

# [Libbie Henrietta Hyman \(1888-1969\)](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

By: Bolfert, Kristin Keywords: [Biography](#) <sup>[2]</sup> [Zoology](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

Libbie Henrietta Hyman was born into a recently immigrated Jewish family on 6 December 1888 in Des Moines, Iowa. One of many siblings and daughter to parents Sabina Neumann and Joseph Hyman, who did not particularly support her interests in science, Hyman excelled in school and indulged her interests in biology in her free time. From a young age, Hyman collected and cataloged flora around her home. Despite being valedictorian of her high school class, Hyman's first job was labeling cereal boxes in a local factory. It was only when a former teacher became aware of Hyman's situation that Hyman was prompted to apply for college scholarships.

Thanks to that teacher Hyman secured funding to attend the [University of Chicago](#) <sup>[4]</sup> beginning in 1906. Hyman's initial interest was in botany, but after being exposed to anti-Semitism, she changed her focus first to chemistry and then to zoology. Despite her scholarship, Hyman was not well situated financially and she constantly struggled to pay her living expenses. She earned a BS in 1910 and stayed at the [University of Chicago](#) <sup>[4]</sup> for graduate school, working with [Charles Manning Child](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. Hyman received her PhD in 1915 and continued working as Child's research assistant and collaborator for many years. During this latter period she was able to work on the physiology of flatworms and other invertebrates, creating a foundation for her later research. Working for Child also allowed her to publish two laboratory manuals, both of which were very popular. The royalties from these manuals allowed Hyman to be financially independent for the rest of her life.

In 1931, after her mother's death, Hyman left Chicago, toured Europe, and then settled in New York to begin work on what would eventually become her *magnum opus*, a comprehensive treatise on invertebrate [morphology](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, physiology, [embryology](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, and [phylogeny](#) <sup>[8]</sup>. The location of her residence, near the American Museum of Natural History, gave her easy access to the library and this was a time of wonderful independent intellectual exploration for her. In 1937 she was made an honorary research associate of the museum, which allowed her to use its laboratories and an office. In 1940 Hyman published the first of six volumes of *The Invertebrates*, of which the final volume appeared in 1967. Plans for more volumes were disrupted by Hyman's deteriorating health. She worked on the last published volume from her wheelchair, and was almost completely immobilized by Parkinson's disease before she died on 3 August 1969 in New York City.

Hyman was recognized for her work by receiving the [National Academy of Sciences](#) <sup>[9]</sup> Daniel Giraud Elliot Medal in 1951 and by being inducted into the Academy in 1961. Other awards included the Gold Medal of the [Linnaean Society](#) <sup>[10]</sup> in 1960 and the Gold Medal of the American Museum of Natural History in 1969. Hyman also served as the editor of *Systematic Zoology*.

## Sources

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2. Harvey, Joy, and Marilyn Ogilvie. "Hyman, Libbie Henrietta (1888–1969)." In *Biographical Dictionary of Women in Science* 1, eds. Joy Harvey and Marilyn Ogilvie, 636–37. New York: Routledge, 2000.
3. Winston, Judith E., ed. "Libbie Henrietta Hyman: Life and Contributions." *American Museum Novitates* 3277 (1999).

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## Publisher

Arizona State University. School of Life Sciences. Center for Biology and Society. Embryo Project Encyclopedia.

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## Format

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## Last Modified

Wednesday, July 4, 2018 - 04:40

## DC Date Accessioned

Thursday, May 10, 2012 - 13:01

## DC Date Available

Thursday, May 10, 2012 - 13:01

## DC Date Created

2007-11-01

## DC Date Created Standard

Thursday, November 1, 2007 - 07:00

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