

Notorious Inmate and Gallant Little Lady:

The Education of Nathan Leopold

In late November 1930, Helen Williams (*right*) received a letter written in pencil on a sheet of cheap tablet paper stamped "CENSOR." The return address was 1900 Collins Street, Joliet, Illinois, and the number 9306 followed the name. The letter was from a man who wanted to study advanced mathematics by correspondence. He described his previous math work, said he would like to study "The Calculus," and asked for advice on the best courses in which to enroll.

The routine response would have been to send a course bulletin and perhaps a form letter stipulating enrollment procedures. In this case, however, Helen Williams took the time to study the request. Williams was the director of the Bureau of Correspondence Study at the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa) in Iowa City. After consulting a math professor, Williams wrote back that the individual's completion of high-school algebra and his independent work in plane trigonometry should have prepared him to do satisfactory work in analytic geometry. For a fee of \$14, he could enroll for three semester hours of credit as an unclassified student.

A few days later, Nathan Leopold Jr. drew a money order from his account in the warden's office of the Il-

by Von Pittman

To
N. F. Leopold Jr. #7306
1200 Parkway St.
Joliet, Ill.

To
The Secretary,
Correspondence Dept.,
University of Iowa,
Iowa City, Ia.

Nov. 20, 1930

RECORDED



1925 UNIVERSITY OF IOWA HAWKEYE YEARBOOK

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Dear Sir:-
Would it be possible for me to enroll for a course in your Correspondence Department? If so, I should be grateful if you would send me complete information on the courses offered, and the procedure to be followed in enrolling.
I am particularly interested in courses in Mathematics and may state that my preparation consists of two years High School Algebra, one year of Plane Geometry and the working thru, without formal instruction, of Keyson + Ingold's Elements of Plane Trigonometry up to the discussion of the General Angle. I desire to prepare myself for study of the Calculus, and perhaps you could inform me what course or courses should be taken as prerequisites.
Very sincerely yours,
N. F. Leopold Jr.



05931. ILLINOIS STATE PENITENTIARY, JOLIET.

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linois State Penitentiary in Joliet and applied for enrollment in the correspondence program. Leopold's enrollment inaugurated a largely accidental partnership between one of the country's most notorious convicts and an obscure university bureaucrat in Iowa.

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IN THE SPRING of 1924, Nathan Leopold Jr. and his friend Richard Loeb kidnapped and murdered 14-year-old Bobby Franks in a Chicago suburb, then sent a ransom note to his father. Although the two young men had begun planning their crime in the late fall, their choice of a victim was last minute and almost random.

Leopold and Loeb were highly intelligent, but their alibis and evasions after their arrest fell apart and they were convicted. The district attorney asked for the death penalty. Only their youth—Leopold was 19, Loeb 18—and their families' good sense in hiring acclaimed criminal defense lawyer Clarence Darrow saved them from the gallows.

From the beginning of their incarceration at Joliet, both Leopold and Loeb enrolled in correspondence courses. Leopold was working his way through Hebrew textbooks, and Loeb was enrolled in a Latin course from Columbia University. Between them, they would enroll in numerous courses both practical—business shorthand—and esoteric—Egyptian hieroglyphics, Greek comedy, and Sanskrit.

Leopold and Loeb differed from the typical correspondence student in several ways. First, they were not only convicts, but "lif-ers." Both were graduates of elite private prep schools: Leopold from Harvard School, and Loeb from the University of Chicago's university high school. By age 19, Leopold had already received his undergraduate degree from the University of Chicago and was enrolled as a first-year law student there. Loeb had graduated from the University of Michigan at 18 and begun graduate study in history at the University of Chicago.

While in prison, Leopold became obsessed with learning how to calculate the area under a curve. "I got hold of a catalogue of the Home Study Department of the State University of Iowa and addressed a letter to the director," he later wrote, referring to his inquiry in late 1930 to Helen Williams. "In so doing I acquired a friend who has stood by me steadfastly ever since."

Why Leopold chose to explore courses at the University of Iowa rather than at the University of Chi-

cago or some other institution is unknown. Perhaps he looked at the catalogs of several programs, either shelved in the prison library or provided by his family, and then inquired about the courses that most interested him. Helen Williams's almost certain recognition of Leopold's name probably accounts for her decision to send an encouraging reply rather than a form letter. And the fact that Leopold received a personal answer from Iowa, with a considered response to his question, no doubt made its program attractive.

Helen Williams also had studied at the University of Chicago. After earning her undergraduate degree

PAPERS OF NATHAN F. LEOPOLD, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES, IOWA CITY, IOWA



Defense attorney Clarence Darrow is flanked by Nathan Leopold (left) and Richard Loeb as they listen to the sentence—life for murder, plus 99 years for kidnapping.

at the University of Iowa in 1910, she had completed two quarters of graduate work in history at Chicago. Then she taught for two years in Scranton, Pennsylvania. She returned to the University of Iowa, where she worked in various capacities for its Extension Division and became the first director of the division's Bureau of Correspondence Study in 1920.

