



## *Extra Extra!!! Read all about it!!!! How has the Brazos County Health Department served you since 1939?*

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Restaurant inspections, immunizations, water sanitation: where would all these be today without the longtime support and direction of public health efforts? Since 1908, when the Bryan City Council first passed an ordinance creating a city Board of Health, much has changed locally and been improved in this realm of public concern.

The first Board of Health consisted of four practicing physicians who were designated to supervise the general sanitary conditions of the city. In 1923, Brazos County Commissioners voted to give \$300 to assist in paying a county nurse as established under the Smith-Towner Act. The nurse had limited equipment and her duties primarily consisted of speaking to groups on the problems of public health. The year 1923 also saw the appointment of the Brazos County Health Committee, which consisted of a group of individuals from various professions who sought to improve the living conditions of their community. The committee met monthly and provided the first statement of objectives regarding public health efforts. These objectives were centered around communicable disease control, sanitation, and education about good health practices. Two full-time nurses were employed and traveled to different parts of the county, providing presentations on health and instructing people on living a healthier lifestyle. By the early 1930s, these nurses conducted immunization and

dental health programs. These programs sought to improve sanitary conditions, teach good nutrition, and examine sick children. Brazos County was one of the first in the state to support public health nurses and one of the best in eliminating malaria.

In 1933, the Brazos County Health Committee became the Brazos County Health Board. While the efforts provided under the leadership of this Board improved the health and well-being of the citizens of Brazos County, it had become clear that an organization on a broader scale was needed to be fully successful in these efforts. In addition to the need for additional monetary support, the committee and others in the community felt that more governmental intervention was needed to expand the programs. In July of 1937, the city of Bryan sent delegates to Austin to confer with the State Health officer about making Bryan the headquarters for a proposed new public health district. An editorial written in the city newspaper, *The Eagle*, in February 1939, promoted the idea of having an organized county health unit supported by the city and county as one that "merits serious consideration." Following this article, plans for an organized public health organization progressed rapidly, until finally on August 18, 1939, the Bryan city council members formally approved the proposal for the health unit. Thus, the Brazos County Health Unit was born.

Funding for the unit was provided by state and federal expenditures and local support from Brazos County, the City of Bryan, the City of College Station, the Chamber of Commerce, and Texas A&M College. Personnel for the unit was hired and consisted of a director, a sanitary engineer, milk and dairy inspector, a sanitarian, and the two existing public health nurses. On October 1, 1939, the group formally attended the annual Texas Public Health Association Convention. This was the first recorded activity that the Unit officially participated in together. Within the next few years, several considerable changes were made in the health status of the community. During this time, the most serious diseases found prevalent were diphtheria, typhoid fever, and malaria. Research had determined that the mosquitoes were the cause of malaria, and steps were being taken by the city to control areas deemed to be the breeding grounds for this insect. In 1941, there were 1,200 cases of malaria recorded; by the year 1944, this number had decreased considerably to 89 cases. When the health unit was formed, the work done by the city was assimilated into its programs. In addition to environmental control measures, immunizations were provided at different locations in the community. The unit at this time was housed in the Bryan City Hall, and nurses traveled to stores and both rural and urban schools to administer immunizations to the general public.

From 1939 to 1950, the Brazos County Health Unit continued to serve the public through venereal disease clinics, tuberculosis-control efforts, meat inspections, restaurant inspections, foodhandler classes, immunizations, child health visits, and communicable disease control methods. With the country in the midst of war during this time period, Brazos County was home to a large Army unit. Special attention had to be paid to the fact that this large Army unit had a high prevalence of venereal disease in its command unit. Efforts of the health unit were increased, and by 1946, Ernest Langford, Vice-Chairman of the Governing Board of the Brazos County Health Unit, recorded the fact that “no venereal disease of local origin has been reported among some 5,000 men in uniform in Brazos County.”

The Unit moved from its original location in City Hall to 104 South Washington Street in 1949. Programs promoting adequate sanitation, dental health, prenatal care, immunizations, disease control, school health, and food safety continued. During the early 1950’s, the top diseases recorded were diarrhea, throat infections, measles, mumps and influenza, along with the outbreak of polio. Many health complaints against restaurants led to an increase in the number of foodhandler classes held each week. Despite drastic budget cuts, the Health Unit continued to be the main force behind the reduction of these problems. The unit survived budget reductions and made a second move to 407 South College Street in August of 1951.

The Brazos County Health Unit was renamed to the Brazos County Health Department in 1964. During the

1960’s, the department added the services of diabetic screenings, pap smears for indigent women, and a ringworm clinic for indigent children. With this expansion of services came once again the need for additional space; thus, the department relocated to 202 East 27<sup>th</sup> Street. Here it remained for several years until October of 1990, when it moved into the newly renovated Safeway building at 201 North Texas Avenue, where it is still located today.

During the decades from 1970 to 2000, the Brazos County Health Department continued to serve the citizens of Brazos County through programs in immunization, sanitation, food and water safety, child health, communicable disease control, tuberculosis treatment and control, disease prevention and health education.

The events of September 11, 2001, ushered in new concerns for Brazos County citizens and for the Brazos County Health Department. While existing services continued to be provided, emergency preparedness became one of the focal points of the health department operations. Over the past decade, the health department has played a major role in the planning and implementation of measures to protect citizens during natural and man-made disasters.

Seventy-five years after its inception, the health department continues to provide many services that affect various aspects of the public’s health. The services provided by the health department’s Community Health Services division include: immunizations, communicable disease control, tuberculosis elimination, adult health screenings for glucose and blood

pressure, HIV testing and counseling, and sexually transmitted disease diagnosis and treatment. The Environmental Health Services division provides food service establishment inspections, daycare facility inspections, foodhandler training and certification, on-site sewage facility permits and inspections, and various environmental investigations. The Laboratory Services division conducts bacteriological analysis of public and private water, along with clinical lab testing for services previously mentioned. The health department continues to maintain an active role in emergency preparedness and health education within the community through its Emergency Preparedness and Response division and its Health Education and Promotion division.

Today the Brazos County Health Department is dedicated to protecting and promoting a healthy life for the community. Thanks to its work and efforts over the years, citizens of the Brazos County can now enjoy healthier lives in a cleaner and safer environment.



