

Looking Back: TMA's Historical Archives

Summer in Texas comes with a litany of health hazards, not least of which is one of medicine's continual villains: the humble, historic, hated mosquito. A mosquito bite is an itchy nuisance, but also a risk for transmitting West Nile virus, dengue, malaria, and other life-threatening illnesses.

THAT'S COMMON KNOWLEDGE to medicine now, but in the 1890s, it was a budding and urgent field of research. Details of decades of difficult, sometimes dangerous study it took to identify precisely how mosquitoes spread disease, and how to control it, are illustrated in the Texas Medical Association's traveling banner exhibit, "Stamping Out Disease" (texmed.org/history).

One of those dedicated doctors was Edwin Albert Woldert, a native of Tyler, who in the late 19th century was hard at work obtaining his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania. There, he did extensive research on the transmission of malaria via mosquitoes. TMA's historical archives now hold the journals with his sketches and observations.

In 1901, Dr. Woldert returned to Tyler after a few years spent in private practice and employed at hospitals, and just one year later, Ronald Ross, a British physician, won the Nobel Prize in Medicine for discovering how mosquitoes transmit malaria. TMA houses Dr. Woldert's correspondence with Dr. Ross along with his journals and sketches.

Armed with the latest in scientific research, like many TMA members of today, he entered public health service, becoming Tyler's city physician and health officer. He initiated the construction of drainage ditches to eliminate pools of stagnant water that served as breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

To this day, built on the research Dr. Woldert and his peers conducted, Texas public health officials monitor areas of mosquito activity and employ mosquito control techniques in times of high risk.

Sources: "Albert Woldert: Physician, Historian, and Community Leader in Tyler, Texas," McCroskey, Vista, for *Handbook of Texas*.



Journals of Dr. Woldert