

Oral vaccine conquered polio in 1960s

ONLY IN OKLAHOMA

By GENE CURTIS

A dread disease that left its victims disabled — such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt — or dead was finally conquered in the 1960s.

By a sugar cube. And by more than 2,000 Tulsa volunteers, including doctors and nurses, pharmacists, Boy Scouts, Kiwanians, school principals, custodians, other employees and Civil Defense patrolmen who staffed 40 clinics in schools and at the Armory.

And thanks to that effort and other similar clinics around the country, most people under 50 today have no knowledge of polio and its crippling effects.

Of course, the sugar didn't have any medicinal quality — the liquid vaccine was dripped onto the cubes to make the medicine go down, especially for children, the primary targets for the vaccine.

The oral vaccine was developed by Dr. Albert Sabin, a University of Cincinnati scientist. Its use followed by about 10 years an injected polio vaccine developed by Dr. Jonas Salk that had cut the incidence of polio dramatically throughout the day country, including Oklahoma.

During the 1950s, for instance, there were 651 cases in five years in Tulsa. By 1962, that number had been cut to 10 cases, reflecting the effectiveness of the injected Salk vaccine. The liquid Sabin vaccine promised even greater protection.

Doctors stressed that even people who had received Salk vaccinations should get the oral medicine because the injected vaccine was only 85 percent to 90 percent effective while tests had shown the oral vaccine to be 100 percent effective.

More than 780,000 doses of the Sabin vaccine were distributed to 70 percent of the county's population by the Tulsa County Medical Society, which still looks at that community effort as one of the most successful projects of the now-100-year-old organization.

Records show that 265,710 received the first dose of type I on Jan. 20 and 27, more than 257,000 received the second dose of type II on March 10 and 17 and 253,064 doses of type III were given April 28 and May 5, according to Paul Patton, executive director of the Tulsa County Medical Society.

The Tulsa World helped draw attention to the second immunization on March 10, 1963, with a Page 1 drawing of a syringe dripping a liquid onto a sugar cube and a message overprinted in red: "Get your Type II oral polio vaccine TODAY!"

Because of the overprinted red message, there was no doubt about the importance of the small story at the bottom announcing that the second of three doses of the Sabin polio vaccine was scheduled to be



given at 43 locations around Tulsa County that day.

Each recipient was asked to contribute 25 cents for receiving the vaccine. However, the World made it clear that no one would be turned away, regardless of a person's ability to pay.

The story stressed the importance of taking all three doses of Sabin vaccine about six or eight weeks apart. The oral vaccine was believed to confer a lifetime immunity to the disease.

In spite of the big red message on the front page of that day's Tulsa World, only 162,615 showed up at the clinics for the second doses of vaccine.

Rain and sickness — many children were out of school with flu, chicken pox and other illnesses — were blamed for the low turnout, and a makeup clinic was scheduled for the next Sunday, when 95,339 more turned out.

It had been only a few years since two of Tulsa's major hospitals, Hillcrest and St. John, created polio wards by moving iron lungs into hallways for victims because they didn't have enough patient rooms. During the height of the



Tulsa World archives

Hillcrest student nurse Ruth Lindquist helps pharmacist Tom Mullen drip the oral polio vaccine onto sugar cubes during Tulsa's "Smash Polio" campaign in January 1963. Each person taking the vaccine was asked to donate 25 cents toward the cost of the project. This photo ran in the Tulsa World on Jan. 17, 1963.

epidemic in the 1940s and '50s, parents kept their children out of swimming pools in the summer and would not allow them to attend movies or other events where they might be in crowds for fear they would contract the virus. During the epidemic's worst days, the World ran Page 1 boxes showing how many new cases had been

diagnosed, how many had died and how many had gone home from the hospitals.

A polio epidemic in 1916 had killed 6,000 and paralyzed 27,000 in the U.S. In 1921, Roosevelt, who had been the Democrat nominee for vice president the previous year, contracted the virus while on vacation. At first he walked with the aid of canes

and heavy steel braces on his legs but eventually relied on a wheelchair for mobility.

Photograph research by Rachelle Vaughan

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Bartlesville librarian, fired in 1950, is due recognition

By LAURA SUMMERS
World Correspondent

BARTLESVILLE — When Ruth Brown was fired as Bartlesville's head librarian in 1950, she probably never imagined the day would come when a permanent sculpture of her likeness would be displayed at the library.

But that's what will happen at 2 p.m. Sunday during a memorial celebration at the Bartlesville Public Library, 600 S. Johnstone Ave., where a bust of her will be unveiled. A prominent figure in local history, Brown was accused of being a communist and dismissed at the height of the McCarthy era.

Her fans say the real reason she was fired was because she allowed black people to borrow library books.

"Miss Brown lost her job because of her determination to promote equal rights for blacks, not only at the library, but also at churches and businesses," according to Joan Dreisker, chair of the Women's Network Ruth Brown project.

"She was ahead of her time in her quest for truth and justice," Dreisker said.

Brown died in 1975. The sculpture of her was created by American Indian artist Janice Albro.

Bartlesville's Greater First Baptist Church choir will sing at Sunday's event, which will include a display of Brown's life and work.

More than \$25,000 was raised for the Ruth Brown memorial, beginning a year ago.

Extra funds for the project will be used to endow a scholarship for library employees seeking to pursue a master's degree in library and information sciences.

"Miss Ruth Brown was a righteous woman," Dreisker said. "We honor her spirit. Her actions here helped change minds and laws and reshape the future."

In addition to allowing the black residents of Bartlesville to borrow library books, Brown also in 1946 helped organize the first chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality group south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

She took a black friend with her to an all-white church. Then in 1950, she accompanied two black teachers to a drugstore in downtown Bartlesville and asked to be served.

"As an activist for civil rights, she relentlessly challenged the racial taboos and legal inequities of her time, stating that she 'simply wanted to live as a Christian in a democracy,'" Dreisker said.

Regular library services will not be offered Sunday. It will be open for the reception only, officials said.

Bartlesville Public Library:
<http://www.bartlesville.lib.ok.us/>

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Courtesy

Ruth Brown, an equal-rights advocate pictured here in this undated photo provided by the Bartlesville Public Library, will be honored Sunday at the library, where a bust of her will be unveiled.

Heritage group honors winners

The Oklahoma Heritage Association honored four individuals and three other winners for preserving local and state history over the past year.

Terry Riggs of Heavener was named winner of the Robert E. and Roxana Lorton and Harold C. and Joan S. Stuart Indian Territory Award for excellence in teaching Oklahoma history.

Ponca City educator T.L. Walker gained the Edward L. and Thelma Gaylord Oklahoma Territory Award for teaching

state history. Thrissa Johnson of Fort Gibson will receive the Oklahoma Heritage Distinguished Service Award.

Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby of Ada is the Centennial Leadership Award honoree for preservation of state and local history.

Founders' Place Historical District in Muskogee captured the Robert E. and Roxana Lorton and Harold C. and Joan S. Stuart Territory Award for state and local history preser-

vation. The Oklahoma Museums Association was named preservation winner of the Edward L. and Thelma Gaylord Oklahoma Territory Award.

The Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise won the Oklahoma Heritage Distinguished Editorial Award.

The award winners will be celebrated March 29 during the Heritage Association's annual membership meeting at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa.

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