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# History of Psychology

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## **The Howard Crosby Warren Medal: Psychology's first award**

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This article explores the development of the first major award given in American psychology, the Howard Crosby Warren Medal. Administered by the Society of Experimental Psychologists, the award was first given in 1936. The first recipients of the Howard Crosby Warren Medal were Ernest G. Wever and Charles W. Bray of Princeton University. The Howard Crosby Warren Medal remains among the most prestigious awards in American psychology.

Awards have become ubiquitous in modern culture. It seems that almost daily awards are given for all manner of performance and achievement. Whether it is the World Series or the Oscars, we have grown accustomed to awards. Psychology is no exception. The total number of awards in psychology is not known, but the divisions of the American Psychological Association alone offer more than 230 awards annually (APA, 2004).

Awards in psychology are given for many reasons. Some include honoring outstanding achievement, recognizing exemplary service, honoring the memory of revered colleagues, and encouraging young scholars. Many psychologists provide countless hours of service on committees that gather information, debate qualifications, and ultimately bestow awards to colleagues. Yet for all the time and attention awards in psychology receive, there is no documentation of the history of awards in psychology in America. This article seeks to remedy that by examining the history of American psychology's first award.

### **The Howard Crosby Warren Medal**

At their annual meeting in 1936, the Society of Experimental Psychologists (SEP) made history. At that meeting the Howard Crosby Warren

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Medal was presented to two Princeton psychologists. The event marked the first time that a major award in American psychology was given.

### **An idea for a prize**

The award was years in the making, and its chief promoter was Karl M. Dallenbach. A student of SEP founder E. B. Titchener, Dallenbach received his PhD from Cornell in 1913 and taught there from 1916 to 1948. He left Cornell for the University of Texas, where he remained until his retirement in 1969. He was editor of the *American Journal of Psychology* from 1926 to 1967. After Titchener's death in 1927, Dallenbach, Raymond Dodge, E. G. Boring, Howard Warren, Robert Yerkes, Madison Bentley, and Herbert Langfeld reorganized the experimentalists and formally adopted the name *Society of Experimental Psychologists*. In 1930 Dallenbach began to formalize plans for an annual award. On March 14, 1931, he mailed a memo delineating the reasons why an award was needed (Dallenbach, 1931):

I am now firmly convinced for the following reasons that the society should establish the prize. Prizes for meritorious work are offered by all the established sciences with the exception of psychology. The prize would increase the respect of the other men of science for psychology. It would emphasize within psychology the fundamental importance of the experimental method. It would bring outstanding research to the attention of psychologists as well as other men of science. It would stimulate research. It would reflect to the credit of this Society. It would not only honor the winner, but would be of material advantage to him.

Dallenbach proposed the giving of an award at the 1931 SEP meeting at Vassar. The idea prompted much discussion. Those opposed to the idea thought administering the award might take up valuable time from the more important research discussions. The administration of the award clearly meant a significant departure from the very informal style of the organization. Ultimately, the SEP members could not agree, and talk of an award was tabled.

There was no discussion of awards at the SEP meetings in 1932 or 1933. It took the death of Howard Crosby Warren in 1934 to renew Dallenbach's attempts to establish psychology's first award.

### **Howard Crosby Warren**

From Dallenbach's perspective, Howard Warren was a good namesake for psychology's first award. Warren had supported the idea of the award and had left his wife a large fortune. Warren's accomplishments made him a respectable ambassador for experimental psychology, and Dallenbach, like many others, had a genuine affection for Warren.

