A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO RALPH GERBRANDS

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On April 9, 1980, B. F. Skinner sent a special message to Robert Gerbrands: "It is now more than 50 years [that] the name Gerbrands has played an important part in my research, and I am very happy that a collaborative effort survives." Those associated with JEAB, now commemorating its 30th year of publication, likewise recognize the importance of the Gerbrands Company in operant research in general and in JEAB's well-being in particular. The special relationship between our two enterprises was established early: When JEAB began publication in 1958, Ralph Gerbrands encouraged that venture by making a donation, by reserving space in its first issue, and by paying for that space in advance so that printing bills could be met. JEAB was the first publication in which Gerbrands advertised. And that special relationship has endured to the present: Among the 106 companies that have advertised in JEAB over the past 30 years, only Gerbrands had an advertisement in *every* issue. (In the mid-1960s, four-page Gerbrands ads were commonplace; the November 1967 issue contained eight pages of advertising for the company—a record that remains unchallenged.)

Ralph Gerbrands began building apparatus for psychological experiments in 1929, when he was hired for that purpose by the Department of Psychology at Harvard. The following year, he obtained permission from the university to use the shop evenings and weekends to build custom-designed apparatus for other laboratories where news of his skill and expertise had spread. In 1930, he produced the first piece of Gerbrands equipment for commercial sale—a memory drum.

In the early 1940s, he expanded his commercial production, setting up a shop in his home, publishing a catalogue, and drawing his

Ralph Gerbrands (1977).

wife Rhoda into the business as order processor and bookkeeper, all the while continuing his full-time employment at Harvard. He hired one full-time person in his home shop (Bob Worthen, who continued with the company until he retired in 1985 at the age of 78). Around 1954, he rented shop space on Warren Street and within the next few years employed Richard Cataldo and Art McMullen, both of whom are still with the company and now serve as president and vice-president, respectively. In 1967, he built a new plant on Beck Road where the company continues to operate out of two industrial buildings. One year later his son Robert joined the company; he remains active in its management to this day.

In the late 1950s, when grants for psychological research were plentiful, Ralph was granted permission to reduce his time at the Harvard shop from five days per week to three, in order to devote more time to his private venture. At the time he told people at Harvard that this would probably be a two- or three-year interlude, that the business was probably a flash in the pan, and that he would probably

I am indebted to Robert F. Gerbrands, who supplied the illustrations and much of the historical detail contained here.

B. F. Skinner with early Gerbrands cumulative recorder (c. 1952).

want to resume full-time employment at the Harvard shop. As it turned out, however, he continued to limit his work at Harvard to three days per week until his retirement in 1971—a span of 42 years with that institution—and continued to devote the other two days to his business.

The sales records for his best-known product, the cumulative recorder, during this period of growth offer an index of interest in—and funding of—operant research:

1955—36	1960—229	1965—411
1956—91	1961—239	1966—425
1957—113	1962—295	1967—571
1958—242	1963—278	1968—510
1959—238	1964—389	1969—459

Ralph Gerbrands is justifiably proud that his products are now in use at universities and

laboratories throughout the world—from Iceland to New Zealand, from Israel and Saudi Arabia to Brazil. (I recall receiving from a group of students in Brazil a series of snapshots showing the excitement in the laboratory at the arrival and unpacking of a large shipment from Gerbrands.)

Until his retirement from the company in 1973, Ralph continued to maintain a shop in his home. Now 82, he divides his time between Florida and Lake Monomonic in New Hampshire (a lake, by the way, on which his long-time friend, Rufus Grason—another charter JEAB advertiser—also has a summer home).

Thank you, Ralph Gerbrands, for your enormous contributions to operant research and for your steadfast loyalty to JEAB.