

William E. Edmonston, Jr.: Editor, 1968-1976

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Abstract

This article is part of an occasional series profiling editors of the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis (AJCH)*. William E. Edmonston was the second editor, succeeding Milton H. Erickson. His research focused on the use of conditioning paradigms and psychophysiological measures to explore a wide variety of hypnotic phenomena, leading to a “neo-Pavlovian” theory of neutral hypnosis as physiological relaxation (*anesis*). A longtime professor of psychology at Colgate University, he created an interdisciplinary undergraduate major in neuroscience, and was named New York State College Professor of the Year in 1988. He gave the *Journal* a new look, and a greater balance of clinical and experimental papers. The article also provides background on George Barton Cutten, George H. Estabrooks, and Frank A. Pattie, pioneers of hypnosis who were linked to Edmonston.

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William E. Edmonston, Jr.: Editor, 1968-1976

William E. Edmonston, Jr., known as “Bill” to his friends and “Doc Ed” to his students, served as Editor of the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* from 1968 to 1976 (Figure 1). He was only the second editor of the *Journal*, and his term saw considerable expansion in the size and scope of the journal, as well as institutional subscriptions. During his term, *AJCH* came to host a greater balance of clinical and experimental papers. Edmonston also served as President of the Greater St. Louis Society of Clinical Hypnosis (1963), ASCH and Division 30 (Psychological Hypnosis) of the American Psychological Association (1973-1974).



Figure 1: Three editors William E. Edmonston, Jr. (center) of the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* with Martin T. Orne (left) of the *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* and Leo Wollman (right), Editor of the *Journal of the American Society of Psychosomatic Dentistry and Medicine* at the 3rd International Conference for Hypnosis and Psychosomatic Medicine, Mainz, Germany, 1970. Photograph by Edward J. Frischholz.

Background

Edmonston was born on November 20, 1931, in Baltimore, Maryland. His father was a businessman specializing in insurance and building loans, and his mother was a homemaker. He received his B.A. from The Johns Hopkins University in 1952, originally majoring in chemistry, but later changing to psychology. He had been a member of Hopkins’ R.O.T.C. program, and from 1952 to 1954 he served in the United States Army as an officer in the Medical Service Corps with postings in the United States and in Korea. After his discharge he resumed his studies in psychology, receiving an MA from the University of Alabama in 1956, and his Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky in 1960. He met his wife, Nellie Kerley, in Alabama where she was working on her degree in speech pathology. They have two daughters, Kathryn Nell and Rebecca Jane, and a son, Owen William, and celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2007.

From 1960 to 1964 Edmonston was on the faculty of the Washington University School of Medicine, in St. Louis, and Director of its Psychology Clinic. In 1964, he joined the

faculty of Colgate University, where he moved up the ranks to Professor in the Department of Psychology. He was chair of the psychology department twice, 1971-1975 and 1978-1981, and founding head of Colgate's interdisciplinary undergraduate program in neuroscience from 1972 to 1993. He has been Professor Emeritus at Colgate since 1996.

A Personal Reminiscence

John Kihlstrom came to Colgate as a freshman in the fall of 1966, intending to major in psychology, but he did not meet Bill Edmonston until a year later – for the simple reason that Colgate students were not permitted to take the introductory psychology course until they were sophomores. There was no time, anyway. At that time Colgate offered a rigorous “core curriculum”, in which all students took seven courses in common, in addition to their areas of concentration and electives. Although these were spread out through the entire four years, most of them – a two-semester course in philosophy, religion, and drama, two more semesters of an interdisciplinary course in physical and biological sciences (or, for potential science majors, a one-semester course in the history and philosophy of science), and a one-semester course on writing and literature – were completed in the freshman year. Moreover, the psychology department required prospective majors to complete two semesters of calculus plus two semesters of physics, chemistry, or biology before actually declaring. Colgate students took only four courses per semester (plus an independent study during the month of January), so that was that.

By the time Kihlstrom took the introductory course, he had been exposed to some existentialism through the philosophy and religion core course (this was the 60s, after all), and was interested in exploring that topic further. Edmonston, who taught the whole introductory course, was the department's lone personality psychologist, so when the department offered all majors (there weren't that many of them) the opportunity to work as apprentices in faculty laboratories (there being no graduate students), Kihlstrom chose him. It was only at that point that he learned that Edmonston did hypnosis research – and psychophysiological research at that.

