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NEWS AND NOTES 1991, NOVEMBER 8

The Rockefeller University

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news & notes

November 8, 1991 Volume 2, Number 10

The Rockefeller University



Marathoners from the Tomasz lab—Peter Matthews, Boudewijn de Jonge, Philippe Cottagnoud, Andy Hoepelman, and Philippe Moreillon (left to right)—celebrate the day after completing the race.

Rockefeller runners go the distance, 26.2 miles

More than a dozen runners from Rockefeller were among the 25,000 competitors who ran the grueling 26.2-mile course of the New York City Marathon last Sunday—from the starting line on Staten Island, through Brooklyn and Queens, over the Queensboro Bridge, and through Central Park to the finish line near Columbus Circle.

Veteran runs for twelfth time

For physics professor Konstantin Goulianos, running the New York City Marathon is tradition. "I ran my first marathon in 1980," he said. "I don't run for time anymore. Now when I train in the morning I just enjoy the sun coming up over Central Park. I tell my friends, you have to violate some physical laws to break your record every year."

"It was a nice day for the marathon—the first year since 1983 that I was not pouring water over my head to cool down," he continued. "But the weather wasn't too cool for the enthusiastic crowds gathered along the whole course."

Goulianos, who makes use of graphs in his work on subatomic particles, could not resist charting his running performance—length of

race on the x-axis, minutes per mile on the y-axis. "You can see as the race gets longer, the minutes per mile increase," he said.

First-time marathoners find pace

For other Rockefeller runners, the marathon was a leap into the unknown. "Last year I saw the race from First Avenue," said Xiaodong Wu, graduate fellow in the Chua lab. "It was so exciting I wanted to be part of it."

Wu had hoped to run the race in under 3:10. His performance exceeded even these high expectations. "I ran it in 3:03:20—that's under 7 minutes a mile," said Wu, the excitement of the race still in his voice. "The volunteers and the cheering crowds made it possible. Next year I will be a volunteer: it will be easier on my legs and I will be happy to spend my time on activities other than training."

For other first-time marathoners, the course proved more challenging than they had anticipated. "I lost time because of my inexperience," said Victor Neel biomedical fellow in the Young lab. "I was fine for the first 20 miles, but then I hit 'the wall.' I didn't eat breakfast that day and I literally began to run out of fuel. The last six miles was torture."

"I might do it again someday, though," he said. "I enjoyed training in Central Park. There is a silent camaraderie among runners there. Although they don't speak—or, God forbid, slow down—the nod is very telling."

As difficult as the race was for Neel, he did hobble into the lab the next day. First-time marathon runner Roger Wies, production editor in the Journals Office, admitted he couldn't get out of bed on Monday morning.

RU wants AT&T back

After an 18-month selection process and a protracted 11-day negotiating session, a contract was signed with AT&T last Friday to replace almost every facet of the telecommunications system on campus.

AT&T's Definity system, scheduled to be in place by April 24, 1992, will provide the university with faster, clearer, and more extensive service. A state-of-the-art switching system will process calls at least five times as fast as the current system and new cables will enhance the quality of the sound that reaches the receivers.

As part of the new system, fiber

optic and other cables are being installed throughout the campus to carry both voice and computer data.

"The vendors were evaluated on resourcefulness, conformity to the specifications of our request, and cost," said Portia Goodman, manager of Telecommunications. "It was a close race. We selected AT&T because the firm submitted an excellent, competitive proposal and because we have been happy with their service in the past."

"It's wonderful that the contract is signed," said David Lyons, treasurer and vice president for business and finance. "Portia has done a super job during the whole, long process. Now we can start the next phase of the project—installing the system."

Each member of the Telecommunications Committee had different responsibilities during the selection process. In addition to Lyons and Goodman, the committee includes: George Candler, Thomas Fallon, Melvin Ferentz; Armand Gazes; Daniel Gearon; Edward Gershey; William Griesar; Kaare Christian; James Metalios; Joseph Nekola; Paul Rosen; and Ralph Steinman.

