

Randall Gustave Heye, M.D.

Doctor Randall Gustave Heye served Plainview and the surrounding area as a leading practitioner of internal medicine for four decades beginning in 1951. He played a key role in the history of local public health, working against the polio epidemic of the early 1950s and detecting and combating the presence of mosquito-borne encephalitis in the same period.

Randall Gustave Heye was born in 1918 in Galveston and grew up there. He completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Texas, Austin and earned his M.D. at the University of Texas, Galveston. He married Jean Kemp in 1943, and the couple eventually had three children. He was a physician in the Army in World War II, and after his military service he practiced medicine in Houston until 1951, when the Heyes moved to Plainview.

During the polio epidemic Dr. Heye was head of the Plainview Hospital ward caring for polio patients, most of whom were children. He discovered that many did not fit the usual profile and, after conducting tests and research, he determined that they were suffering from encephalitis, a lesser but still deadly mosquito-borne disease. He revised their treatment accordingly and convinced local officials to prevent an epidemic by means of public education (convincing people to stay indoors at dawn and dusk, the periods when the mosquitoes were most active) and mosquito abatement (widespread spraying of insecticide, much of it by trucks passing down all the city streets — a sight and smell older Plainview residents remember well).

During his many years of private practice, Dr. Heye volunteered extensively for the Public Health Department and played a leading role in developing new programs. He also participated in planning for the new hospital. He was an active member of the First United Methodist Church and a frequent supporter of a variety of community causes. He died in 1997.

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