Howard Crosby Warren was born in 1867 to a religious and wealthy New Jersey family. He suffered severe burns on his face in a childhood accident

that left him badly scarred. This injury was a recurrent source of health problems, but he credited it for his introspective nature (Warren, 1930). It may have also contributed to his interest in social nudism, which he wrote about and practiced (Warren, 1933). Warren attended Princeton University and developed an interest in psychology. After a few years of graduate work he traveled to Europe, studying with Wundt (with Titchener as a classmate), Ebbinghaus, and Stumpf. He returned to Princeton and worked under James Baldwin. He remained at Princeton his entire professional life. Warren's life boasts a number of important accomplishments that advanced psychology in America. As chair of the psychology department at Princeton he proudly presided over the opening of Eno Hall in 1924. It was "the first laboratory in this country, if not in the world, dedicated solely to the teaching and investigation of scientific psychology" (Warren, 1930, p. 167). Warren long served as editor and major owner of *Psychological Review* publications, which included *Psychological Review*, *Psychological Bulletin*, *Psychological Monographs*, the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, and the *Psychological Index* (which eventually became *Psychological Abstracts*). In a generous act, he sold the *Psychological Review* publications at a reduced cost to the APA. When part of the debt was paid, he forgave the rest. Personally, Warren counted among his career highlights the defense of the psychology department against suggested cuts from Princeton President Woodrow Wilson.

### **Crafting an award**

In a letter dated September 11, 1934, SEP secretary Samuel Fernberger (1934) wrote,

This will inform you that Professor Miles, President of the Society of Experimental Psychologists has appointed a Committee, consisting of Professor Dallenbach, Chairman, Professor Miles, President of the Society and Professor Carmichael to confer with Mrs. Howard Warren in regard to the possible presentation of a medal in memory of Howard C. Warren to the Society of Experimental Psychologists. It is the function of this committee: 1. to prepare a basis for the gift; 2. to enter into negotiations with Mrs. Warren after the plan has been prepared; 3. to submit the proposition to the members of the Society, through the Secretary, by mail ballot for acceptance or rejection and 4. to determine the means of awarding the medal if the action on proposition 3 is favorable. It seems to me that this is the proper order for the committee to proceed. Professor Dallenbach has informed me that Mrs. Warren believes that she will not live long and this is the reason for handling the matter in this way and at this time rather than bring it up, for the first time, at the next business meeting.

Dallenbach had already given much time to the issue of the Warren Medal, and it made sense for him to chair the committee. All the groundwork he had done made it easy for the committee to quickly agree that a

medal would be awarded and that it would be bronze, named in honor of Warren, and bestowed for distinguished work in the field of experimental psychology in the past 5 years. Within a month of being formed, the committee mailed a ballot to the SEP membership asking for a vote on the proposed Warren Medal. An affirmative vote was received by the first week of November 1934. Dallenbach wasted no time pursuing the idea of the medal with Warren's widow, Catherine. Dallenbach explained that, with her support, the SEP would create an annual award named after her late husband. In a note to Dallenbach, Catherine Warren tentatively agreed (Dallenbach, 1934):

It will give me great pleasure to endow the medal you suggest. Will you have a committee of the Experimentalists appointed to confer as to ways and means and medal design and method of giving medal? I suppose the die could be given in care of Tiffany or whoever makes the medal. It ought to be ready to turn to the Experimentalists when they meet next Easter.

Catherine Warren endowed the medal with a gift of \$1,000 in bonds. This endowment eventually required the SEP to incorporate itself in New Jersey, making it the Society of Experimental Psychologists, Inc. It took 2 more years before the medal was awarded.

Discussion of the wording on the back of the Warren Medal sparked an interesting debate. Walter Miles thought that including the words "Awarded by the SEP" would be a disadvantage to the society. Carmichael agreed, in part because he thought that the SEP might not always be the administrator of the award. Writing to Miles and Dallenbach, he noted,

I am inclined to agree about the suggested wording of the reverse side of the medal. I can see many arguments in favor of inserting the name of the Society, but I suppose that it is conceivable that experimental psychology and the Warren medal may last longer than our society and that some other agency, such as the APA, might some time take over the administration of the award. (Carmichael, 1935)

The idea did not sit well with Dallenbach, and he responded quickly,

I don't know, therefore, whether you are proposing the name of the Society be left off the medal. If so I am against it, and I believe that it would take a "mail vote" of the Society to justify the omission of the name of the Society. I think the society will endure as strong as the APA. It has a history almost as long, and is more closely integrated, and is not divided by so many diverse interests. (Dallenbach, 1935)

Dallenbach clearly did not want the administration of the medal moved to the APA, an institution toward which he had a lukewarm attitude and on which he had substantially less influence. Ultimately, Dallenbach's view on this matter held sway, and the name of the SEP was printed on the medal.