Hugh Meier, an outside consultant, and the Telecommunications staff were also essential in selecting a vendor. (See related story, *Installation*, page 2.)

"Because I had an injury, I just wasn't running the mileage I should have before the race," Wies said. "I cramped up at 17 miles and ran the last 9 miles in agony. A marathon is not something to take lightly." Despite the pain, Wies feels positively about the experience. "It felt good to be a New Yorker that day," he said. "If only New Yorkers were like that all year round."

Lab makes group effort

While running is generally a solitary sport, the Tomasz lab made this year's marathon into a group effort. The lab was represented by an international delegation: Philippe Cottagnoud from Switzerland; Boudewijn de Jonge from Holland (with his wife Josephine Wendel); Andy Hoepelman from Holland; Peter Matthews from Australia; and Philippe Moreillon from Switzerland.

The day after the marathon found the lab in the midst of a jubilant pastry party.

"Every runner gets a prize of one of these lovely, rich pastries to slow them down next year," said Professor Alexander Tomasz. "The first prize, the Portuguese dessert *quente e frio*, goes to Peter who came in with the fastest time. Our lab is not part of the anti-cholesterol craze. We believe in cholesterol, an important lipid component in biological membranes."

Other runners from Rockefeller University who completed the course include: Jean-Philippe Defoort, guest investigator in the Merrifield lab; Laurent Fasano, postdoctoral associate in the Desplan lab; Martha Kellar, director of the RU Press; and Calandra Thierry, postdoctoral fellow, Cohn-Steinman lab.

What's your number?

In April 1992, RU's telephone exchange, now "570," will be changed, affecting every phone number on campus. Individual extensions will remain the same.

"It's a good idea to minimize orders of business cards and personal stationery with the current number," Portia Goodman, manager of Telecommunications, advises.

2 Library displays
Islamic pottery

3 Protocol Club helps
with bench work

4 Starlings, grackles
flock to campus



For an update on the neighborhood falcons, see page 4.



Gerri Lindner (left) and Marie Grossi attend one of this week's telecommunications coordinator meetings.

New appointment for Mirsky

Librarian Emeritus begins cataloging, indexing historical treasure trove

The Rockefeller University Board of Trustees recently "unanimously and enthusiastically" named Sonya Wohl Mirsky University Librarian Emeritus. Her new responsibilities include cataloging and indexing the historical documents of the institute/university, beginning with the inception of The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, as it was known when it was founded in 1901. Mirsky is currently working in large part with the minutes of the institute's Board of Scientific Directors in an attempt to identify and list all persons associated with the Institute.

"These documents provide more

than just factual information," says Mirsky. "They are a treasure trove of the social history of each period of Rockefeller's existence."

Mirsky's work will be invaluable for any future historian preparing a sequel to George W. Corner's *A History of the Rockefeller Institute*, which covers the years 1901 to 1953. It will also provide a wealth of accessible information about Rockefeller's history for the university's centennial, less than a decade away.

Mirsky's office is on the third floor of Welch Hall, office number 4. Her new phone number is x8009 and her mail box is 215.

Islamic pottery display gives feel of another time and place

An exhibit of Islamic pottery from the ninth through seventeenth century, hand-picked from the Alfred E. Mirsky Collection, is currently on display at the library in Welch Hall.

Art curator Cynthia Altman planned the exhibit as part of a series—which has included Asian art, and Greek and Roman pottery—aimed at enlarging the Rockefeller community's view of other cultures and historical periods. "The Mirsky collection provides a nice balance to the twentieth-

century art that one sees around campus. I wanted to provide a fresh perspective—a kind of escape into another world."

The exhibit presents an overview of many facets of the Islamic empire—which spanned more than a thousand years and stretched from Spain to the borders of China. It also gives us a glimpse of everyday life there, because most of the objects were created for daily use.