While still working on his first math correspondence course with Professor John Reilly, Leopold asked to enroll in an advanced Hebrew course. This presented an embarrassing problem for Williams. As often happened in correspondence or independent study programs, while the course listing appeared in the catalog, the study guide and lesson sheets had never actually been written. Professor Moses Jung had agreed to write them but had not gotten around to it.

Williams contacted Jung and explained the prob-

lem. "I am enclosing a letter from a person whose name I believe you will recognize at once as a prisoner in Illinois State Penitentiary at Joliet." She continued, "I am writing Mr. Leopold, telling him that I am asking for your advice, but I am not telling him that our course in Hebrew language has never been written. I believe this is the first actual request that we have ever had for it." She suggested providing an "arranged" course, in which Leopold and Jung would communicate directly, outside the correspondence program. She would turn Leopold's entire tuition of \$12 over to Jung, without taking the Correspondence Bureau's normal overhead charge. Jung assented. He not only guided Leopold through the arranged course, but he also frequently loaned his own books to the prisoner and worked with him one-on-one for several more years as Leopold studied large portions of the Talmud and medieval and contemporary Hebrew literature.

Upon completing his Math 4C lessons and receiving comments from his professor in March 1931, Leopold asked Williams to allow John Taylor, superintendent of education for the Illinois State Penitentiary, to proctor his exams. Williams agreed and mailed Leopold's exam to Taylor. After receiving nothing from either Taylor or Leopold for more than a month, she wrote Taylor, gently reminding him that exams should be administered and returned promptly. "It would be a good thing if Mr. Leopold could take his examination before long."

Williams did not know about the violence that had broken out inside both the "Old Prison" at Joliet and the more modern facility at Stateville, five miles away. Since late February, the Old Prison had been in a state of high tension after guards—who had been tipped off—laid in wait for an expected escape, then shot and killed three prisoners as they tried to scale the wall. The next day, convicts set fires (one with Leopold's lighter) in retaliation. The guards quickly extinguished the fires. A riot broke out in the kitchen, and the inmates captured a guard captain and broke his arm. The guards on the walls fired down into the yard, killing another two prisoners. Immediately after regaining control, the staff shook down the cells. When Leopold was allowed to return to his cell, he found that all of his books, correspondence, and papers had been confiscated.

Shortly after the Old Prison riot, Leopold was told that he would be moved to the new facility at Stateville. Just as the prison bus transporting him and 29 other prisoners pulled up to the Stateville gate, a riot broke out. The bus returned to Joliet. A few days later, after the administration had regained control, Leopold once again was transported to Stateville.

Given the state of affairs, Superintendent Taylor's choice not to assign a high priority to proctoring Leopold's test is not surprising. In late April, he sent Williams two communications. In a conventional business letter, he simply said that he had not yet been able to schedule the exam and that the textbook that Leopold had borrowed from the university library was lost. He did not mention the shakedown. However, in an undated, handwritten note, Taylor told Williams, "On account of our recent riot in prison, I have been unable to give Leopold the examination." He hoped to be in a position to do it soon.

Williams used her own funds to purchase another copy of the textbook and mailed it to Leopold so he could prepare for the test. Finally, in late May, Taylor returned the completed exam and said that the lost textbook had been found and would be returned.

Helen Williams became a sort of de facto academic adviser and advocate for Leopold, frequently working as a go-between. In October 1931, Leopold was about to complete his second math course. "My aim in studying Mathematics is two-fold: first, I am interested in the purely cultural aspects of the subject (or perhaps it is just innate curiosity), but specifically, I should like to work toward an understanding of the Mathematics of Relativity," he wrote Williams. "I have no idea how long this would require, nor what specific courses would be necessary, and it is precisely this point which I should like to have explained."

Williams took Leopold's question to Reilly, who suggested the second course in integral calculus as the next logical step. While his department had a policy against offering advanced math courses by correspondence, Reilly hoped it could be changed. However, should that not happen soon, he would consider arranging some individual courses for Leopold in differential equations, analytical geometry, mechanics, and perhaps the theory of equations. Williams passed his message along to Leopold.

* * * * *

LEOPOLD CREDITED his friend and fellow felon Richard Loeb with the idea of creating a correspondence-study high school inside Stateville. Until then, the sole school in the penitentiary offered only grades one through eight and covered only the most fundamental skills. Most participants were barely literate, at least when they began. The elementary school was classified as a work assignment for prisoners, but it offered fewer privileges, considerably lower status, and slightly less commissary money than did work assignments in the

carpentry shop or kitchen, for example. Essentially, all this amounted to a disincentive. Students were not allowed to request other work assignments, and inmates with more desirable work assignments rarely chose to attend school.

Loeb and Leopold decided that the greatest need for education inside Joliet and Stateville was at the high-school level. They chose the correspondence model for several reasons. They knew that few men would participate should they be forced to give up the status and privileges of their other work assignments. With correspondence courses, they could hold onto their work assignments and do their schoolwork during cell time. Because there were no extrinsic rewards for participation, only men who sincerely wanted instruction at the high-school level for its own sake would enroll, and it could be offered at virtually no cost to the institution.