Catherine Warren worked closely with Dallenbach and the committee throughout the development of the Warren Medal, but she was also courted by the APA to finance another award. Writing to Leonard Carmichael, she mentioned,

I have been wondering about leaving a similar fund for the national association [APA], not calling it a medal but calling it a prize, do you think this would cause any confusion with the medal? I am sure that Howard would prefer the medal to go to the Experimentalists for that was the association in which he was most deeply interested. There is no hurry about the decision but I should like to put a codicil to my will if you think the prize would not interfere with the medal. This is the Howard Crosby Warren medal and we might call it the Howard C. Warren prize. This idea is simply a suggestion and I would like to have you get the opinion of Howard's various friends. It can be arranged out of the residue of my estate unless we get into some horrible war or a still deeper depression than we have had. (Warren, 1935a)

Carmichael confided to Walter Miles that Catherine Warren got the idea for an APA award from applied psychologist Walter Van Dyke Bingham. In addition, the reorganization of the SEP after Titchener's death contributed to her concern that the SEP might dissolve. Writing to Walter Miles, she noted,

You know it was really in our house that the Experimentalists reorganized after the break. Do you suppose there is any possibility of such a condition arising again and if so, how can I plan the transfer of the medal? It seems hardly likely to occur again but it has happened once and I should like to prepare for such an emergency should it arise again. (Warren, 1935b)

Miles, Carmichael, and Dallenbach corresponded frequently during the summer of 1935 and discussed how to best reassure Catherine Warren of the stability of the SEP and to convince her that it would be best to award the Warren Medal through the SEP. In a letter to Catherine Warren, Miles (1935) summarized the views of the committee:

I think it will be in general more satisfactory to administer the Warren medal through the Society of Experimental Psychologists than it would be through the American Psychological Association. A relatively small association can look after such matters, I believe, better than a larger heterogeneous association. The membership of the S.E.P. is selected from the membership of A.P.A. The medal will be a national one, of course, and each member of A.P.A., or any other psychologist will be eligible for it if he does important work. That is, consideration of candidates for the award will in no sense be limited to the membership of S.E.P. You of course remember that the Society of Experimental Psychologists was organized as a national society at your home, 133 Library Place Princeton, N.J., on April 1 and 2, 1929. . . . We adopted a set of by-laws and elected officers. I think the Society of Experimental Psychologists may be considered a safe one in which to vest a responsibility such as

you contemplate. Also I think for historical reasons it is very fitting to have the Warren medal administered through the Society.

Catherine Warren agreed with Miles, and the medal moved another step closer to becoming reality.

#### **The medal**

Catherine Warren chose Harriet H. Mayor to create the medal. Mayor was a renowned sculptor and was active in the Princeton area. Her mother was a painter and her father a paleontologist and Harvard professor. In addition to the Warren Medal, Mayor is perhaps best known for her work *Boy and Chicken*, which is on permanent exhibit at Brookgreen Gardens in Pawleys Island, South Carolina. Brookgreen Gardens is a National Historic Landmark with the most significant outdoor collection of figurative sculpture by American artists in the world. It was founded in 1930 by philanthropist Archer Huntington and his wife, Anna, who was also the sister of Harriet Mayor.

The medal was and continues to be minted by the American Medallic Company, which also mints the Pulitzer Prize, the Peabody Award, and the Medal of Freedom.