The exhibit includes two displays of early pottery, chiefly from tenth-century Iran, that feature bowls and

First phase of telecommunications installation relies on coordinators

This week, six telecommunications coordinator meetings began the first phase of the installation of the new AT&T Definity system. Representatives from every lab and service group on campus were invited to the meetings and were asked to review the location of telephone jacks and data outlets in their area.

"I believe that the Rockefeller community has to participate in the installation to be happy with the new system," said Portia Goodman,

manager of Telecommunications. "Coordinators are now playing their first key role by evaluating the location of jacks and data outlets. The plans for each area will be used to create a master blueprint to present to the installers."

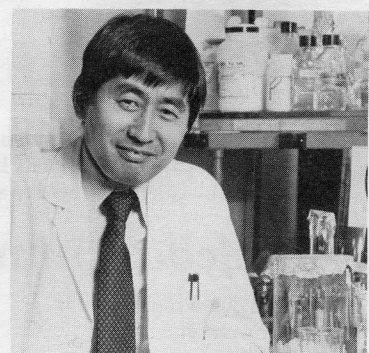
"It's vital that we get back the floor plans on time," she continued. "Delays could be costly."

Telecommunications has set up a hot line—x1313—to respond to any problems with the installation.

RU professor honored in native Japan

Hidesaburo Hanafusa, Leon Hess Professor at Rockefeller, received the 1991 Cultural Merit Award from Japan on Tuesday in recognition of his work on the role of oncogenes in cancer. Hanafusa, one of 15 winners of the prestigious national award for cultural, artistic and scientific achievements, was invited for tea at the Imperial Palace to celebrate the honor with the Emperor.

"I was a bit surprised but I am very happy that they recognized my work in the United States," Dr. Hanafusa said. "Of course many people share in this award with me, including my colleagues and students at Rockefeller." Hanafusa, who came to the United States at the age of 32 after earning his Ph.D. from Osaka University, felt it was



Hidesaburo Hanafusa

important for Japanese scientists to work outside their country to show that science was an international field. Three decades later, he can look back on a renowned career with some satisfaction. "Perhaps I was also recognized for playing some role in improving friendship between the U.S. and Japan," he suggested.

Other individuals receiving Cultural Merit awards this year include film director Keisuke Kinoshita, novelist Ryotaro Shiba, architect Yoshinobu Ashihara, and biochemist Shosaku Numa.

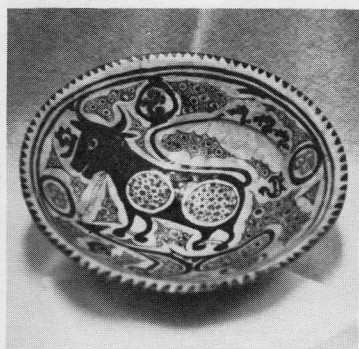
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The Rockefeller University is an equal opportunity employer and has an affirmative action program to increase the employment of women and members of protected groups at all job levels.



Two tenth-century bowls are part of the exhibit of Islamic pottery on display at the library in Welch Hall.



dishes with stylized animals—bulls, felines, hares, and birds—with an underglaze of browns and greens on a cream ground. Lacking the kaolin available in China to manufacture true porcelain, vessels were covered in a white glaze by the addition of metallic oxides which give the pieces an iridescent luster. This technique was eventually carried to Europe, becoming the basis for the lusters of Spain and the majolicas of Italy.

The medieval display contains bowls and vases with floral patterns and scroll motifs under a turquoise glaze from thirteenth-century Iran. One particularly charming piece is a lozenge-shaped tile painted with the halcyon figure of a water bird.

The Ottoman period is represented with dishes from seventeenth-century Turkey and tile fragments from Syria and Iran. There was a revival in tilemaking in this period to fill the many mosques. The vigorous and bold motifs include abstract waves and cloud banks adapted from Chinese porcelains, as well as an exuberance of floral motifs and cypress trees.



