Charlotte and Allen in England, 1954
Bruce: As time-binders, we humans build on the values—visible and invisible—created by those who have come before us. And so we create our own values which we in turn can then pass on to others. When we recognize this process, when we remember and give thanks to the time-binders—known and unknown—who provided us with the values upon which we build, we become more conscious time-binders. And that can make a difference.

Today we officially open and dedicate Read House, the new home for the Institute of General Semantics. Read House is named for two of the most important time-binders in the history of general semantics (GS): Charlotte Schuchardt Read and her husband Allen Walker Read. Let us now remember them.

Susan: As we enjoy this Read House, let’s go back to the Read’s grand old apartment near Columbia University, New York City: a rich environment of paintings, tapestries, wonderful objects, and mostly, books, magazines, newspapers, more books, more...etc. Charlotte used the large dining room as her office; prominent was the old Royal typewriter that she never gave up, although she did acquire fax and answering machines in a timely way. Allen used the small second bedroom for his office. His desk, facing the window directly opposite the door, was reached via a very narrow passageway surrounded by filing cabinets. Quite an endearing sight to see his back as he worked amidst the partial accumulation of decades of scholarship. Overflow file cabinets could be found in the master bedroom, hallways, and the “maid’s room” adjacent to the kitchen.

Dinners at the Reads were a treat. Until near the end of her life, Charlotte cooked exquisite meals, which she insisted on serving elegantly. When cooking became difficult, we had take-out Chinese—reheated, put in bowls and served on china plates. Meals were often accompanied by wine. Before meals, and sometimes during them, Charlotte enjoyed a bottle of ale. As good as all of this was, mainly I cherish the conversation: urbane, intellectual and passionate, with lots of belly laughs from the sly and witty humor expressed.

Bruce: After Korzybski—with the help of his beloved wife Mira—had spent himself in the monumental effort of writing Science and Sanity, he knew that he had created something of potentially world-changing significance. But to build on what he had done, he needed more help. And he did eventually get the help that allowed him to found the Institute of General Semantics in Chicago in 1938.

In 1939, Charlotte Schuchardt came to work at the Institute as Korzybski’s personal assistant and secretary. Born in Wisconsin in 1909, she had studied dance, received a B.A. in zoology and physical education at the University of Wisconsin and an M.A. at the University of Chicago. She took a seminar in Chicago with Korzybski in 1936, just before becoming the secretary of the Math Department at M.I.T. in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Over the next few years she took several seminars with Korzybski until getting invited to move to Chicago to become his assistant. She soon became an irreplaceable co-worker, editor, and advisor. After the Institute moved to Connecticut in 1946 and until Korzybski’s death on March 3, 1950, she also helped the increasingly arthritis-crippled Korzybski—severely injured in World War I—to continue to function despite his growing pain and immobility. At some point this involved becoming, in effect, his personal occupational and physical therapist, i.e. helping him to dress.
After Korzybski's death, Charlotte worked for and with the Institute until her own death in 2002. She fulfilled many roles including: Secretary of the Board of Trustees from 1950 until just a few years ago, Literary Executor of the Alfred Korzybski Estate, Director of the Institute of General Semantics, Editor of the General Semantics Bulletin, IGS seminar administrator and teacher, GS writer and historian, etc. As a teacher, she focused primarily on the non-verbal aspects of GS training, first teaching Korzybski’s neuro-semantic relaxation technique and then later applying the “sensory awareness” work of Charlotte Selver to help people extensionalize themselves through silent-level practice. This work now seems an essential part of GS extensional training.

**Susan:** Charlotte led sensory awareness sessions in her gentle, forceful way. She guided us through what she called “experiments,” not “exercises,” which might imply effort; rather, “What can you notice now? And now?” When the work involved lying on the floor, for most of us a welcome rest from classroom-type sessions, she seemed unfazed by the not-infrequent snoring heard around the room. On these, as well as on many other occasions, I would sense her accepting, “I’ve seen and heard it all and it’s okay,” albeit sometimes expressed with an eye-roll. After hours, Charlotte could be very playful. One instance stands out (so to say, to use a phrase of hers): Music was playing; people were dancing, including Charlotte. The room ended up decorated by two fewer balloons, as she put two of them down the front of her blouse, creating quite a different dancing Charlotte. She did love to dance. One year, lakeside in the dark, while Milton Dawes drummed, she spontaneously danced alone for 30 minutes before an enchanted audience.

**Bruce:** In 1953 Charlotte became known as Charlotte Schuchardt Read when she married Allen Walker Read. Given the sum total of her achievements, I can safely say that Charlotte Read contributed more than any person I know to the survival of the Institute into the 21st century and thus to the continuation of Korzybski’s work. I feel confident that Allen—devoted as he was to Charlotte—would not have felt ‘jealous’ by my promoting her to this lofty status. It also seems clear to me that Charlotte would not have been able to accomplish what she did without the support of her beloved Allen, a professor in the Department of English at Columbia University. In providing Charlotte the means to continue to devote herself to Institute work and through his own teaching, writing and other assistance, Allen Walker Read contributed more than almost anyone other than her to the Institute and to GS.

**Susan:** They were a most romantic couple, enjoying dancing together at weddings, swimming together when possible, taking hikes weekly while able. When they were angry with each other, at the same or different times, they expressed it vigorously but politely; models of handling marital hitches well.