Edmonston Encounters Hypnosis

Here, history repeated itself, because Edmonston was also introduced to hypnosis by accident. While considering a number of topics for his dissertation research, a casual remark by one of the faculty at Kentucky sent him to Frank Pattie, who had founded the Hypnosis Seminars with Milton Erickson (see Sidebar 1). For his doctoral dissertation Edmonston employed a classical conditioning procedure in an analysis of hypnotic age-regression (Edmonston, 1961). Some weeks after acquiring a conditioned eyeblink response, the subjects went through an extinction procedure, and then were age-regressed to the time of the previous acquisition trials. The age-regressed subjects showed a recovery of the conditioned response, while control subjects showed continued extinction. Edmonston concluded that age-regression entailed an ablation of knowledge acquired after the target age, apparently contradicting the “role-taking” theory of hypnosis (Edmonston, 1962). The article received the 1961 Bernard E. Gorton Award for Meritorious Scientific Writing in Hypnosis, awarded by the *AJCH*, and brought Edmonston to the attention of the *Journal's* editorial board (Edmonston, 1964).

After completing his doctoral dissertation, Edmonston continued his research at Washington University, where he worked with John A. Stern, a pioneering psychophysiological, adding psychophysiological measures to his experimental repertoire. In one study, he and Stern, working with other colleagues, showed that amnesia suggestions resulted in a dishabituation of the electrodermal orienting response – another result apparently inconsistent with role-taking theory (Stern, Edmonston, Ulett, & Levitsky, 1963).

At Colgate

Edmonston moved to Colgate at the invitation of George Estabrooks, who was then an Associate Editor of the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, and who was preparing to retire (see Sidebar 2). His appointment was somewhat controversial, as Estabrooks had developed a reputation as something of a loose cannon on and off campus. Even in retirement, “Esty” regaled Colgate students with stories, some perhaps apocryphal, of his involvement in espionage during World War II. And some of his correspondence with J. Edgar Hoover, in which he pressed his claim for hypnosis as a powerful means of behavior control, has been preserved on the World Wide Web. Some faculty in the department were not sure they wanted another hypnotist around, let alone one personally recommended by Estabrooks. In fact, Colgate initially hired someone else. But when another member of the psychology department abruptly resigned, Edmonston was offered the newly opened position – pending successful negotiations about his hypnosis research.

Institutional concerns about hypnosis itself were allayed by Edmonston’s use of written informed consent procedures (somewhat in advance of many other psychologists of his time). But then there was the matter of the balance between teaching and research. At Washington University, Edmonston had been the principal investigator of a Public Health Service research grant, which he now wished to move to Colgate. Although Colgate, then and now, expected its faculty to be active scholars as well as dedicated teachers, the administration was ambivalent about external funding for research. Everett Needham Case, who had recently retired as president of the University, was concerned that such funding would create a “shadow faculty” which received high salaries for doing research, but who would contribute little to what he considered to be the main mission of the liberal-arts college, which was teaching. (Ironically, Case went on to become president and chief executive officer of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, which in the 1960s and 1970s provided seed money for a number of interdisciplinary research initiatives, including cognitive science and cognitive neuroscience.) After negotiations that secured Colgate’s commitment to Edmonston’s program of hypnosis research Edmonston finally arrived on campus in 1964.

Hypnosis and Anesis

Learning paradigms, coupled with psychophysiological measures, formed the basis for Edmonston’s programmatic research on the effects of “neutral” hypnosis – following the induction, but in the absence of any further suggestions (e.g., Edmonston, 1968, 1972b, 1972c, 1977b; Edmonston & Marks, 1967; Edmonston & Pessin, 1966; Edmonston & Stanek, 1966; May & Edmonston, 1966; Plapp & Edmonston, 1965; for comprehensive reviews, see Edmonston, 1967b; Edmonston, 1972a, 1979). The experiments ranged widely over a number of paradigms, each one carefully chosen to address a question left open by the results of its predecessor.

Edmonston’s earliest experiments showed that hypnosis abolished the conditioned finger-withdrawal response, but left open the possibility that the effect was the result of deliberate suppression on the part of the subjects. Another set of studies employed an eyelid conditioning paradigm that was less susceptible to voluntary control, largely supported the conclusions of the first series. A third series of studies showed that hypnosis had no effect on the conditioned electrodermal response, which has very little voluntary motor component to it. This was also the conclusion from a series of studies on heart-rate conditioning. A final set of studies showed that hypnosis produced reductions in spontaneous fluctuations in electrodermal activity that were comparable to those seen in a relaxation control condition.