New Protocol Club helps RU scientists with bench work

by Susan Blum

The theories of science may be breathtakingly beautiful, but the practice of science isn't always as pretty. Researchers know that behind the most elegant ideas often lie weeks, months, or even years of painstaking, backbreaking, and potentially frustrating bench work whose ultimate success may depend as much on technique as on brilliant thinking.

Nowhere is this truer than in molecular biology, where concepts and techniques are inseparably linked. From the early seventies, by which time the fundamental details of DNA replication, recombination, and repair could be reproduced in the test tube, to the present, when organisms such as mice can be genetically altered almost at will, techniques have helped drive discovery.

But like biological organisms themselves, technology keeps evolving—and so must scientists. That is why Charles Mobbs recently organized the Protocol Club, a monthly meeting for Rockefeller researchers who want to hone current technical skills or learn new ones. "The Protocol Club will give people a nitty-gritty, hands-on view of what the techniques of molecular biology entail," says Mobbs.

Club shares benefits of experience

"Many people have great technical skills, but we all have a tendency to specialize," Mobbs adds. One aim of the Protocol Club is to let group members benefit from the specialists' experience, rather than starting from scratch themselves. Mobbs asks, "Why waste time reinventing the wheel?"

The inspiration for the club came in part from his own experience as a researcher in the Pfaff lab. Mobbs, who studies aging, is investigating the hypothesis that, over time, glucose, estrogen, and glucocorticoids cause accumulated damage to the neuroendocrine system. His research, which spans realms of investigation from the biochemical to the behavioral, is multi-disciplinary in approach and demands proficiency in a multitude of research techniques.

A few years ago, as part of the research project, Mobbs and his colleagues were searching for a protein specifically regulated by estrogen. To track this protein, they wanted to use the then-new and quite complicated technique called two-dimensional gel electrophoresis. "It turns out there were plenty of people around who were already using the technique,

but I didn't know about their work and spent a lot of time learning how to do it myself," he recalls.

Eventually, Mobbs's time and effort paid off with the discovery that an important protein called phospholipase-C- α is regulated by estrogen in a brain region called the ventromedial hypothalamus and by another hormone, called leuteinizing hormone-releasing hormone (LHRH), in the pituitary. But Mobbs asserts the excitement of discovery would have been just as delightful had he not had to slog through all the technical challenges first.

Those who can, teach

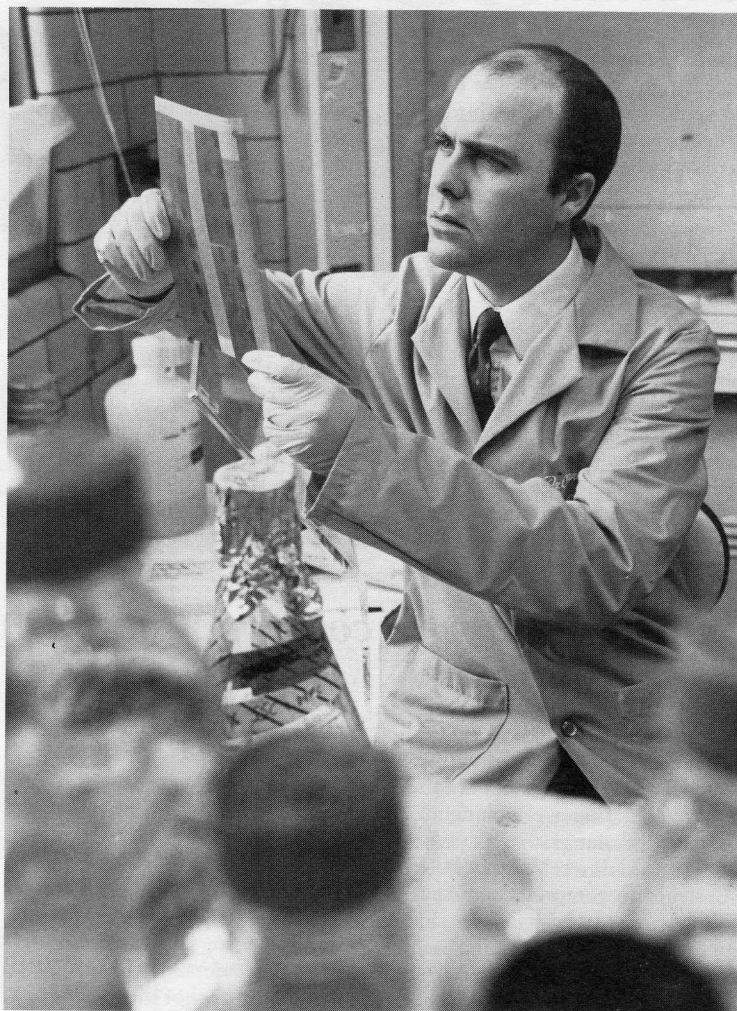
Thus, one of Mobbs's goals for the Protocol Club is "to get a bunch of people in the room who have already 'done it'—whatever 'it' happens to be. During the first half hour or so of each hour-long meeting, scientists experienced in a particular technique describe the protocol—the steps and the methods—that has worked best for them. The meetings then open up for others in the group to share their own experiences or to ask questions.

