



## Garland E. Allen (1936–2023), Historian of Life Science

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In this issue we include a special set of invited essays to remember Garland E. Allen (1936–2023), a historian of life science and past editor of *Journal of the History of Biology*. “Gar,” as he liked to be known, died of complications from cancer, a disease he fought with characteristic optimism, engaging with the scholarly community nearly to the end, and trying to complete his last work, a revision of his influential 1975 *Life Science in the Twentieth Century* (Allen 1975b). That book, more than any other perhaps, provided us with the first real overview of the history of life science in the twentieth century and laid the foundations for much of the historiography that engaged historians of biology for a generation. It was bold: covering a long chronological period, it traced the intersections and trajectory of a range of life sciences, and paid special attention to the vitalist-mechanist philosophy, as well as to the scientific questions, techniques, and practices, along with individuals, schools of thought, and their ideas. It was, as the late historian of science, Frederick Churchill, said “the first genuine *history* of modern biology (Churchill 1976, p. 290).” This comprehensive approach characterized much of his life-work. His biography of Thomas Hunt Morgan, for example, which focused on the “man and his science,” remains a durable contribution to the history of genetics, and to many of us still serves as a model of the genre known as the “scientific biography” (Allen 1978). And if he was not the first, then he was one of the first, to recognize the importance of *Drosophila* as experimental organism in a pathbreaking article in *Isis*, the journal of the History of Science Society (Allen 1975a). His many other publications reflect a stunning output of scholarship that reached not just historians but also practicing scientists. Indeed, Gar never lost touch with biology, and distinguished himself as a successful biology

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textbook writer. His scholarly achievements alone thus place him amongst the giants in the field, but he shared that success with our community and exerted even more influence by becoming a meticulous, careful editor of this journal, and an attentive mentor as well as friend to generations of historians of biology. In short, he was towering figure in the field, leaving a lasting legacy that we wish to recognize with this special issue.

The three papers we include are therefore devoted to Gar's memory, and although original, they build on previous scholarship on Gar's work that include a retrospective published in this journal (see for example Mendelsohn 2016). They delve into his scholarship, but also tell us something about Gar as a mentor, colleague, collaborator and friend. Marsha Richmond offers us an overview and appreciation of Gar's extensive body of work, while Kim Kleinman, a former doctoral student, offers us an original essay analyzing how Gar's politics, and in particular his embrace of Marxism shaped his views of the history of biology. Finally, Jane Maienschein, his co-editor for *JHB*, and co-organizer for many a Marine Biological Station at Woods Hole summer seminar (See Fig. 1), offers us a remembrance of a special colleague and friend. We hope that they will give us an opportunity to reflect on the history of our own field, and how much Gar helped shape it, but that they will also serve to honor—and celebrate—Gar's memory.



**Fig. 1** Garland Allen on a dredging expedition, 1989, MBL Summer Seminar on Neurobiology and Behavior. Photograph by Vassiliki Betty Smocovitis

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