Viewed strictly at an empirical level, the implication of these studies is that hypnosis affects voluntary, but not involuntary components of the conditioned response. But at a deeper theoretical level, the results were congruent with Pavlov's view that hypnosis represented a state of irradiating cortical inhibition – first affecting motor centers, then subcortical areas — resulting in a state of deep relaxation, if not quite sleep. The title of his theoretical monograph says it all: *Hypnosis and relaxation: Modern verification of an old equation* (see also Edmonston, 1981; Edmonston, 1977b). Edmonston even coined a new term to represent this state: *anesis*, from the Greek *anesis*, meaning to relax, or let go. Just as Braid coined the term *hypnosis* to distinguish what he and his contemporaries practiced from Mesmer's animal magnetism (Kihlstrom, 1992; see also Gravitz & Gerton, 1984), so Edmonston proposed that modern-day "hypnosis" diverged so much from the phenomenon known to Braid that it deserved a new name (Edmonston, 1991). Responding to the objection that hypnotized subjects can be active and alert, as well as relaxed and sleepy, Edmonston countered that "active-alert" hypnosis was in fact a different state than traditional hypnosis (Ham & Edmonston, 1971) – implying that it, too, deserves a new (but different) name. Responding to specific suggestions may disrupt the relaxation accompanying neutral hypnosis, but in Edmonston's view a state of relaxation is the prerequisite for the suggested effects to occur.

Aside from this programmatic research, Edmonston followed his nose, taking up particular problems that interested him, such as the role of task motivation in hypnosis (Edmonston & Marks, 1967; Edmonston & Robertson, 1967), hypnotic time distortion (Edmonston, 1967a), personality and somatic correlates of hypnotizability (Edmonston, 1977a; Rhoades & Edmonston, 1969), hypnosis and body temperature (Cogger & Edmonston, 1971), and even a study of altered consciousness in hypnosis (Kihlstrom & Edmonston, 1971), using a semantic differential technique that Edmonston had previously employed in some non-hypnotic studies of aesthetic judgments (Edmonston, 1966, 1969). This intellectual tendency was aided and abetted by the many undergraduates who worked in his laboratory and who he, too, allowed to follow their noses. By actively collaborating with students, instead of simply telling them what to do, Edmonston exemplified the liberal arts ideal of the teacher-scholar.

At the height of the new "golden age" of hypnosis, Edmonston convened a conference of hypnosis researchers, clinicians, and theorists under the auspices of the New York Academy of Sciences – the first time that distinguished institution had taken official note of hypnosis (Edmonston, 1977c). On sabbatical as a Fulbright Scholar and *Gastprofessor* at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany, Edmonston prepared a history of hypnotic induction techniques covering a huge swath of territory from the sleep temples of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome to the Stanford and Harvard scales, the Creative Imagination Scale, and the Hypnotic Induction Profile (Edmonston, 1986). The book concludes with the prediction that the eyes – "the only naturally visible parts of the central nervous system" (p. 386) will prove to be the keys to understanding hypnosis and hypnotizability.

On to Neuroscience

Pavlov's theory implied that hypnosis was a state of cortical (and subcortical) inhibition, and so it was perhaps not surprising that Edmonston's research and theoretical interests would turn toward the emerging field of neuroscience. Following a sabbatical in the Department of Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Washington, Edmonston returned to Colgate to find an interdisciplinary undergraduate neuroscience major, uniting courses from the departments of psychology and biology. Some of his hypnosis research took on a distinctive neuroscientific cast, with studies of the density of EEG alpha activity

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(Edmonston & Grotevant, 1975), and of lateralized brain activity (Edmonston & Moskovitz, 1990). But Edmonston also moved beyond hypnosis, opening up an entirely new line of research – involving rodents instead of college sophomores — on the recovery of function following spinal-cord damage.

Professor of the Year

After his retirement from Colgate, Edmonston and Nellie founded a small publishing company, Edmonston Publishing, which issued Pattie’s scholarly biography of Franz Anton Mesmer (Pattie, 1994). They also released a number of books on the Civil War, based on letters and journals. Edmonston turned some of this material into a play, *Unfurl the Flags: Remembrances of the American Civil War*. He also took up oil painting, producing more than 300 works to date, and has exhibited in regional and national juried shows (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: “The Factory” (2004), oil painting by William E. Edmonston, Jr. Digital image by Edward J. Frischholz.