The first meeting, held in October, covered Western blots, a technique used to detect the presence of proteins. Often, Western blotting involves the use of radioactive antibodies. While extremely useful, this technique has its drawbacks including non-specificity, radioactivity, and slowness, says Mobbs. At the meeting, Mobbs's colleague in the Pfaff lab, Ursula Olazabal, discussed an alternative Western blot method that uses enzymes rather than radioactive antibodies to disclose the presence of particular proteins. She also described how this technique can be used to provide quantitative as well as qualitative information about proteins.

Some discussion at the meeting focussed on the comparative benefits of particular enzyme products—a topic Mobbs says is both inevitable and necessary. "Most of us are very dependent on the products out there in the marketplace," says Mobbs. "But who has the time or the money to check them all out?" He says he hopes the Protocol Club will become a forum for scientists to report on the products that have worked best for them.

Knowledge sharpens critical edge

Another goal of the club is to make scientists savvier analysts of the work of their colleagues, Mobbs says. He believes that though researchers may not need to use a



Charles Mobbs founded the Protocol Club, a monthly meeting which gives participants a nitty-gritty, hands-on view of lab techniques.

particular technique, they can still benefit from a basic understanding of what it entails. "The more you know about what's involved in the work, the better an idea you have of how reliable it may be," says Mobbs.

A wide range of topics will be covered at Protocol Club meetings, but Mobbs says he hopes many will focus on techniques that are still rapidly developing, such as the polymerase chain reaction, or PCR. "Today, PCR touches just about every molecular biologist, but only the current crop of graduate students learned the technique in school. The rest of us had to pick it up later."

According to Mobbs, the principles of PCR are "so simple, a child can do it." All it takes is a commercially-manufactured machine, some test tubes, a segment of DNA under study, some DNA primers, and the enzyme known as DNA polymerase. The machine automatically multiplies the DNA at speeds orders of magnitude faster than bacteria, previously the only available DNA cloning "machine."

But though the basic PCR technique is simple, improvements

are constantly being made, leading to new uses for the technology. Moreover, many questions remain to be resolved. For instance, does PCR reproduce DNA accurately enough to use the products for gene sequencing? "There are plenty of papers that say it does, but there is still a lot of skepticism about the fidelity of PCR," reports Mobbs. This is just one of the issues that will be discussed during upcoming meetings of the Protocol Club devoted to PCR.

Other topics scheduled for discussion include RNA extraction, Northern blots, genomic analysis, and expression vectors. Normally, the Protocol Club will meet on the second Tuesday of each month from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. in Tower 305. This month, however, it will meet on Nov. 19. The subject: image analysis techniques including methods to quantify bands or spots on gels, grains over cells, and immunoreactivity.

