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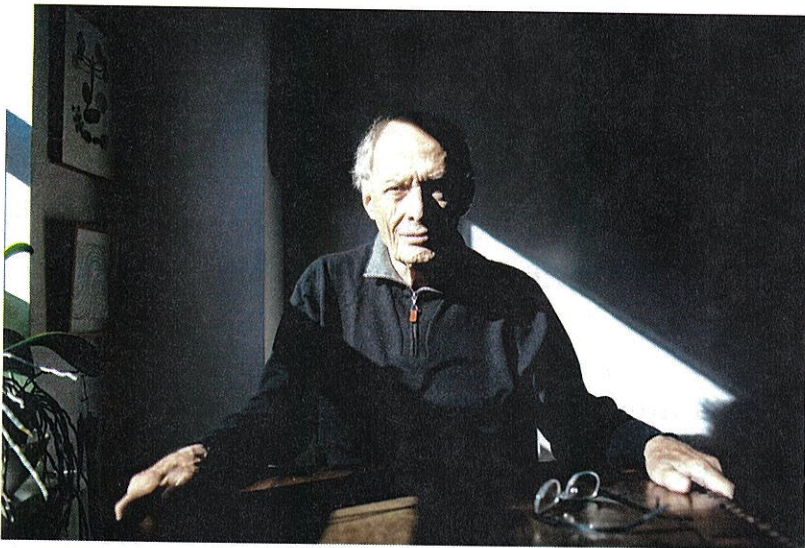
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OBITUARIES

Neuroscientist Changed Thinking on Brain Function

Paul Greengard used Nobel Prize money to establish award for women in biomedicine



Noble laureate Paul Greengard PHOTO: ADRIENNE GRUNWALD FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Patrick McGroarty

April 19, 2019 10:30 a.m. ET

A contrarian streak helped Paul Greengard identify a flaw in the assumptions underpinning brain research in the young Atomic Age.

Most researchers in the 1950s believed that transmissions between cells in the brain were purely electrical. Mr. Greengard, who died on April 13 at the age of 93, demonstrated in studies over 15 years that neurons in fact communicate mainly via a more subtle biochemical process now known as slow synaptic transmission.

That work won him the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2000.

He used the prize money to establish an award at Rockefeller University for women in biomedical research. Two recipients of the annual award have gone on to win Nobel Prizes of

their own.

“I’d seen terrible discrimination against women up until very recently and I thought this might help to overcome that,” Mr. Greengard said in an oral history of his career that Rockefeller University recorded in 2016. “There’s absolutely no evidence one way or another as to whether there’s a difference between the sexes in terms of creativity, the most important parameter of scientific discovery.”

Paul Greengard was born in Brooklyn on Dec. 11, 1925. His mother, Pearl Meister Greengard, died giving birth to him. His father, Benjamin Greengard, a vaudeville performer and salesman of perfume and raincoats, remarried 13 months later.

It was a difficult childhood. Mr. Greengard excelled at math and science but made few friends. He misbehaved. His stepmother punished and belittled him. His father was distant. They didn’t tell him about his birth mother until he was attending college after World War II.

“I’m always trying to prove I’m not the worthless child they say I was,” he told the Journal in 2014.

After enlisting in the Navy in 1943, he was sent to Massachusetts Institute of Technology to help develop a radar system for alerting Allied ships in the Pacific to the approach of Japanese kamikaze aircraft.

He studied physics at Hamilton College on the GI Bill after the war and completed a Ph.D. in neurophysiology at Johns Hopkins University in 1953.