In a formal proposal prepared for Superintendent Taylor and Warden Frank Whipp, Loeb and Leopold explained, "The advantages of this system are obvious. It would place a high school education within the reach of any inmate industrious enough to take advantage of the privilege. To those interested in some particular subject, such as history or languages, it would offer a chance to spend their spare time pleasantly and profitably. Finally, since certificates of completion could be given, following satisfactory work in a course, the inmate would have a definite goal to strive for. A great deal of the irregular studying, at the present time done by inmates, could thus be directed into channels which would benefit them and have a direct effect on their rehabilitation as members of society."

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CORRESPONDENCE study was not a new idea in the United States generally, nor in prisons specifically. Indeed, this instructional format enjoyed great popularity in the period between the World Wars. During the 1920s, more than two million people annually enrolled in correspondence courses, usually vocationally or professionally oriented. As educational reformer Dorothy Canfield Fisher noted, that two million exceeded the number of students enrolled in all of the postsecondary institutions in the country.

In 1906, the New Jersey State Prison had introduced correspondence courses to the American penal system. Some state-funded prison education programs made correspondence courses, supplied by either commercial entities or university extension programs, available to inmates. Most offered little beyond lists of assigned readings followed by sheets of objective ques-

tions. Few offered serious instruction. Even then, only the few inmates whose families could afford to pay for such courses had access to them.

Loeb, who sometimes did domestic work in Warden Whipp's quarters, told the warden's wife about the idea for a correspondence school. She encouraged him to take it forward. Whipp eventually granted Loeb a hearing that resulted in permission to open the school.

Leopold and Loeb spent the last two months of 1932 preparing course materials. Leopold told Williams that they had modeled their school on university departments such as hers. They intended to offer as comprehensive a high-school curriculum as practicable. The teachers would be inmate volunteers. Superintendent Taylor would supervise the entire project, to be known as the Stateville Correspondence School (SCS).

Once again Leopold asked Williams for help. In particular, he needed lesson sheets: "I realize that this is a bold request, but I feel sure that in view of the very good purpose to which this material will be put, you will not consider me presumptuous in asking whether you could see your way clear to helping us in this way."

He also cautioned Williams to keep the information about the school to herself. He knew from experience that publicity could cause problems. Shortly after arriving at Joliet in 1924, he had begun teaching small groups of students. A story in the Chicago papers provoked an outcry about allowing a convict of his notoriety and "deficient character" to teach other men. The warden had shut down his classes and Leopold had not taught since. In 1931, an individual in Texas, probably alerted by another news story, wrote the president of the University of Iowa that people like Leopold should receive "moral training," not academic credits: "No student ought to be graduated who will not agree he is his brother's keeper."

Williams enthusiastically supported the project. In addition to course guides, lesson sheets, and exams for numerous courses, she sent books that were out of date for her courses but potentially useful at the prison school, checked out books from the university library in her own name for the prisoners, and arranged loans of books from sympathetic professors. The University of Chicago's high school and its collegiate Home Study Department also contributed instructional materials. Several years later, the University of Illinois would provide some courses.

These materials proved invaluable as outlines and templates, but Loeb and Leopold decided that the materials needed considerably more detail. Loeb wrote a textbook for seventh- and eighth-grade English and designed the course around his own experience

with prisoners and his perception of their practical educational needs. Because the greatest need of all the men upon release would be to seek employment, he designed the course to emphasize business correspondence. It consistently enrolled the highest annual number of students.

Leopold's guiding rationale, as it appeared in the school's annual reports, suggested that education could lead to better employment prospects and reduced rates of recidivism and parole violations, a proposition that Leopold would test statistically. But further, he argued, "[the school] furnishes an adequate outlet for pent-up mental energy, which finds few other opportunities for vigorous application; it offers opportunity to keep the mental faculties alert by constant exercise; above all it furnishes an excellent distraction from the brooding and worry to which many prisoners are prone." If true,

the SCS program would not only improve the mental health of the inmates, it would make the prisons safer and more secure.

Because so many men lacked language skills, the school offered remedial courses in English grammar and composition, but it also offered a full high-school curriculum, with the exceptions of physics and chemistry, which would have required lab equipment and supplies and additional security measures. The SCS study guides rivaled those of the large state and private universities. This is because the bulk of the first round of courses originated at the universities of Chicago, Iowa, and Illinois. Loeb's—and especially Leopold's—commitment to academic standards also contributed to the instructional quality of course materials.

* * * * *

Nathan F. Leopold Jr. 6923
1900 Collins St.
Joliet, Ill. 948

Time started: 5:10
Time finished: 7:20
Time elapsed: 2 hr

1. $y'' = 12x$
 $y' = 6x^2 + C$
 $y = 2x^3 + C_1x + C_2$

at (1, 2)
 $3 = C_1$
 $2 = 2 + C_2$
 $C_2 = 0$

$y = 2x^3 - 3x + 3$ (ans.)