Sessions are still in the planning stage, and Mobbs encourages people with topic suggestions, or those who would like to give presentations, to contact him at x8662.

For the birds

Grackles and starlings flock to campus

Walking on campus at dusk in the fall can be eerily reminiscent of a scene from Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Huge flocks of small, dark birds with raucous voices swoop down from the treetops, changing direction suddenly in seemingly one motion. Jeffrey Cynx, assistant professor in the Nottebohm lab, identified the birds as starlings and grackles, two cousin species.

"In the spring, starlings and grackles are territorial. In the fall, after molting, they form large flocks which make them very visible. The flocks break up in January or February, the individual birds find mates, and the cycle starts again."

Like pigeons, starlings and grackles eat garbage and are considered pests. Unlike pigeons,

starlings have soft beaks which they can use to burrow for worms and insects. Male starlings are an iridescent green or blue cast in the spring; after they molt, they become black with white spots on their chests.

"Starlings' beaks change color in the spring," said Cynx. "The base of the male's beak turns from black to blue and the female's from black to pink. Isn't it astounding that the colors are the same as baby clothes?"

Cynx keeps a pet starling. He became more familiar with the species when Rockefeller's Field Research Center used starlings in avian developmental and hormonal studies a few years ago.

"Starlings are excellent mimics,"

Cynx continued. "Mozart had a pet starling that whistled the theme of one of his concertos. No one knows for sure who thought of the melody first—Mozart or the bird."

Michael John, security captain, has watched the birds come and go from campus for years.

"They spend the night in the trees on the corner of 68th and York," he said. "Then, by about 6:30 a.m., they start to move down the street. I don't know where they go during the day, but they come back to campus around 6:00 p.m."

"They do make a tremendous mess," he continued. "A few years ago, we tried to get rid of them using a noise device. But they just keep coming back. Now we just accept them."



Peregrine falcons love to eat grackles and starlings.

Falcons adapt to construction with nonchalance

The pair of peregrine falcons roosting on The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center has nonchalantly adapted to the waterproofing atop the roof of the 27-story building overlooking Rockefeller's campus.

"The birds are tolerating the construction very well," said Dr. John Aronian, who has been nicknamed "godfather of the falcons" by New York Hospital staff. "These falcons aren't like wild birds. They're used to people: every day people look at them and they look at people."

"We did, however, build a provision into the contract that no

construction work would take place from mid-February to mid-July," he said. "The birds become very sensitive during the period when they court, mate, and raise young."

The Department of Environmental Conservation will build a new nesting box, which will offer more shade and protection from the elements, to replace the one to be removed during the waterproofing. A remote camera may be installed to broadcast images of the falcons and their young into the hospital.

Peregrine falcons are on the endangered species list. In the 1970s, their population dropped to a low of about 100 breeding pairs in

the contiguous United States. DDT, which damages the birds' eggs, was largely to blame for the decline. Since that time special breeding programs have helped the birds make a slow comeback.

The neighborhood falcons were probably drawn to their roost by the skyscrapers that resemble natural cliffs, the river, and the nearby greenery at Rockefeller. In addition, New York City is on a major migration route, the Atlantic flyway, which guarantees the falcons a varied diet.

Among the falcons' favorite meals are pigeons, grackles, and starlings.

Potpourri

Noon Recital

Cellist Caroline Dale and pianist Marija Stroke will perform works by Ludwig van Beethoven, Claude Debussy, and Frederic Chopin at noon today in Caspary Auditorium. Both musicians are winners of numerous awards and scholarships.

