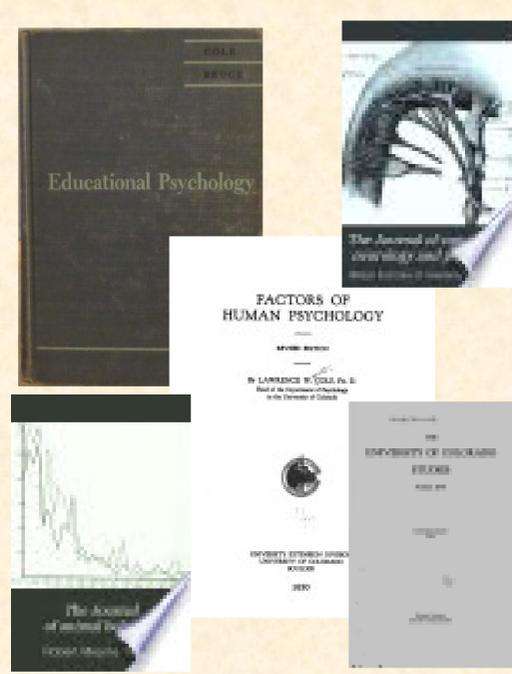


Our First President 1930-31



Lawrence W. Cole PhD, was the first President of RMPA. He was an animal researcher, and academic psychologist. He still has the definitive paper on Raccoon intelligence. He established a colony of raccoons at the University of Oklahoma, He conducted experiments on the processes of learning, association and memory in raccoons. For his studies, Cole relied on E.L. Thorndike's puzzle-box methodology, which involved placing animals in wooden crates from which the animal had to escape by opening the latch or sequence of latches. They observed the number of trials required for successful completion and the extent to which the animal retained the ability to solve the same problem more quickly when confronted again with it. Using this method, they sought what Davis called "a tolerable basis" for ranking the intelligence of raccoons on the phylogenetic scale of evolutionary development. They independently concluded that raccoons bested the abilities of cats and dogs, most closely approximating the mental attributes of monkeys.

His paper was advanced for its time (1907). He meticulously described the conditions under which the animals were kept, and that he took them out for exercise and taught them how to climb trees in preparation for their eventual release. Cole was devoted to the scientific method and tended to discount conjecture and unsubstantiated claims in his field. For that reason he harbored a real disdain for Freudian psychology, which was taken very seriously at the time. His writing is insightful, and possesses a healthy scientific skepticism, which is often entertaining. He trained under Yerkes at Harvard, and led the psychology department at the University of Colorado for a couple of decades. It was at Boulder that he wrote "Factors...", which was used as a text for many years. It combines common sense and genuine pioneer spirit, with nascent modern science.

CORPSES STREWED ABOUT CAMPUS: From the University of Oklahoma to the University of Colorado. In 1908, the Governor of Oklahoma appointed a new set of Oklahoma University Regents who declared that all faculty positions were open and existing faculty would need to re-apply for their old jobs. Lawrence Cole was one of the professors that the Governor and the Board wanted to get rid of. He was accused of immorality: dancing, smoking and playing cards. As it happens, Cole was as straight-laced as his accusers and he was acquitted of those charges. According to Gittinger, he "was not as popular on the campus as Parrington, but he was better known over the State, especially by public-school men, and he was not unpopular in Norman." Cole was elected regularly to the Norman School board. Gittinger acquits him of all charges of immorality: "Cole was too busy to dance or play cards at the time, and, contrary to the statement of Regent Linebaugh and others, he did not smoke at all. Cole was fired for two reasons. His connection with the American Book Company angered Regent Hickam, and Regent Linebaugh had somebody else in mind for the job.

Somehow rumors began to spread after the firings that the Regents just might reconsider the dismissal of Lawrence Cole. Former students wrote emotional letters straight to the governor, asking that Cole be kept. "The case for his discharge was the charge of immoral conduct," wrote one alumnus. "While a student in the University I was in close contact with Professor Cole and knew him both in the class room and as a man. I have always considered him one of the most moral men that I have ever met with. "His successor, I am told, is a man who has never taken special work in Psychology and has never taught it. His only qualification, I am informed, is that he is a good strong South Methodist". Another student wrote that "Many men who to us alumni were regarded as the best qualified men in every sense for the places have gone, but perhaps no surprise was so great as that of Mr. Lawrence W. Cole from the chair of Psychology." It was all in vain. The Regents never considered reinstating Cole, and he headed off to teach for a year at Wellesley, earn a Ph.D. from Harvard, and then enjoy a long and notable career at the University of Colorado.