Once we returned by train with Charlotte from a two-week seminar. We knew that Allen was to meet her, but not how he would do it. As we pulled into the station, we saw him on the track, practically dancing on the platform with eagerness and joy at seeing her.

Charlotte worried about Allen when she was away for more than a day or two, preparing food in advance for him. For she knew that he was happy to live on ice cream and milk shakes and would delight in doing so while she was gone. I imagine him happily getting in as many of this type of meal as possible while he could. Near the end Allen’s life, Bob Pula would take him and his home health aide on outings to New Jersey, during which Allen would enjoy the change of scene—and especially a chocolate milk shake.

**Bruce:** Born in Minnesota in 1906, Allen grew up in Iowa where his father worked as the one-man science faculty of Iowa State Teacher’s College in Cedar Falls. With a love of the English language inspired by H.L. Mencken’s The American Language, Allen decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and take up an academic career studying English as a scientist. Allen received a bachelor’s degree from Iowa State in 1925 and an M.A. in English from the University of Iowa in 1926. He then taught English at the University of Missouri. Awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, Allen studied at Oxford University from 1928 to 1932, where he specialized in descriptive linguistics and lexicography.

His scientific attitude and down-to-earth interest in how people talk had already led him in the late 1920s to collect material, i.e., men’s room graffiti, that others did not consider suitable for academic study. His resulting book on ‘nasty’ words, Lexical Evidence From Folk...
Epigraphy In Western North America: A Glossarial Study of the Low Element in the English Vocabulary had to be privately published in Paris in 1935 in a limited edition of 75 copies. (It was later reprinted in 1977 by Maledicta Press under the title, Classical American Graffiti.) In 1932, Allen became a research associate in English at the University of Chicago where he worked on the editorial staff of the Dictionary of American English. Allen’s unorthodox (at the time) scientific approach to studying how people used language eventually led him to GS in 1936 when Allen began reading Science and Sanity and attending lectures by Korzybski.

Susan: Allen would attend the seminar-workshops for a few days each year, and deliver one lecture on language—history, usage, etc. He prepared carefully and used his notes, so the proceedings seemed very formal and professor-like. All the more delightful, then, when he forthrightly, ardently, forcefully, wittily skewered people with whom he vigorously disagreed (e.g. Noam Chomsky). He had numerous handouts for each of us, each of them carefully signed by him, “To [name inserted], with best wishes, Allen.” Such courtliness. He gave us the formulation of English Minus Absolutisms (EMA), for which we have much to thank. The reasonableness which this represents pervaded his life, and at least once got him in “trouble” at a seminar. He participated in a session on the “Uncritical Inference Test” and disagreed with some of the “right” answers. After all, he insisted, what he was suggesting instead seemed a much more reasonable choice.

I admired Charlotte and Allen’s decisions to withdraw from teaching at seminars when they felt that they could no longer do so adequately. Charlotte quit before I would have said she needed to. However, her hearing loss was such that she was concerned that, because she couldn’t accurately hear students, she wouldn’t be able to work up to her standards.

Bruce: Receiving a Guggenheim fellowship in 1938, Allen left Chicago for three years, and it was not until he returned that he made friends with M. Kendig and Charlotte and Korzybski himself. He took a seminar with Korzybski in 1941 and again in 1945. Allen definitely made friends with Charlotte, as we know. He also became devoted to promoting and building upon Korzybski’s work. After his World War II army service, Allen held a Professorship of English at Columbia University from 1945 to 1974. After retirement, he continued his research and professional activities well into his nineties. Allen presented and/or published some 317 papers and books in lexicography, semiotics, onomastics (place name studies), geolinguistics, sociolinguistics, etc. He became most well-known to the general public for his discovery of the origin of the word “O.K.”

His papers directly about or related to general semantics number around ten percent of his total output. He also worked steadfastly to promote GS in reference works—no small thing. If you ever pick up a dictionary and feel surprised about the accuracy of its discussion of general semantics, it seems likely that Allen—as an editor or consultant to the Funk & Wagnalls Dictionary, the Random House Dictionary, the Dictionary of American English, etc.—had something to do with it.

Susan: Our last visit with the Reads, in November 2001, found them diminished in capacities but not in themselves. Charlotte insisted that nuts, dried fruit and cookies be served in her lovely china, and that we choose something to drink from the variety of beverages offered. She wanted to know what we were currently up to and discussed with us various projects in progress, as well as what she was currently working on.

Near the end of her life, she edited Allen’s last two books, as well as General Semantics and Psychotherapy. She was open about her difficulties, yet uncomplaining. Allen was resting when we arrived and I first saw him in the kitchen, when I went to replenish something. After a hug, he said, “I’m in terrible shape!” and then joined us in the living room. After living a life devoted to language, he was depressed in response to his profound hearing loss. His retreat annoyed Charlotte, because he was more mobile than she was. She said, “I have to keep going. I have work to do!” As do we now, building on their legacy in this wonderful center that their generosity has made possible.

Bruce: Allen and Charlotte may have been born non-aristotelians but after they met Korzybski they worked hard to extensionalize themselves further. As a result they became models of consciousness of abstracting, semantic flexibility and the non-identifying person. We miss them greatly. Their memory will remain a blessing to us whenever we enter Read House.