Edmonston has said that his boyhood love of the “Sherlock Holmes” mysteries was one factor leading him to a life in science. Therefore, it seems appropriate that, in his retirement, he has returned to his beginnings. Writing under the somewhat Dickensian penname of Owen Magruder, he has published a series of mystery novels – the first of which, *The Strange Case of Mr. Nobody*, takes his protagonist, John Braemhor, from the highlands of Scotland to the coast of Nova Scotia (did we mention that Edmonston was of Scots heritage?)

Colgate University was the center of village life in Hamilton, New York, and in addition to the usual demands for good teaching and research, the school encouraged its faculty to take part in community affairs. Always interested in the theatre, Edmonston was a frequent participant in local theatricals, both before and after his retirement from the faculty. He also could be found performing a musical review at the Colgate Inn. Among his many

roles were Tom Wingfield in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Editor Webb in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and Uncle Vanya in the eponymous Chekov play.

In the end, Colgate needn't have worried: Edmonston was able to have a vigorous, productive research career without compromising his effectiveness as a teacher. In 1988, Edmonston was named New York State Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, and he was a gold medalist in the competition for the national award. The citation reads: "For extraordinary contributions to the lives and careers of undergraduate students and to the intellectual welfare of our society". He was an exceptional teacher and mentor, and a faithful steward of the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*.

Sidebar 1: Frank A. Pattie

Frank A. Pattie (1901-1999) was a pioneering hypnosis researcher, perhaps best known today for his experiments on hypnotic alterations of sensory function (Pattie, 1935, 1937, 1950, 1956a, 1964). Pattie also had historical interests (Pattie, 1956b, 1979; Pattie, 1990), which culminated in his definitive biography of Franz Anton Mesmer (Pattie, 1994) – which, as it happens, was published by Edmonston's own boutique publishing company. The Frank Acklen Pattie Mesmer Collection, comprising hundreds of volumes from the 18th and 19th centuries, is now housed within the Princeton University Library.

Before entering Vanderbilt University for his undergraduate studies, Pattie was employed as a courtroom reporter, and witnessed the Scopes "monkey trial". After receiving his doctoral degree, he taught briefly at Rice University, before moving to Kentucky for the remainder of his career. A co-founder, with Milton Erickson and others, of the Seminars in Hypnosis, he also was a co-founder, and later president, of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (Edmonston, 2000). In fact, the Seminars in Hypnosis led to the formation of the Educational and Research Foundation of ASCH.

The origins of Pattie's interest in hypnosis are lost in the mists of time: his doctoral dissertation was on the problem of auditory fatigue (Pattie, 1927). However, he had begun his graduate studies at Harvard, moving to Princeton with Herbert S. Langfeld, his major advisor, when the latter took up a position there, and Harvard was at that time a center for hypnosis research. Boris Sidis had recently died (1923), but Morton Prince was still active, and about to found the Harvard Psychological Clinic (in 1927). E.G. Boring had an abiding interest in hypnosis – he included Martin Orne as a guest lecturer on his public-television series, *Psychology I with E.G. Boring*; Langfeld himself would later publish an admiring review of Prince's *Festschrift* (Langfeld, 1928). George H. Estabrooks was also a graduate student at Harvard at the time – though not, apparently, working on hypnosis (see Sidebar 2). However, another graduate student, Paul C. Young, had recently completed a pioneering experimental study of hypnosis for his dissertation (P. C. Young, 1925, 1926a), and had also published comprehensive reviews of the experimental literature then available (P. C. Young, 1926b, 1927). Boring and Langfeld were also on Young's dissertation committee, which was chaired by William McDougall. In his dissertation, Young cites McDougall as the source of his interest in hypnosis. It seems likely that McDougall performed the same function for Pattie, though the presence of Langfeld, Boring, Young, and Estabrooks himself probably fanned the flames as well. So hypnosis was in the air, and it is not surprising that Pattie caught the bug.

Sidebar 2: George H. Estabrooks

George H. Estabrooks (1895-1973), took his Bachelor's degree from Acadia College

(now University), in Nova Scotia. There he was a student of George Barton Cutten (1874-1962), a pioneer of the use of hypnosis in the treatment of alcoholism (Cutten, 1903a, 1903b). Cutten had graduated from Acadia, received his PhD in psychology at Yale, and returned to the faculty at Acadia, ultimately ascending to the college presidency.