Check

10 $y = 2x^3 - 3x + 3$
 $2 = 2(1)^3 - 3(1) + 3$
 $y' = 6x^2 - 3$
 m at (1, 2) = $6(1)^2 - 3 = 3$
 $y'' = 12x$

2. (a) $\int x \sqrt{a^2 - x^2} dx = -\frac{1}{2} \int (a^2 - x^2)^{1/2} dx$
 $-\frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{2}{3} (a^2 - x^2)^{3/2} + C = -\frac{1}{3} (a^2 - x^2)^{3/2} + C$
 Check: $d \left[-\frac{1}{3} (a^2 - x^2)^{3/2} + C \right] = -\frac{1}{3} \cdot \frac{3}{2} (a^2 - x^2)^{1/2} \cdot (-2x) dx = x(a^2 - x^2)^{1/2} dx$

(b) $\int \frac{1}{x^2 + 6x + 13} dx = \int \frac{1}{(x+3)^2 + 4} dx = \frac{1}{2} \arctan \frac{x+3}{2} + C$ (ans.)
 $d \frac{1}{2} \arctan \frac{x+3}{2} + C = \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{1 + \frac{(x+3)^2}{4}} \cdot \frac{1}{2} dx = \frac{1}{4} \cdot \frac{4}{4 + (x+3)^2} dx = \frac{1}{x^2 + 6x + 13} dx$

Miss Helen Williams,
Director, Extension Division,
University of Iowa,
Iowa City, Iowa.

My dear Miss Williams:—
 Your letter containing registration for the next course in Mathematics—Integral Calculus, has been received, but probably I am a bit doubtful as to whether to go on with this work or not. The only uncertainty is the fact that Math 5 is the last course listed in your Extension Division catalog, in this department. I should successfully complete Math 5 and would that be all the work I could do from the University of Iowa, or do you think it might be possible to arrange for my courses, as you were kind enough to do Hebrew.

If it should prove possible to arrange more advanced courses, what would they comprise? I realize, of course, that this depends upon my ultimate purpose in studying mathematics, and that a program would have to be mapped out to suit that purpose. Perhaps, if I could take this matter up directly with Prof. Reilly, or perhaps you could discuss it with him.

My aim in studying Mathematics is two-fold: first I am interested in the purely cultural aspects of the subject (or perhaps it is just innate curiosity), but specifically, I should like to work toward an understanding of the Mathematics of Relativity. I have no idea how long this would require, nor what specific courses would be necessary, and it is precisely this point which I should like to have explained. I feel sure that you will be kind enough to favor me in this matter as you have in so many others.

Sincerely yours,
 N. F. Leopold Jr.

CORR. 3

PLACE X IN PROPER SQUARE

MR. MRS.
 MISS BISTER

Date: Nov 25, 1930
 (Month) (Day) (Year)

PRINT LEOPOLD Nathan F. #9306
 (Last name) (First name) (Middle name)

Mailing address: 1900 Collins St. Joliet, Ill.
 Course title: Analytic Geometry Math 5
 Course No. Cr. Grade Instructor

Registration expires _____
 Signature of Director of Correspondence Study _____

Miss Williams and Prof. Reilly:

...I am at present working all day on classification and cataloging of a large number of new books which we have been fortunate enough to secure for our Library, and then often continue the work during the evening. The amount of leisure left is like one of the Professor's infinitesimals in that it approaches zero as a limit....

Very sincerely yours,
 N. F. Leopold Jr.

#3 Math 6 C
 Final Ex.

The parabolas intersect at (4a, 4a).

The area under the parabola $y^2 = 4ax$, from the origin to $x = 4a$ is

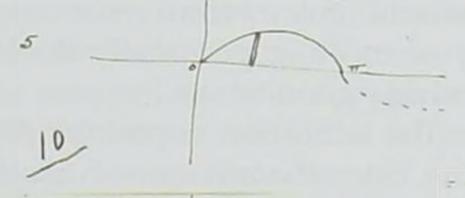
$$\int_0^{4a} y dx = \int_0^{4a} 2\sqrt{ax} dx = 2\sqrt{a} \cdot \frac{2}{3} x^{3/2} \Big|_0^{4a} = \frac{4}{3} a^{1/2} (4a)^{3/2} = \frac{4}{3} a^{1/2} \cdot 8a^{3/2} = \frac{32}{3} a^2$$

The y-axis, the x-axis, the parabola, and the ordinate $x = 4a$ is

$$4a \cdot \frac{4a}{2} = \frac{16a^2}{2} = 8a^2$$

Hence the area between the curves =

$$\frac{32}{3} a^2 - 8a^2 = \frac{16}{3} a^2 \text{ (ans.)}$$

5 

10 $V = \pi \int_0^{\pi} y^2 dx$
 $= \pi \int_0^{\pi} \sin^2 x dx$
 $= \pi \left[\frac{1}{2} x - \frac{\sin 2x}{4} \right]_0^{\pi} = \frac{\pi^2}{2}$