Macintosh Users Group Meeting

RockMUG, the Rockefeller University Macintosh Users Group will have its next meeting Wed., Nov. 13, 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., in Caspary 1B. The topic of the meeting will be image analysis. Featured speakers will be Michel Ledizet of The Mount Sinai School of Medicine and Ray Aldrete of RU Media Resources. The discussion and demonstrations will focus on practical aspects of image analysis and preparation for publication. The public domain image analysis software NIH Image will be available free; those interested in obtaining it should come with a formatted Macintosh disk.

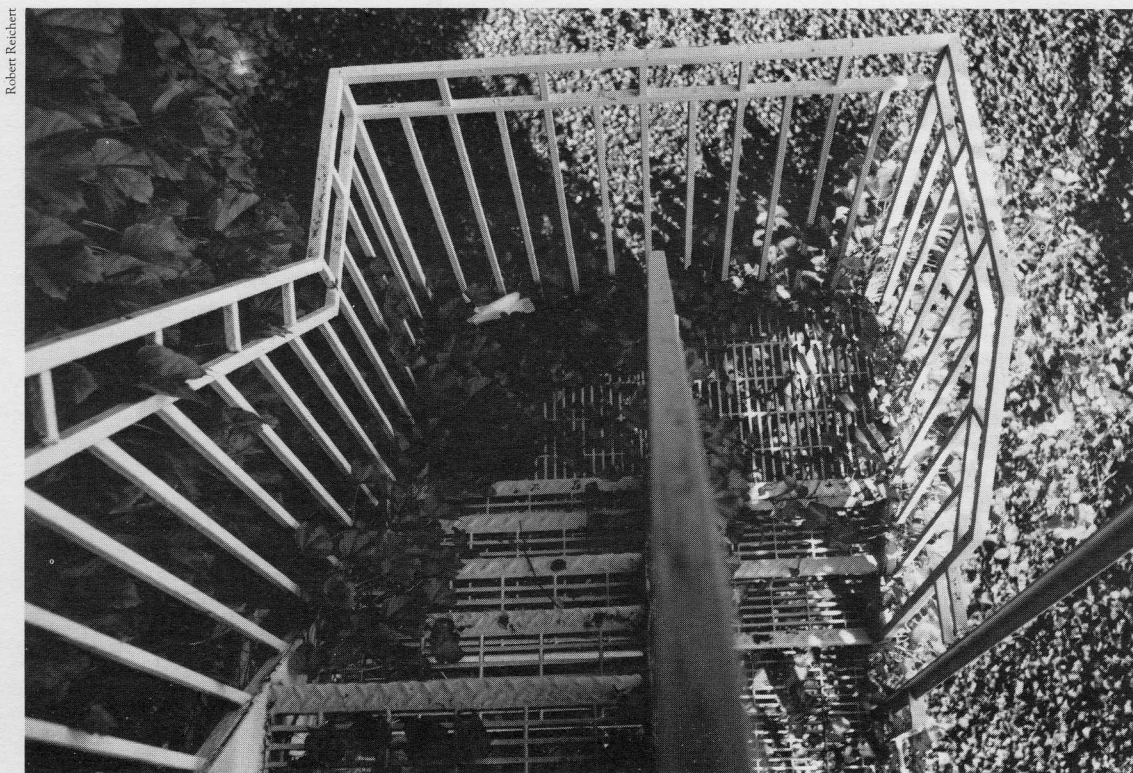
Bring lunch—drinks will be provided. Those who would like to help plan future meetings or who want to be added to the mailing list should contact Rachael Kolb or Anthony Popowicz, x8925 or e-mail rachael or tony.

Computer workshops

Workshops on Microsoft Word for the Mac will run from Nov. 18 through Nov. 27. These workshops require some experience, specifically the ability to use a mouse, work with menus, open, close, move, and resize windows, and navigate from one folder to another. Those interested in registering should call x8925 between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. or e-mail Carol Calmer (calmer) or Christa Owens (owens). The workshops will be held in Flexner extension room 363.

All Introduction to the Macintosh workshops have been filled.

Corners



A balcony provides a bird's-eye view of one of the fire escapes outside of Nurses Residence.