



Suzanne Bourgeois

Professor and Founding Director
Regulatory Biology Laboratory

“Today we take the Salk Institute and its success for granted. It is edifying—and makes a good story—to explore what it took to get us here and to be what we are: the idea, the people, the circumstances, the location, the building.”

After a scientific career researching bacterial cell regulation and gene expression in cancer cells, Bourgeois has recently turned her attention to the history of science—specifically, the early history of the Salk Institute. Because she was a witness to the Institute’s history since before its inception, Bourgeois is uniquely qualified to bring that story alive. She also had the privilege, while working in New York and Paris in the 1950s and 1960s, of knowing many of the pundits of molecular biology, some of whom became the founders of the Salk Institute. She therefore has begun work on a book-length history of the Salk Institute, which will be a well-documented personal chronicle that is based on extensive research encompassing archival material, interviews, and her own diaries.

Jonas Salk’s original concept for an institute evolved under many influences, including those of the physicists Robert Oppenheimer and Leo Szilard. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he contacted the scientists who were to become the Institute’s founders: Melvin Cohn, Francis Crick, Renato

Dulbecco, Edwin Lennox, and Jacques Monod. At the same time a mathematician and humanist, Jacob Bronowski, joined the group, and another mathematician and remarkable man became the first chairman of the Board of Trustees: Warren Weaver, who coined the term “molecular biology.” The success of the polio vaccine earned Jonas Salk the respect and friendship of Basil O’Connor, the founding president of the March of Dimes, whose support ultimately made the Salk Institute a reality.

The Institute’s founders belonged to the generation of World War II and the Manhattan Project and, afterward, the Cold War. The original faculty and several of the early presidents and trustees had actively participated in those events, which shaped what they wanted to do, how they operated, and how they saw the future. Most importantly, that background distinguished them as members of an impressive network of outstanding achievers. That legacy of accomplishment remains the foundation of the Salk Institute to this day.



The founding Fellows, resident and non-resident, in February 1966.

Left to right:

Francis Crick, Edwin Lennox, Jacques Monod, Jonas Salk, Leslie Orgel, Melvin Cohn, Salvador Luria, Jacob Bronowski, Renato Dulbecco