6 $s = \int_0^{\sqrt{2}} ds = \int_0^{\sqrt{2}} \sqrt{1 + \left(\frac{dy}{dx}\right)^2} dx$
 $y = \log x$
 $\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{1}{x}$
 $\int_1^{\sqrt{2}} \sqrt{1 + \frac{1}{x^2}} dx = \int_1^{\sqrt{2}} \sqrt{\frac{x^2 + 1}{x^2}} dx = \int_1^{\sqrt{2}} \frac{\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}{x} dx$
 Let $z = \sqrt{x^2 + 1}$
 $z^2 = x^2 + 1$
 $x^2 = z^2 - 1$
 $x = \sqrt{z^2 - 1}$
 $dx = \frac{z dz}{\sqrt{z^2 - 1}}$
 $\int_{z=1}^{z=\sqrt{3}} \frac{z \cdot \frac{z dz}{\sqrt{z^2 - 1}}}{\sqrt{z^2 - 1}} = \int_1^{\sqrt{3}} \frac{z^2 dz}{z^2 - 1} = \int_1^{\sqrt{3}} \left(1 + \frac{1}{z^2 - 1} \right) dz = \int_1^{\sqrt{3}} \left(1 + \frac{1}{2(z-1)} + \frac{1}{2(z+1)} \right) dz$
 $= z + \frac{1}{2} \log \frac{z-1}{z+1} \Big|_1^{\sqrt{3}} = 3 + \frac{1}{2} \log \frac{\sqrt{3}-1}{\sqrt{3}+1} - \left(1 + \frac{1}{2} \log \frac{1-1}{1+1} \right) = 2 + \frac{1}{2} \log \frac{\sqrt{3}-1}{\sqrt{3}+1}$

THE SCHOOL OPENED in January 1933, with 22 students enrolled in Spanish, English, history, and mathematics. Sixty-four additional students had applied for admission, pending verification of their claims to have received an eighth-grade education. The correspondence method made it convenient for men at the prison in Joliet to take courses also. The two prisons were located only a few miles apart and operated under a single administration. Over time, several dozen inmates from other male units of the Illinois penal system also enrolled.

Loeb and Leopold administered the program under the supervision of the education superintendent. The SCS faculty members were a well-educated, colorful lot. Former University of Kansas student Teddy Dillon, the "society bandit," taught English. Attorney, teacher, and kidnapper Joseph Pursifull offered Latin. Forger Mark Oettinger took charge of some of the math courses.

The penitentiary's administration—no doubt with a wary eye toward public reaction—stated its support for a program that "would help solve the problem of idleness." The *Chicago Tribune's* coverage did not mention Leopold, even though he took the largest role in creating SCS. Indeed, both Loeb and Leopold worried that the public might brand the school as a frivolous and misdirected exercise. Leopold said, "We'd obviate that by seeing to it that our courses were tougher and more complete than corresponding courses outside. We'd lean over backward in setting high academic standards—higher, just because we were convicts, than would be necessary in the free world."

Leopold and Helen Williams maintained a respectful, businesslike correspondence until 1934, when Leopold was admitted to the prison hospital for minor surgery. Williams sent a personal note, wishing him a quick recovery. Later the same year she wrote that she had been in the town of Joliet recently to see friends. She had considered seeking permission for a visit, "but since I felt so certain that my request would be refused I did not make the attempt."

Leopold replied, "I was particularly touched, Miss Williams, by your desire to stop in for a little visit. I can think of nothing which would give me more pleasure and to which I would look forward more eagerly than the opportunity of meeting personally the lady who has been so extremely good to me."

A year later the education superintendent wrote her that "judging from the amount of sunshine you have at one time and another managed to inject into his particular life, [Leopold] feels that you are a personage of quite sufficient importance to justify anyone

whatsoever in waiving regulations in your favor." Williams soon received permission to visit, and Leopold and Loeb showed her the school and the prison's Sociological Research Office.

Williams and Leopold became fast friends. He wrote that he had "adopted" her—she was now "Aunt Helen." She began addressing him as "Babe," the nickname Leopold's family had given him as a child and still used. Although Williams had already made a major commitment of time and energy to SCS, her new friendship with Leopold strengthened the partnership that was serving hundreds of convicts.

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ON THE MORNING of January 28, 1936, Leopold and Loeb were enjoying some of the privileges that had been conferred on them—directly or indirectly—for their work with SCS. Instead of going to the dining hall for breakfast, they had sweet rolls delivered to their cells. When they got to their office, they graded papers and worked on plans for a new math course. One of the chief privileges was access to the washroom and shower adjoining the office, and Loeb decided to shower before lunch. A former cellmate, James Day, entered the room, carrying a straight razor that he had kept hidden in the Protestant chaplain's office. A few minutes later, Loeb staggered out of the washroom, having sustained at least 56 slashes. Day handed the weapon to a guard and said that he had been forced to defend himself against Loeb's sexual advances. In spite of the efforts of seven doctors, and with his friend Leopold in the room, Loeb bled out in the prison hospital.

Day's motive has never been clearly established. Some conjecture that the role of prison privileges, most importantly commissary goods, provoked his attack. Until 1935, inmates had enjoyed unlimited commissary privileges and could spend as much as they liked from their prison accounts. Loeb's family gave him an allowance of \$50 a month, and he used it to provide goods to friends and to control others. When Warden Joseph Ragen arrived in 1935, he ended the largesse of the more monied prisoners. Did Day resent no longer receiving perks from Loeb? Or had Loeb awarded privileges to coerce Day into assenting to his persistent sexual advances? The Catholic prison chaplain, Father Eligius Weir, believed that, if anything, Day had been enraged because Loeb had rejected his sexual overtures.