The Warren Medal is attractive and of a classic style (Figures 1 and 2). The front of the medal contains the profile of Howard Crosby Warren

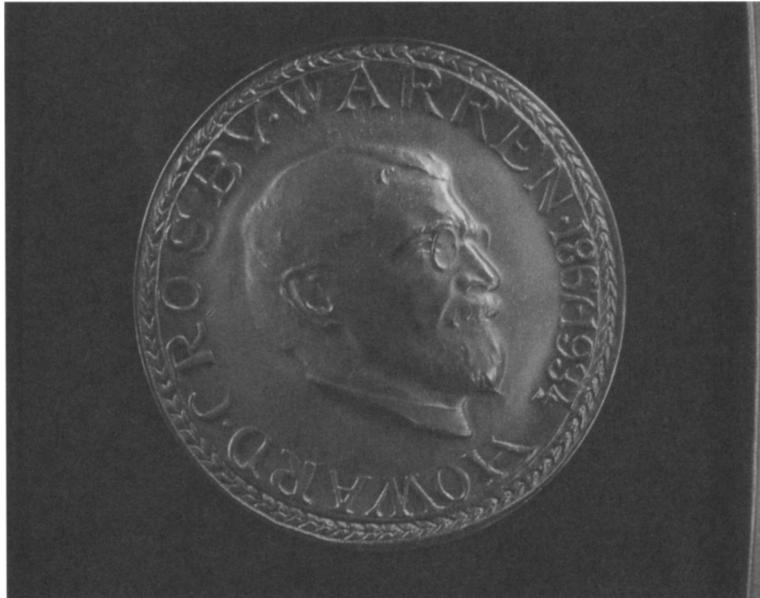


Figure 1. Front view of the Warren Medal

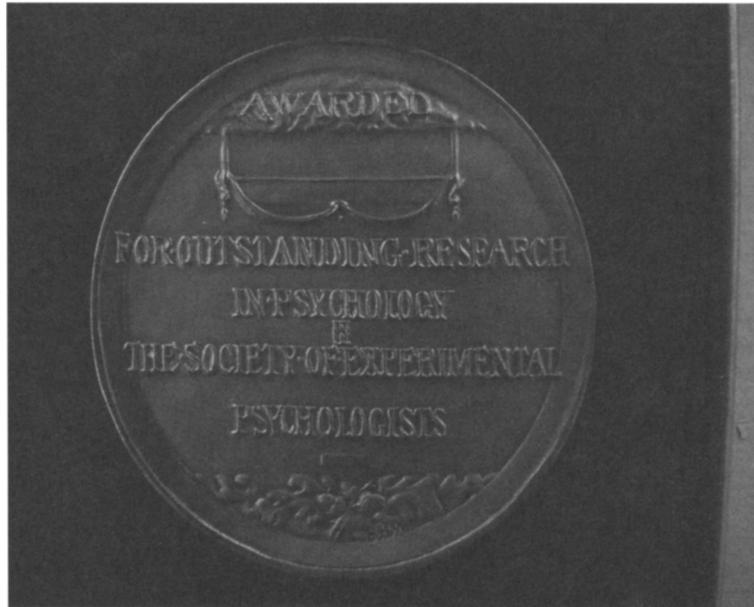


Figure 2. Back view of the Warren Medal

and his life dates. The back is the statement of the award, with room for the name of the recipient.

#### **Conclusion**

With all the planning completed and the Warren Medal minted, the SEP planned an award ceremony for their 1936 meeting. At that meeting Ernest G. Wever and Charles W. Bray of Princeton University became the first recipients of the Howard Warren Crosby Medal. The award was bestowed in recognition of the research Wever and Bray had done on auditory nerve responses in insects, reptiles, and mammals, particularly the phenomenon of the cochlear microphonic (Wever & Bray, 1930). They showed that sound spoken into the ear produced an electronic current that could be amplified and delivered through a receiver so that the sound would be audible to a listener. This work was an important contribution to the development of cochlear implants (Blume, 1995).

