

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Grayson Morley
Communications Manager
American Philosophical Society
gmorley@amphilsoc.org
215-701-4427

The American Philosophical Society Announces Acquisition of the Lynn Margulis Papers

The revolutionary scientist comes to the Revolutionary City

PRESS KIT

[Photos](#)

PHILADELPHIA, PA (August 19)—The **American Philosophical Society (APS)** announces the acquisition of the papers of evolutionary biologist and microbiologist **Lynn Margulis** (1938–2011), whose work on symbiosis and evolution made her the greatest contributor to ideas about evolution since Darwin. At over 300 linear feet, the collection is the largest acquisition made by the APS Library in 15 years and represents a significant moment for the APS’s **Center for the History of Science**.

Known for her outspoken support of theories of evolution via symbiosis and cooperation rather than competition, Margulis was a singular figure whose work remains cutting-edge to this day. Her 1967 paper “On the origin of mitosing cells” is now considered a fundamental reconception of biology, though it faced more than 15 rejections before its eventual publication in the *Journal of Theoretical Biology*. Since then, her research into the origins and evolution of bacteria and microbes has proven to be transformative, impacting scientific thinking about everything from how we understand the complexities of the gut microbiome to the effects of climate change on bacteria to informing the search for life beyond our solar system—even anticipating the rise of adult coloring books.

With James Lovelock, Margulis codeveloped the Gaia hypothesis: the idea that the Earth is a self-regulating system that supports life through the interaction and co-evolution of living and nonliving organisms. Margulis’s ideas and her ties to an international scientific network that included Carl Sagan (her first husband), Richard Dawkins, G. Evelyn Hutchinson, Stewart Brand, and Donna Haraway, as well as

numerous students and collaborators, make her one of the most compelling and understudied figures in the history of modern science.

Now safely housed at the APS archives, Margulis's papers have journeyed far, from her office and lab first at Boston University and then at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, to a storage unit in Ashland, Oregon, to Philadelphia. The collection, which consists of correspondence, photographs, research notes, writings, teaching materials, and audiovisual content, spans nearly 170 boxes, with more expected to arrive in the coming months. This collection will significantly bolster the work of the APS's Center for the History of Science, which launched in July 2024.

"The arrival of Margulis's papers signals an important moment for the future of the scientific collections at the APS," said **Adrianna Link**, Ph.D., Curator of History of Science. "While they are a natural complement to the Society's already strong holdings in the history of biology and evolution, what really excites me is how they connect with other areas represented in our collections, particularly in planetary science, astrobiology, cybernetics, and ecology."

The acquisition, which complements a small set of Margulis materials donated to the Library of Congress, also marks a significant addition to the Society's growing collection of papers documenting the work of women scientists, including Nobel Prize-winning geneticist Barbara McClintock, cancer researcher and embryologist Beatrice Mintz, physicist Rose Camille LeDieu Mooney-Slater, and medical scientist and physician Florence Sabin, among others.

"Lynn Margulis saw what others missed. Her theory of symbiosis rewrote the story of evolution itself," said **David Gary**, Ph.D., Associate Director of Collections. "We're honored to preserve the archive at the root of that insight, and we look forward to helping future generations of thinkers consider the world as a web of partnerships instead of continuous competition."

The American Philosophical Society Library is an international center for research with specialties in the history of science, early American history, Native American cultures and languages, and digital innovation. The Margulis Papers are a natural evolution of the Society's holdings, which document over 300 years of scientific innovation in topics spanning from astronomy and zoology and include the works of individuals such as Benjamin Franklin, Lewis and Clark, Charles Darwin, and Nobel

laureates Peyton Rous, Sheldon Glashow, Salvador Luria, and Baruch Blumberg. Margulis's work will now rightly sit alongside other luminaries in the field.

"My mom was beyond prolific," said science writer and editor **Jennifer Margulis**, Ph.D., Margulis's daughter and executrix of her estate, who is writing a book about her mother's life and work. "Her letters and other papers show the astonishing breadth and depth of her knowledge of chemistry, biology, geology, atmospheric science, and systems thinking. Her correspondence with so many luminary scientists, documented in letters written back and forth, debating ideas and sharing details of their private lives, is utterly fascinating. This is a literal treasure trove of scientific information, and we couldn't be more delighted that it will be housed at the American Philosophical Society."

#

ABOUT THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The **American Philosophical Society (APS)**, the oldest learned society in the United States, was founded in 1743 by Benjamin Franklin for the purpose of "promoting useful knowledge." The APS sustains this mission today by engaging leading scholars, scientists, and professionals through elected Membership, supporting research and discovery via grants and fellowships, sparking conversation through its programs, conferences, and books, and by making its research library available to scholars at all stages of their careers. The APS continues to reflect the founders' spirit of inquiry, to provide a forum for the free exchange of ideas, and to convey the conviction that intellectual inquiry and critical thought are inherently in the best interest of the public. To learn more about the APS, visit amphilsoc.org.

###