The state's attorney tried Day, demanding the death penalty. However, as usual, no prisoner would testify against another, particularly in a capital case. Be-

yond that, the foreman later described a homophobic consensus among the jury members. Finally, it is possible—even probable—that nobody wanted to convict the man who had killed one of the perpetrators of the “crime of the century.” After less than an hour of deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of “not guilty.”

Warden Ragen, frustrated by the verdict, sought to avoid further trouble by removing both Day and Leopold from the general prison population at Stateville. He sent Leopold to the mental unit, or “bug cells.” Ragen told him this was for his own protection, but Leopold never accepted this reasoning. In isolation, he could not resume his SCS work assignment for six months.

When he returned, he considered asking for a different work assignment. He associated the school with his slain friend, he said, and this made it difficult to continue. He learned, however, that in his absence the school had suffered. Many men had quit sending in lessons (although most returned after he contacted them). It was becoming difficult to replace instructors who were paroled. Most of the remaining teachers were less committed than he and had secured new work assignments with more privileges. Leopold talked enough instructors into continuing to keep the school going, saying that it should be a memorial to Loeb.

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LEOPOLD CONTINUED to run the school—without Loeb but with increasing support from the warden’s office and Helen Williams. State and national educators began to take notice of SCS, particularly educators from the Chicago area. In the late 1930s, William Johnson and Don Rogers of the Chicago Board of Education administered some of the SCS tests to 500 high-school students. According to Leopold, the lowest grades of SCS students closely matched the highest grades of the Chicago students. Johnson arranged to grant SCS students academic credit at any Chicago high school upon their release. The state educational bureaucracy also inspected SCS and adopted the same policy. When SCS added courses at the junior-college level to its curriculum, it changed its name to the Stateville Correspondence School and Junior College. In 1941 it allowed students from anywhere in the United States to enroll.

The SCS’s inmate faculty created an honorary advisory council of five individuals who had significantly assisted the school. Sociologists Ernest Burgess (University of Chicago), Edwin Sutherland (Indiana University), and Arthur Todd (Northwestern) received this honor, as well as Father Weir and Helen Williams.

Also with Williams’s help, Leopold received top-

drawer assistance from Everet F. Lindquist, the University of Iowa professor who had created the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in 1935 and would later introduce the American College Testing Program (ACT). Leopold wanted to develop a survey. Williams wrote Lindquist, “I am sending along a letter which came to me yesterday morning which is more or less self-explanatory. The letter addressed to me was written by Nathan Leopold. Of course, it may not come out under his name. He is not supposed to be working on this research, but he knows so much more about it than anyone else and is so interested in it.”

Leopold wanted to compare the rates of parole violations by inmates who had taken courses with SCS against those who had not. With Lindquist’s assistance, he controlled for such factors as age and intelligence. “When correction is made for all these factors,” he reported, “students violate parole from a third to a fourth less than do comparable non-students.” He explained, “The chances [that] the difference in favor of the students is due to chance are one in twenty-five.”

This was good enough for Helen Williams. She showed off the study to several Iowa professors and told sociologist F. E. Haynes that Leopold “has been trying to prove that the prison school is a good thing and I believe he has proved it scientifically.”

Between 1933 and 1941, students in the Joliet, Stateville, and Menard units of the Illinois penal system, plus a handful of other units, completed a total of 2,135 correspondence courses, ranging from a low of 30 courses in the first year to 436 in 1940. By 1941, SCS offered a selection of 120 courses; its faculty graded and returned an average of 968 lessons per month; and each student completed an average of 2.3 lessons monthly. (It did not record enrollments from institutions outside Illinois in its count.)

Well before March 1941, Leopold had decided that he needed to leave the school. Warden Ragen had cancelled all of the privileges that had once made it a plum assignment, and it had devolved into a situation of close confinement and hard work. After asking Ragen several times for a new job and being ignored, he approached another warden in the prison yard and asked him directly for a new assignment, preferably in the x-ray room of the prison hospital. More than a month later, he received notice to report to the hospital for his new assignment. Even though he was no longer involved in the administration of SCS, he would continue to grade courses for a decade.

In 1947 Leopold was himself the object of study. Still working in the hospital, he, along with other inmates, participated in a project testing antimalarial drugs. His

interest in learning had not slackened. Williams received a letter from the warden's office: "I am writing to you at the request of Nathan Leopold, who, as you know, is assigned to our malaria project. Nate has told me of your kindness in obtaining for him information about the dissection of fruit flies. . . . We are especially interested in securing a copy of the book by Darlington on 'The handling of chromosomes.' . . . Nate asks me to apologize for causing so much trouble but tells me that you are quite used to his being a nuisance."

The University of Iowa's Correspondence Bureau apparently closed its file on SCS when Leopold was reassigned in 1941. There is no evidence that Helen Williams maintained any involvement with SCS after that date, although she continued to direct the bureau until 1949. SCS continued its operations until 1954, when the Illinois

State Prison School System finally created a comprehensive education system (named Stateville Schools) and incorporated SCS as one of its four major divisions.

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WHY DID LEOPOLD and Loeb invest so much time and effort in creating and administering SCS? And why did Leopold persist in his stewardship after Loeb died? Did they envision the school as an opportunity to provide a needed service to men they considered oppressed and in need, or did they exploit it as a means of making serving time easier, more pleasant, and, with luck, shorter? According to Leopold, Loeb advanced the idea as a way to improve educational opportunities inside the prisons.