The spirit of the award and the mechanism for awarding the Warren Medal have remained largely unchanged since the days of Dallenbach. The list of recipients of the Warren Medal is a distinguished one (Table 1). In the pantheon of psychology awards the Warren Medal is among the most important. It is the oldest, it is designed to honor and promote

excellence in psychological science (thus it is the work rather than the individual that is the primary consideration), and perhaps more importantly it strives to be free of patronage. One need not be a member of the SEP to receive the Warren Medal; indeed, one does not have to be a psychologist. This helps to ensure that the award will be judged on merit. The integrity of these decisions seems to be without question. In 2002 the *Review of General Psychology* published an article (Haggbloom et al., 2002) on the 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century; 24 of the 100 were Warren Medal recipients. In 2003, the Institute for Scientific Information, which provides the Social Sciences Citation Index, posted a list of the most cited authors in psychology and psychiatry during the period 1981–1999. Of the 242 people listed in this largely clinical group of researchers, 6 have been awarded the Warren Medal. Citation analysis and similar methods for determining eminence are problematic. However, another metric that seems to add to the reliability and validity of the selection of Warren Medal recipients is the finding that four holders of the medal—Haldan Keffer Hartline, George Von Bekesy, Roger Sperry, and Daniel Kahneman—were later awarded Nobel Prizes.

Awards in psychology are many, and there are many deserving psychologists. To receive an award is a satisfying event; to receive the Howard Crosby Warren Medal is truly an honor.

Table 1. Warren Medal recipients, 1936–2004

<b>1936</b> Ernest G. Wever and Charles W. Bray	<b>1957</b> Lorrin A. Riggs
<b>1937</b> Karl Spencer Lashley	<b>1958</b> Donald O. Hebb
<b>1938</b> Elmer A. Culler	<b>1959</b> Harry Helson
<b>1939</b> Carlyle Jacobsen	<b>1960</b> Carl Pfaffmann
<b>1940</b> Ernest R. Hilgard	<b>1961</b> Carl I. Hovland
<b>1941</b> Clarence H. Graham	<b>1962</b> James Olds
<b>1942</b> B. F. Skinner	<b>1963</b> William K. Estes
<b>1943</b> Stanley Smith Stevens	<b>1964</b> Benton J. Underwood
<b>1944</b> No award given	<b>1965</b> William C. Young
<b>1945</b> Clark L. Hull	<b>1966</b> Floyd Ratliff
<b>1946</b> No award given	<b>1967</b> Eliot Stellar
<b>1947</b> Wolfgang Kohler	<b>1968</b> Richard L. Solomon
<b>1948</b> Haldan Keffer Hartline	<b>1969</b> Roger W. Sperry
<b>1949</b> Walter R. Miles	<b>1970</b> Daniel S. Lehrman
<b>1950</b> Curt P. Richter	<b>1971</b> Leo M. Hurvich and Dorothea Jameson
<b>1951</b> Frank A. Beach	<b>1972</b> George A. Miller
<b>1952</b> James J. Gibson	<b>1973</b> Delos D. Wickens
<b>1953</b> Kenneth W. Spence	<b>1974</b> Leo J. Postman
<b>1954</b> Neal E. Miller	<b>1975</b> Alvin M. Liberman and Franklin S. Cooper
<b>1955</b> George von Bekesy	<b>1976</b> Wendell R. Gardner
<b>1956</b> Harry F. Harlow	

Table 1. *Continued*

1977 Eleanor J. Gibson	1992 Saul Sternberg
1978 John Garcia	1993 James L. McClelland and David Rumelhart
1979 Russell L. DeValois	1994 Isidore Gormezano
1980 Abram Amsel	1995 Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky
1981 Roger N. Shepard	1996 George Sperling
1982 Endel Tulving	1997 M. E. Bitterman
1983 Richard M. Held	1998 Mortimer Mishkin
1984 Eric R. Kandel	1999 Richard Shiffrin
1985 David M. Green and John A. Swets	2000 Julian Hochberg
1986 Gordon H. Bower	2001 Norman E. Spear
1987 Hans Wallach	2002 Roger Ratcliff
1988 Michael I. Posner	2003 Carolyn Rovee-Collier
1989 Richard F. Thompson	2004 Herbert Terrace
1990 Anne M. Treisman	
1991 Robert A. Rescolarla and Allan R. Wagner	

### Notes

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