

# **The History of Pathology in Texas**

**Marilyn Miller Baker**

**Texas Society of Pathologists**

# The History of Pathology in Texas

By Marilyn Miller Baker

**FIRST EDITION**

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*New Spain Physician - Early 17th Century*

*18th Century Spanish physician in Texas, by El Paso painter Jose Cisneros*  
From the personal collection of Dr. and Mrs. Vernie A. Stembridge

## Foreword

FRONTIERSMEN IN TEXAS' development were a rough and tumble group. Native Americans and European immigrants satisfied their curiosity about the cause and manner of death through the performance of crude autopsies. Pioneer pathologists, by today's standards, necessarily used coarse approaches to the study of disease.

Like the state, Texas Pathology is a young specialty, the recorded activity of which is scarcely 100 years old. The University of Texas Medical Branch has the distinction of the longest lineal heritage: the early scientific contributions of George Dock and Allen J. Smith and the available autopsy and surgical pathology reports of 1892 and 1903. From that time until the present there have been at least three identifiable growth periods of pathology in the state.

The first significant step was highlighted by World War I. The emergence of bacteriology (and its sequel sanitation) together with the field of immunology did much to establish the importance of the clinical laboratory. In combination with the growth occurring in both surgery and medicine, the specialty of pathology became established and recognized. A remarkable acknowledgment of the contribution of pathologists was emphasized by the American College of Surgeons, which deemed that it would approve no hospital that did not have a pathologist in support of surgery performed by Fellows of the College.

The second significant step occurred in the aftermath of World War II. During the war, the importance of pathologists had been accentuated by their beneficial service in military hospitals, and when pathologists returned home, progress was extrapolated in two major ways: first, via the Hill-Burton Act, which fostered the establishment of first-rate hospitals in less-populated areas of the country and by the requirement that a pathologist direct the clinical labo-

ratory. Second, as a consequence of the war effort, the benefit of targeted research became crystal clear as medical school departments received funding to support the inquiring minds of their faculties.

And what of the future? From a scientific standpoint, the doors have been opened to molecular biology and the human genome. Yet, today momentous struggles continue: First, in the public's mind, providing health care and containing its costs are uppermost. Second, universities seemingly have outrun their resources and are being forced to restructure or downsize with the agonizing prospect of atrophy.

Third, what about medicine's New Wave of physicians, researchers, and others interested in good health? What torch is being passed to our youth (the New Wave) and how will it be handled?

Finally, what about Virchow? Most of us readily acknowledge that Virchow was the founder of much that we consider the body of medical knowledge. Few people realize, however, that he also championed the distinction between the body of medical knowledge and the practice of medicine, or the application of that knowledge. In other words, he focused on both the science and the art of medicine. Perhaps there are lessons yet to be learned from Virchow's seemingly forgotten pronouncements about the art.

From an etymologic standpoint, *Pathology* is the study of the essential changes of disease. With this definition, how could one doubt its future? Ours is a dedication to the essential understanding of disease. For centuries, mankind has acknowledged its "medicine men" with a position of high standing.

It behooves us now to keep to the basics, regardless of the various tuggings by governments, politicians and the like.

VERNIE A. STEMBRIDGE, MD  
Ashbel Smith Professor & Chairman  
Emeritus of Pathology  
University of Texas Southwestern  
Medical Center at Dallas  
January 1996

## Preface & Acknowledgments

IN 1996, THE TEXAS Society of Pathologists celebrates its Seventy-fifth Anniversary and as such is the oldest state pathology organization in the nation. Plans for a Diamond Jubilee Celebration began in 1993 when an ad hoc committee was appointed, consisting of Drs. John J. Andujar, William T. Hill, William Gordon McGee, Susan M. Strate, and Domingo H. Useda, with Drs. Thomas H. McConnell, III, and Vernie A. Stembridge as Co-Chairs.

Two fine articles of historic nature existed (Beecher F. Stout, 1953, and John J. Andujar, 1967), but clearly the assemblage of a complete history of pathology in Texas would serve a useful purpose. Despite the apparent need, the anticipated cost of the project was outside the realm of the Society alone. Then, Medaphis Physician Services Corporation accepted TSP's offer to become a Premier Sponsor for the Seventy-fifth Anniversary—which permitted arrangements for a book to proceed.

For many years Marilyn Baker has been identified in literary matters at the Texas Medical Association, having served as a top executive and for more than twenty years as editor of *Texas Medicine*—receiving numerous awards for excellence. Now a free-lance agent, her broad understanding of medicine's accomplishments, issues and challenges well suited her for our endeavor. In fact, Mrs. Baker had been developing a similar history for pediatrics, *Caring for the Children: The History of Pediatrics in Texas*. Our task was urgent—we must have a finished product within six months! With her characteristic dedication, Marilyn has devoted full energies to this project: conducting a large number of personal interviews, reviewing innumerable questionnaires, spending countless hours in li-



braries, and ultimately assembling, organizing and synthesizing mountains of information about pathology and pathologists.

An Editorial Advisory Board was appointed to assist Mrs. Baker with the book: Drs. John J. Andujar, Joyce S. Davis, William T. Hill, Thomas H. McConnell, III, William Gordon McGee, George J. Race, Susan M. Strate, Frank M. Townsend, and Vernie A. Stembridge. This committee worked assiduously to accomplish this feat.

A number of other individuals also graciously assisted with providing information, among whom were Susan L. Brock, Director, and her staff, Texas Medical Association Library, Austin; Elizabeth Borst White, Director, Historical Research Center, Houston Academy of Medicine, Texas Medical Center Library, Houston; Inci Bowman, Curator, and Sarita Bullard Oertling, Library Assistant III, Blocker History of Medicine Collections, The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Appreciation is expressed also to the staff of the Texas Society of Pathologists, Paula Rigling and Angie Sais; to Sharon R. Walker, Texas Medical Association staff, and others for readily providing information and other assistance.

V. A. S.

POSTSCRIPT: Dr. Vernie A. Stembridge has failed to mention his monumental effort in assembling and sharing information on the history of pathology, both in Texas and globally, and in reviewing the manuscript. Without the *true* mountain of information that he had been gathering for more than two years and his sage guidance, it would have been impossible to complete this book within a matter of months. Texas Pathology has a rich history, and there are many special people whose stories are not told, particularly because of the short time frame for preparing this bound volume. It is hoped, however, that "the story" of Texas Pathology conveyed here will provide both interesting reading and the insight that history brings to future choices and decisions.

M. M. B.

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