Dear Nathan:

. . . I told [Professor Feigl] that you were finding *Axiomatic Biology* pretty deep and he says he is not surprised. . . . He does say that mastering it is largely a matter of patience and I assured him that you had plenty of that. . . .

Sincerely yours,
[Helen Williams]

Dear Mr. Leopold:

I am sorry that circumstances made me an even poorer correspondent than I am anyway. But, settled with a Research Fellowship in New York, I am beginning to breathe a little more freely and should enjoy hearing from you.

Did you find anything sufficiently attractive in the problem of formulating an empirical (or 'scientific') realism? . . . I am working on the Methodology of Scientific Explanation and in that connection I am interested in the problem 'construction vs. inference' in regard to theoretical concepts. . . .

Any suggestions you may have along these lines will meet with great interest on my part. . . .

With best wishes, yours,
[Professor Herbert Feigl
Philosophy of Science]

Dear Professor Feigl:

. . . I couldn't resist telling you about Nathan's reaction to D'Abro's "The Decline of Mechanism."

. . . In my letter, I remarked that we were sending him some more light summer reading - meaning to be funny. He wrote back and said that I was doing just that; the book was so fascinating that he could hardly lay it down when the lights went out in his cell. . . . He has returned D'Abro because some student has asked for it and we did not have nerve to ask the librarian to renew it.

Sincerely yours,
[Helen Williams]

Books on Professor Feigl's list already read by philosophy student

- P. W. Bridgman: The logic of modern physics
- Max Born: The restless universe
- Cohen: Reason and nature
- A. S. Eddington: The nature of the physical world
- J. Jeans: The new background of science
- E. Schrödinger: Science and the human temperament
- G.F.W. Swann: The architecture of the universe
- B. Davink: The natural sciences
- X H. Reichenbach: Philosophie der Raum-Zeit-Lehre
Wahrscheinlichkeitslehre
- Ph. Frank: Das Kausalgesetz
- B. Russell: Our knowledge of the external world

Books not available at our State Library

- A. J. Ayer: Language, Truth and Logic
 - Dampier-Whetham: History of Science
 - Loeb & Adams: The development of physical thought
 - Max Born: Einstein's theory of relativity (Methuen, London)
 - M. Planck: Survey of physics
 - G. H. Lewis: The anatomy of science
 - H. Poincare: The foundations of science
 - K. Popper: Logik der Forschung
 - E. Mach: Mechanics
 - C. S. Peirce: Chance, Love (sic) and Logic
 - X X X H. Reichenbach: Experience & Prediction (Chicago U. Press, 1938)
 - X J. H. Woodger: (a little diff) read it last
 - X X S. K. Langer, Intro. to Symbolic Logic (Houghton-Mifflin 1937)
- Axiomatic Biology*
- Question
interest
difficulties*

Leopold continued it out of a sense of duty to Loeb.

Leopold presented his version of his motives in his memoir, *Life Plus 99 Years*. His chief reason for writing the memoir was to promote and enhance his chances for parole. Opportunism was definitely a factor. However, his long correspondence with Helen Williams seems to reveal a genuine idealism. He also took obvious pride in the post-release success of some of its alumni and the State of Illinois's certification of the school's effectiveness.

Administering SCS had immediate, tangible rewards, although Loeb and Leopold hadn't expected such privileges when they began planning. Once the school was operational, its pay matched that of such desirable assignments as the woodworking shop and the kitchen (which had not been the case in earlier educational programs). This kept Leopold and Loeb flush in prison currency—tobacco and other commissary goods—until Warden Ragen changed the rules. When Warden Whipp assigned the school an office, one with its own washroom, Leopold and Loeb gained a great degree of privacy, a rare and precious commodity in prison. They had unprecedented access to most parts of the prison. At least once, their privileged status saved them from serious disciplinary trouble. A guard captain discovered Loeb, Leopold, and two other men sharing a bottle of good whiskey. While the four were immediately sent to solitary confinement, both Loeb and Leopold were released in under an hour.

Like any school anywhere using any teaching format, SCS experienced cheating problems. Warden Ragen initiated the practice of recording all grades in each student's file, so that the parole board could consider school participation when evaluating parole applications. This attracted men with no real interest in school other than beefing up their files. Sometimes convicts would find someone else to do their lessons. But this tactic had little impact because each course required two proctored exams. However, after Ragen left in 1941, the school's instructors, who had been residing in a different area than the students, were moved back into common housing, and most of their privileges were withdrawn, and Leopold heard rumors that embittered teachers were selling grades. Eventually after Ragen's return, the teachers were moved away from most of their students and back into a separate cell house; according to Leopold, the selling of grades ceased.

Gene Lovitz advanced a cynical view of Leopold's motivation. Lovitz began a sentence for armed robbery at Stateville in 1948. He and Leopold became close friends and regularly talked for hours about all manner

of topics. Their friendship ended when Lovitz rejected what he considered Leopold's sexual advances. Even so, he maintained the highest regard for Leopold's intelligence. However, for all of his regard for Leopold's intellect, Lovitz believed his achievements were overrated and that "he and Loeb had established the prison school for the opportunity of getting together."