Prior to college, Estabrooks had served in the Canadian army during World War I, and survived the first-ever attack by lethal gas, at the Second Battle of Ypres (letter from G.H. Estabrooks to W.E. Edmonston, April 29, 1968). Estabrooks' first encounter with hypnosis was at a wartime entertainment, but his professional interest in hypnosis was stimulated by reading Bernheim's *Suggestive Therapeutics*. When he was discharged, Estabrooks enrolled at Acadia specifically to study with Cutten. After three years as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and Exeter (1921-1924), Estabrooks entered graduate school at Harvard. He received his PhD from Harvard's Graduate School of Education in 1926, and assumed a teaching post at Springfield College (Massachusetts). Meanwhile, Cutten had become president of Colgate in 1922, and soon recruited his former protégé to the faculty there.

Estabrooks' first book, *Hypnotism* (G.H. Estabrooks, 1943/1957), was dedicated to Cutten. But Cutten had other interests as well. Widely praised for bringing Colgate through the Great Depression in solid financial shape, and for introducing the "Colgate Plan" of broad general education, he was somewhat notorious for his ethnocentrism – his remarks about the potential dangers of the American "melting-pot" are enshrined on the wall of the National Museum of Immigration at Ellis Island as an example of anti-immigrant prejudice. Interestingly, Estabrooks did his dissertation on racial differences in intelligence, with a committee composed of Walter F. Dearborn (an educational psychologist who developed an early intelligence test), Henry W. Holmes (another educational psychologist), and Earnest A. Hooton (a physical anthropologist). Unlike Cutten, however, Estabrooks seems to have taken the view that racial and ethnic differences in intelligence were negligible: to quote the abstract of one of his articles: "Investigation of racial differences in intelligence seems at present hopeless, due to our inability (1) to eliminate environmental differences, (2) to determine races, (3) to determine intelligence" (G.H. Estabrooks, 1928).

Despite the nature of his dissertation research, Estabrooks maintained his early interest in hypnosis, and pursued it avidly once he was at Colgate. Still, aside from his 1943 book, which was the first comprehensive account of hypnosis intended for the lay public, his publication record in the field was somewhat sparse (G.H. Estabrooks, 1929b, 1930a). He was, however, the first to use a standardized technique, recorded on a Victrola record, for inducing hypnosis (G.H. Estabrooks, 1930b). Toward the end of his career, Estabrooks brought to Colgate many of the leading investigators of hypnosis, both clinical and experimental – a conference that, in many ways, marked the beginning of a new "Golden Age" of hypnosis (G.H. Estabrooks, 1962). (It was, in fact, this conference that first brought Edmonston to Colgate.)

Apparently, hypnosis was not the only thing in the air at Harvard when Estabrooks was there. McDougall was fascinated by what are now called parapsychological phenomena, and in the early 1920s served as president of both the British and the American Society for Psychical Research. He and Gardner Murphy arranged for Estabrooks to receive a postdoctoral stipend to conduct research on extra-sensory perception. When Estabrooks left for Springfield, J.B. Rhine (who had received his Ph.D. in botany from Chicago in 1925) took his place, and moved to Duke with McDougall in 1927. But the honor of performing the first experimental research on extrasensory perception belongs to Estabrooks (G.H. Estabrooks, 1927/1961, 1929a).

Aside from his work on hypnosis, Estabrooks had strong interests in educational psychology and vocational counseling. As a student at Acadia, he had invented the "freshman week" of orientation, and for almost 30 years served as director of student placement services

at Colgate (G. H. Estabrooks, 1929). He published a system for effective note-taking, and introduced ancient mnemonic techniques, such as the method of loci, to American teachers faced with helping their students memorize foreign vocabulary and long lists of facts. Apparently, subsequent generations of teachers at all levels have him to thank for inventing the short-answer test (G.H. Estabrooks, 1927). With another Colgate colleague, he developed a scale of studiousness based on the Strong Vocational Interest Blank (C. W. Young & Estabrooks, 1937). In his work with students, as both teacher and counselor, he promoted higher education as education for democracy, including development of the personality as well as the intellect (G. H. Estabrooks, 1932). His last publication, on the role of hypnosis in the treatment of academic underachievement (G.H. Estabrooks, 1965), brought him full circle.

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