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May 11, 1984

Mr. Marshall Breger
Special Assistant to the President
Room 197 OEOB
White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Marshall:

As a result of our telephone conversation, the following information is somewhat general. However, I believe there is enough in it to tell you great things are happening at the College to return it to its former glory.

A renaissance is underway at Dropsie College with The Honorable Walter H. Annenberg, former U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, appointed as Honorary Chairman of its Board of Trustees. Leading the way for Dropsie's revitalization, he will be hosting a reception and dinner at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel, Philadelphia, on Monday, May 14th.

While Mr. Annenberg has an illustrious history, individually, for his personal support of humanitarianism, this is the first time that he has sought others to join him in financial endorsement for an institution or project. At his suggestion, Admiral Hyman G. Rickover will speak on behalf of Dropsie, in keeping with his lifetime concern for integrity and excellence in education and science. In addition to his distinguished service to the U.S. Navy, as the mastermind for the first nuclear-powered submarine, the Admiral has published several books addressing education in the United States.

It is the non-religious and non-sectarian approach to Near Eastern Studies, unique to Dropsie College, that has captured Mr. Annenberg's attention. He values this graduate school and research center for its role in interpreting the contributions of Jewish civilization to humanity and for promoting a healthy semitism.

Newly established is the Annenberg Chair providing for world-renowned research professors to visit Dropsie on a rotating

basis. Harry M. Orlinsky, Professor of Biblical Literature, is the first to be named to this faculty position. A Dropsie graduate, he initiated the new translation of the Bible recently published by the Jewish Publication Society of Philadelphia and has served as a member of the excavation team in Ramat Gan, Israel and also as visiting professor at Hebrew University, Brandeis University, and the Union Theological Seminary. At Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, he is Professor of Bible.

The curriculum at Dropsie College centers on examining the roots of Western civilization - in particular, the Biblical and Rabbinic periods of Jewish history - not only as historical periods of rare and beautiful literature, but also as the cornerstone of ethical standards and moral behavior for a large part of humanity. Religion aside, everyone at Dropsie College studies the same texts with the same tools of modern scholarship: history, philology and linguistics, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and computer technology.

The rare book treasures and ancient documents at Dropsie, the fourth largest and most valuable collection of its kind in our country, are the centerpieces for study, providing an unusual source for objective exploration. In 1982, a grant from the Pew Foundation aided in the computerization of Dropsie's possessions, placing it on-line with 13 million entries in the library system shared throughout the United States, England, and France.

The modern study of Judaism only began some 150 years ago. At that time, there were thousands of years of history and literature yet to be discovered and interpreted non-theologically. Since then, fortunately, we have been literally inundated with remnants of Jewish history. Therefore, the research done at Dropsie constantly rewrites what is known of Judaism. The following are a few of the discoveries researched at Dropsie:

1. First came the artifacts in the Cairo Synagogue (the "Genizah") with upwards of 200,000 fragments, writings and documents (poetry, marriage and divorce documents, business, and children's books, eye-witness accounts of the Crusades and much more) --- truly a slice of Jewish life 700-1000 years ago. Based on some of this material, Dropsie has written an entire history of the Jews in Egypt and Palestine during the eighth to twelfth centuries, a period about which nothing had been known fifty years ago.
2. Then came the Dead Sea Scrolls, a find which has entirely rewritten our knowledge of Judaism 2000 years ago.

3. Lastly, on-going archeological projects in the Middle East and Israel are providing material for us to bring back to life many more communities and institutions of the past so that we may better understand the present.

Before World War II, there were several schools in Europe which implemented this type of scholarly study of Judaism unhampered by religious overtones. This was truly a movement of the first rank in Jewish and Western intellectual history. The schools and research centers to the last were destroyed by the Nazis. Only Dropsie remains as the ideological descendant of these schools.

The Jewish Quarterly Review, published by Dropsie College, is the oldest English language journal devoted to the scholarly study of Judaism. The debates which raged over the authenticity of the Dead Sea Scrolls are found in its pages as are newly discovered ancient and medieval texts.

A fire in 1981 placed Dropsie College in a crisis when its established home, a Philadelphia landmark for almost 70 years at Broad and York Streets, was ruined and parts of its collection were lost and damaged. These circumstances precipitated the move to its present setting in Merion, Pennsylvania at 250 North Highland Avenue, an advantageous location, facilitating exchange with many other educational institutions in the area: St. Joseph's University, Bryn Mawr College, Haverford, Swarthmore, Villanova University, Akiba Academy as well as numerous impressive religious institutions.

Moses Aaron Dropsie, a Philadelphia lawyer, through provisions in his will, had the foresight to found an institution such as Dropsie College, where Judaism and its roots could be studied without theological constraints. Today, a resurgence for its development is coming to pass so that the healthy continuity of Dropsie College can be assured for future generations.

Because of what is presently happening at Dropsie College and your interest, anything you can do to promote this non-sectarian, non-theological graduate school and research center for Near Eastern and Judaic Studies would be very much appreciated. Please telephone me if you have any questions. I can be reached at my office, A.J. Wood Corporation, where I am Chairman of the Board, (215) 473-7100.

With warmest regards,


Chairman of the Board
Dropsie College

AJW/srg
Encl.

P.P.S. The following have recently joined the Board of Trustees and their names are not printed on the stationery:
Bernard J. Korman, Robert Saligman, Daniel Tabas and David Wachs.