

Biological Lectures Delivered at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole ^[1]

By: Editorial Team, EP Keywords: [Laboratories](#) ^[2] [Education](#) ^[3]

The Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, began in 1888 with one building housing researchers upstairs and students in a shared lab and lecture space downstairs. For the first two years, instruction took the form of general lectures covering a range of topics in zoology. In addition, the trustees offered some public lectures in Boston to raise funds for the lab.

In 1890 the lab began a new tradition that has continued every year since. They began a series of evening lectures intended to be accessible to a wide audience of those interested in biology. Eventually these became known as the [Friday Evening Lectures](#) ^[4], and since the opening of the auditorium in the Lillie Building in 1924 (named after second Director Frank Rattray Lillie) the lectures have been held there. Every Friday evening during the summer season, the community of scientists, students, and members of the public interested in science stream into the auditorium for their weekly lecture, then move to the reception held afterward. These lectures are a high point of the MBL's summer of science.

Throughout the 1890s Charles Otis Whitman, as the MBL's first Director, persuaded the lecturers to write up their lectures and publish them. He organized the lectures of 1890 and then 1893-1899 into volumes that appeared as a serial that both showed the larger world what the MBL offered and brought leading scientists to the lab to participate in the lectures and their publications.

The Biological Lectures Delivered at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Holl provides a useful insight into what were thought to be the driving questions of the day and what were seen as productive ways of approaching them. Some years reveal a general distribution of topics, while other years are much more focused.

For an introduction to the lectures, see Jane Maienschein's introduction to *Defining Biology*. This volume offers a sampling of the lectures and also a complete list of lectures published during the 1890s. The MBL *Annual Reports* provide a list of every year's lecturers and demonstrate the shifts in emphasis over time, as well as changing trends in biology.