from its founding and establishment in Orange Park, FL, in 1930 to its transfer to Emory University and relocation to Georgia in 1965.

There are several possible ways to write the history of an institution. One is to write a history of the people who founded the institution or contributed most significantly to it. Robert Yerkes, Karl Lashley, and the other early directors of the YLPB were scientists with strong and interesting personalities, who were at the top of their game. In addition to them, many of the main players in the field of primate research before 1965 either worked at the YLPB or had some connection with it. Therefore, writing an early history of the Yerkes Center could have been an opportunity to shed light on the founding fathers of US primatology and what made them tick.

The history of an institution could also be written as a history of the ideas and the goals that led to its founding and guided its early beginnings. Or it could include a historical analysis of the intellectual and cultural context in which the institution was founded and operated. Robert Yerkes was not only the founder and first director of the YLPB but he also played a major role in the establishment of large-scale programs for breeding and use of nonhuman primates in behavioral and biomedical research. He also made fundamental contributions to the growth and success of primatology and comparative psychology as scientific disciplines. Moreover, the

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first 35 years of the history of the YLPB were also a period of time associated with dramatic changes in the way scientific research was done in the United States and other parts of the world.

*Monkey Farm* contains some analyses of the lives, personalities, and intellectual contributions of Robert Yerkes, Karl Lashley, and their contemporaries or successors. For example, we learn that Robert Yerkes was not “socially gifted”; sometimes manipulated his data to make them fit his theories, and fired some of the brightest and most independent young scientists around him because he felt threatened by them. *Monkey Farm* also contains analyses of the historical, cultural, and intellectual context in which the YLPB existed. For example, one learns that private foundations sponsored much scientific research before World War II and federal funding did not become available until much later. By and large, however, *Monkey Farm* is not a history of people or ideas. Instead it is a fact-based account of the origin and chronological changes of the YLPB as a research institution, with its administrative structure, its physical plant and equipment, its funding sources and budgets, and yes, also its research activities and scientific accomplishments.

To write *Monkey Farm*, Dewsbury appears to have reviewed a massive amount of archival material concerning the YLPB including correspondence between people, minutes of meetings, and budgets. In the Preface, he informs us that his original manuscript was much longer and more comprehensive than the current one but it had to be cut in half to become more readable (you can almost feel Dewsbury’s pain when he states that he had to eliminate a lot of pertinent information about the YLPB). Nonetheless, the “more readable” manuscript includes pages and pages of tables listing the names of all the staff that worked at the YLPB along with their birthplaces, birthdates, and years of service, all of the Ph.D. dissertations that were completed in 35 years, and all the operating budgets of the various YLPB administrations. The description of the research activities taking place at the YLPB over the years is also there, but it is quite brief and presented with a textbook style.

*Monkey Farm* contains a great deal of valuable information about the early beginnings of the Yerkes National Primate Research Center. As a historical account, it is well-written, professional, objective, and most of all, detailed. I learned a great deal of new information from this book but had to drink a great deal of coffee to get through it.