



Guide to the John Buettner-Janusch Letters and Clippings, 1979-1992 and undated

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Summary

Collection Title:

John Buettner-Janusch Letters and Clippings, 1979-1992 and undated

Abstract:

John Buettner-Janusch was a professor at Duke University in the 1960s who was convicted of manufacturing illegal drugs in his New York University laboratory in the 1970s and of sending poisoned candy to a New York judge and another Duke professor in 1987.

Extent:

0.25 Linear Feet

Language:

English

Language:

Materials in English

Collection ID:

UA.29.02.0261

Permalink:

<http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/uabuettnerjanusch/>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], John Buettner-Janusch Letters and Clippings, Duke University Archives, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

The John Buettner-Janusch Papers consist of letters written by Buettner-Janusch while in prison, primarily from 1987-1992, as well as clippings on his chargings and convictions. Several letters are addressed to "Annie and Will", although many letters are missing the first page or are not addressed, and many are undated. Most are handwritten. Many of the letters relate stories of Buettner-Janusch's research trips to Madagascar. Also included are clippings that detail

accusations against him related to the manufacture of illegal drugs at NYU as well as the poisoned candy sent to Judge Brieant in 1987, and his obituary from the New York Times in 1992.

Biographical/Historical

John Buettner-Janusch was a professor at Duke University in the 1960s who was convicted of manufacturing illegal drugs in his New York University laboratory in the 1970s and of sending poisoned candy to a federal judge and another Duke professor in 1987.

John Buettner-Janusch was born on December 7, 1924 in Chicago. He graduated from the University of Chicago with a BS in 1949 and an MA in 1953, then completed a PhD in anthropology at the University of Michigan in 1957. He married Vina Mallowitz in 1950. Buettner-Janusch was a professor of anthropology at Yale University from 1957-1965, when he joined the Duke University faculty. He brought with him a colony of 90 lemurs and founded the Duke University Primate Center, now called the Duke Lemur Center. While on the faculty at Duke, he served on the University Planning Committee from 1971-1972, chairing the Sub-Committee on Faculty Development. In 1973, he left Duke to become the head of the anthropology department at New York University. Throughout his career, he published numerous articles and the anthropology textbook "Origins of Man". Vina Mallowitz, his wife and collaborator, died in 1977.

In 1977, Buettner-Janusch was accused of manufacturing illegal drugs including LSD and methaqualone in his laboratory with the aid of student assistants. He claimed he was innocent and that he was being framed. In 1979 Buettner-Janusch was indicted; in 1980 he was sentenced to five years in prison, three for drug-related charges and two for lying to federal investigators. He was released on parole in 1983.

In 1987, Buettner-Janusch was charged with sending poisoned chocolate candy to Charles L. Brieant, Jr., the federal judge who presided over his 1979 case. Virginia Brieant, Judge Brieant's wife, ate some of the candy and became seriously ill. He also sent similar poisoned candy to Duke University professor J. Bolling Sullivan, whose wife Ashley and daughter Ann became ill after eating some of the chocolates. Buettner-Janusch pled guilty to mailing the poisoned candy and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

On July 2, 1992, John Buettner-Janusch died of pneumonia in a medical center for prisoners, at the age of 67.

Sondra Schlesinger is a virologist and professor emeritus at the Washington University School of Medicine. She graduated from the University of Michigan with a PhD in biochemistry in 1960.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Acquisition Information

The John Buettner-Janusch Letters and Clippings were received by the Duke University Archives as a transfer in 2017.

Processing Information

Processed by Tracy M. Jackson, October, 2017

Accessions described in this collection guide: UA2017.0038

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Names and Subjects

- Madagascar
- Buettner-Janusch, John, 1924-1992
- Briant, Charles L.
- New York University -- Faculty

Collection Inventory

Letters, undated circa 1980-1992	Box 1
Letters regarding Madagascar trips, 1987-1988 and undated	Box 1
Clippings on NYU drug charges and convictions, 1979-1980	Box 1
Clippings on poison charges and conviction, 1987	Box 1
Clippings on death of John Buettner-Janusch, 1992	Box 1