



The Polio Years in Texas: Battling a Terrifying Unknown

Heather Green Wooten

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From the 1930s to the 1950s, in response to the rising epidemic of paralytic poliomyelitis (polio), Texas researchers led a wave of discoveries in virology, rehabilitative therapies, and the modern intensive care unit that transformed the field nationally.

The disease threatened the lives of children and adults in the United States, especially in the South, arousing the same kind of fear more recently associated with AIDS and other dread diseases. Houston and Harris County, Texas, had the second-highest rate of infection in the nation, and the rest of the Texas Gulf Coast was particularly hard-hit by this debilitating illness. At the time, little was known, but eventually the medical responses to polio changed the medical landscape forever.

Polio also had a sweeping cultural and societal effect. It engendered fearful responses from parents trying to keep children safe from its ravages and an all-out public information blitz aimed at helping a frightened population protect itself. The disease exacted a very real toll on the families, friends, healthcare resources, and social fabric of those who contracted the disease and endured its acute, convalescent, and rehabilitation phases.

In *The Polio Years in Texas*, Heather Green Wooten draws on extensive archival research as well as interviews conducted over a five-year period with Texas polio survivors and their families. This is a detailed and intensely human account of not only the epidemics that swept Texas during the polio years, but also of the continuing aftermath of the disease for those who are still living with its effects.

Public health and medical professionals, historians, and interested general readers will derive deep and lasting benefits from reading *The Polio Years in Texas*.

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