While Loeb probably and Leopold certainly had self-serving motives, their school nonetheless benefited the penal system and prison population of Illinois. There can be no doubt that the two men made SCS a useful, effective, and respected institution.

* * * * *

ALTHOUGH HELEN WILLIAMS'S involvement with SCS effectively ended in 1941, she maintained her correspondence and friendship with Leopold. For ten years, she traveled to Stateville for all of his parole and clemency hearings. In 1958, she was one of several who appeared to testify in what turned out to be his final parole hearing. Recounting his personal academic achievements and his role in creating and maintaining SCS, she concluded, "My acquaintance with him has shown him to be generous, thoughtful, ready to help those who have not had his advantages. In short, following the Judeo-Christian ethics of behavior, even to the point of forgiving his enemies."

Upon his release on March 13, 1958, Leopold, then 53, moved to Puerto Rico to work as an x-ray technician in a missionary hospital operated by the Church of the Brethren. He earned a master's degree in medical social work at the University of Puerto Rico, coming in first in his class and winning election as class president. He later taught math there—in Spanish. He wrote a book, *A Checklist of the Birds of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands*.

Leopold chafed under the terms of his parole. He frequently broke all of them, he told his attorney. "I have visited most of the better whore-houses, cheap bars, and gambling casinos in greater San Juan and like 'em fine." In 1961, he received parole-board permission to marry Trudi Feldman Garcia, a widow he had met at a Seder dinner. Upon final release from parole in March 1963, Leopold could travel as he pleased. He and Trudi visited Helen Williams in Iowa City, and she later visited them in San Juan.

Several of Leopold's letters to Williams after his release from parole reveal that he frequently discussed various Stateville "alumni," politicians, parole board members, and prison employees he disliked. He expressed a special degree of contempt for Ragen, even

though the warden had strongly supported his parole application.

In 1962 Leopold sold an option for the film rights to his story to the actor Don Murray. Aware that funding for the project was not a sure thing, he nonetheless found the prospect exciting. He told Williams to start thinking about how she would like to be portrayed. Would she want her name changed, for example? He added, "Even that, I am afraid, would not veil you entirely from the folks who know you. But gosh! If I had ever done for another one-tenth of what you have done for me, I'd be so proud that I'd want the whole world to know it. Please think about it and don't make a snap judgment."

When Murray wrote his film treatment, he reduced Williams to a small, elderly, unnamed woman who attends the parole hearing and "gives a moving message of faith" on Leopold's behalf. Murray let his option expire. In the following years, others showed interest in making a film about Leopold but nothing came of those efforts. Several novels, films, and plays, however, were loosely derived from the story of the 1924 murder and trial.

* * * * *

HELEN WILLIAMS and Nathan Leopold remained friends until his death by heart attack in San Juan on August 30, 1971. Upon Williams's death in Iowa City five years later, Trudi Feldman Leopold wrote, "Nathan was not held in high esteem by most of the world. Still, this gallant little lady, despite warnings from many of her friends and acquaintances who warned her against him, chose to ignore those pleas and continued to help him in every way possible until his death."

Williams's assistance to—and friendship with—Leopold dominated her brief, 26-line obituary; her long and distinguished career received comparatively little attention. She is now remembered as a pioneer in the field of collegiate distance education and in the delivery of college courses by radio. During her years at the University of Iowa, she was one of the few female administrators, albeit at a low rank. In 1990, the American Association for Collegiate Independent Study named its major prize for curriculum design the Helen Williams Award.

This account of Nathan Leopold, Helen Williams, and the Stateville Correspondence School is neither a straight crime story nor an inspirational story of redemption. The principals acted from motives both ambiguous and unclear. However, this odd partnership—between one of the most notorious murderers of the 20th century and an unknown, low-status administrator working on the margin of her university—resulted in the creation of a school that provided a rigorous and respected secondary education to a population that the State of Illinois had chosen to ignore. It taught via a format used around the world to extend educational opportunity to places and to populations the established institutions had little or no interest in reaching. The partnership of Leopold and Williams had exceeded all reasonable expectations. ❖

Von Pittman directed the Center for Distance and Independent Study at the University of Missouri for 12 years. In 1984, in a similar position at the University of Iowa, he discovered in a very old desk Helen Williams's monthly reports stretching from 1920 to 1949. This led him to the Papers of Nathan F. Leopold in the University of Iowa Libraries.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The author has adapted this article from his earlier article "Correspondence Study and the 'Crime of the Century': Helen Williams, Nathan Leopold, and the Stateville Correspondence School," *Vitae Scholasticae* 26:2 (2009) and it appears here with permission.

Major archival collections used include the Papers of Nathan F. Leopold, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa; and Leopold and Loeb Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Library, Chicago. Annual reports for Stateville School are in the Sheldon Glueck Papers, Special Collections, Harvard Law School Library, Harvard University; and in the collections of American Legends, Inc. Helen Williams's obituary appeared in the *Iowa City Press Citizen*, 1-8-1976.

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Annotations to the original manuscript are housed in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).