

# How we became who we are

“History,” says Julian Barnes’ narrator in *The Sense of An Ending*, “is the certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation.” We can smile at the acid comment but where institutional histories are concerned, it’s too often appropriate. So when a book-length history of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory was first proposed, the question we asked at CSHL Press was “Can it be done well?”

You can judge for yourself when you read *Prevail Through Knowledge: A History of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory*. Written by historian Jan Witkowski, Executive Director of the Laboratory’s Banbury Center, it’s a compact, accessible book that will appeal to friends and neighbors of the Laboratory and anyone interested in the development of biomedical science and biotechnology.

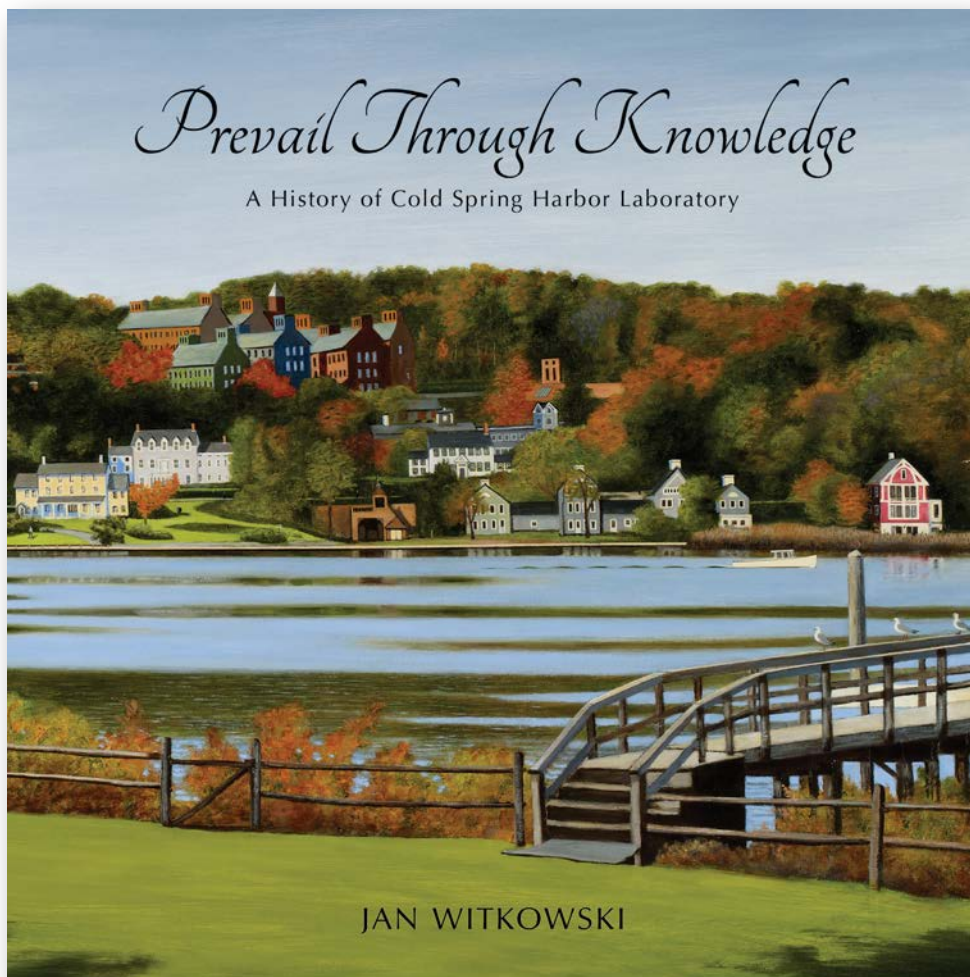
At Cold Spring Harbor, two interdependent research centers born in the light of Darwin’s ideas grew into a single institution that would cradle another revolution, the new science of molecular biology, and go on to world renown in research and professional education. The path was neither simple nor assured. For the first half-century, there were changes in name, leadership, governance, and financial fortune. And scientific missteps, most notoriously in eugenics, triumphed by innovative work in genetics, human metabolism, and cancer.

Appointed Director in 1968, James Watson would inspire, cajole, and goad the Lab into new research directions and initiatives in conferences, courses, publishing, and education. Bruce Stillman’s leadership has expanded that scope still more. The Laboratory is unique among research institutions worldwide—envied, imitated, but not reproduced.

*Prevail Through Knowledge* is a story of remarkable people, outstanding achievements, and occasionally dramatic events, illuminated by vignettes of individual scientists and material from the CSHL Archives. It draws on an unpublished manuscript by distinguished scientist and educator Bentley Glass, a long-time Trustee. His memoir is of research and symposia through the ‘60s but also the personal, the idyllic summers in which visiting scientists debated ideas while their inquisitive children roamed the grounds and once turned off the entire institution’s water supply.

Jan Witkowski’s knowledge of his subject is wide, his affection for it deep, and his perspective is enriched by a decades-long career on the staff. Anyone who has walked on the Laboratory’s gorgeous campus—or browsed its website—and wondered how it became what it is today will find answers in the entertaining pages of *Prevail Through Knowledge*.

**John Inglis**



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