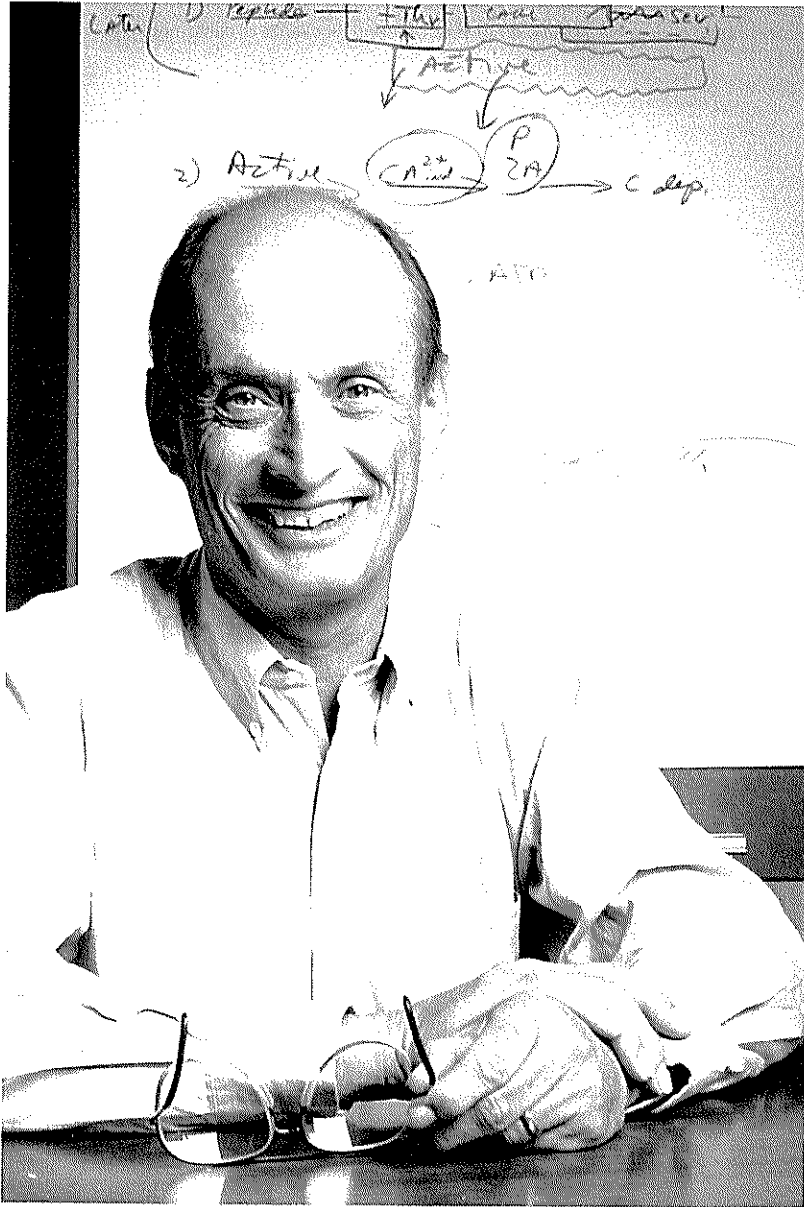
Mr. Greengard conducted research and taught at institutions including Cambridge University and Vanderbilt University. In the 1960s he directed biochemistry research for Geigy, which later became Novartis AG.

While teaching at the Yale School of Medicine in the early 1980s, he met the sculptor Ursula von Rydingsvard, whose gnarled works of wood and bronze are on display around the world. One 20-foot-tall piece, “Ona,” looms outside Barclays Center in Mr. Greengard’s native Brooklyn.

They were married in 1986, three years after Mr. Greengard joined Rockefeller University, where he established the Laboratory of Molecular and Cellular Neuroscience.

He spent the rest of his career there, investigating the causes of depression and Alzheimer’s disease, among other projects. He often brought his Bernese Mountain Dog with him to the office that he filled with orchids and bespoke furniture curated by his wife.

“His work was never work. He loved, loved it,” she said.



Paul Greengard in 1987 PHOTO: ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

He also had a passion for Peking duck and chocolate. Colleagues and friends gave him the latter indulgence in such quantities that Ms. von Rydingsvard often hid it from him or gave it away.

Mr. Greengard spent Friday April 12 at work in his laboratory, and died the next day at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center after suffering a heart attack.

OTHER OBITUARIES

- Ronald Siegel, UCLA Researcher, Explored How People and Animals Get High April 19, 2019
- Irwin Jacobs, Feared 1980s Corporate Raider, Dies in Apparent Murder-Suicide April 16, 2019
- George Putnam Led Investment Firm, Managed Harvard's Money April 12, 2019

His older sister, the actress Chris Chase, who appeared in films including Stanley Kubrick's "Killer's Kiss," died in 2013. He is survived by his wife, a daughter, two sons and six grandchildren.

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