



Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience

February 7 – September 12, 2004



ALBERTA-WIDE POLIO BAN

**Affects
Children
Under 16**

**Restrict Pools,
Theatres Friday**

In an attempt to combat Alberta's mid-summer wave of polio, children under 16 years of age will be barred from swimming pools and theatres throughout the province, starting Friday morning.

Alberta chief, today and municipalities were informed of the ban Thursday afternoon by Dr. D. A. Sowerby, deputy minister of health for the province. In Calgary, Dr. L. C. Allan, assistant city health officer, stressed that the order was issued by the provincial board of health in Edmonton and not by the city. Letters containing additional details on the ban were mailed to health officers throughout the province Thursday afternoon. Dr. Allan said the provincial board of health feels the distribution of polio cases is far more uniform in the province than it was last summer. That, apparently, is the principal reason for imposing the swimming pool and theatre ban.

Meanwhile, two additional polio cases were reported in Calgary Thursday, bringing to 64 the total for city and district. Latest victims are a two-and-a-half-year-old boy and a 21-year-old man, both from the city. Polio count inside the city is now 46. At the same date last year, Calgary and district had 81 cases. 61 within city boundaries. Polio total in Alberta stood at 147 Thursday, with new cases reported in Edmonton, Camrose, Alberta Beach, Round Hill, as well as Calgary. There have been six deaths.



Four Polio Deaths Bring Total To 58

Alberta's 1927 polio death toll climbed to 58 at the week-end as Edmonton deaths were reported to the provincial health department.

The latest victims are a five-year-old Edmonton boy, a 40-year-old woman at Vinny, a 23-year-old man at Inisraill and a four-year-old boy at Medicine Hat. The death at Medicine Hat occurred Sept. 7, but was not previously reported.

The health department listed 23 new cases, increasing this province's record-breaking polio count to 832 cases since the start of the year.

New cases included seven in Edmonton, four in Calgary and the Calgary district, one Edmonton rural and one each at Elkwater, Duchess, Medicine Hat, Claresholm, Whiskey Gap, Highwood, Vulcan, Legal, Stony Plain, Ryley, and Jasper Place.

Edmonton's victim was a five-year-old east-end boy, who was admitted to hospital Saturday.

The child was one of seven persons suffering from polio, who were admitted to hospital at the week-end. City health authorities so far this year. At the corresponding time last year 76 of the year's total of 81 cases had been reported. There were 13 new cases reported in the seven days to Saturday previous week. The total includes four of the week-end cases. The remaining three were admitted Sunday and will be included in this week's total.

Latest victims are a two-year-old girl, five-year-old girl and a 21-year-old woman, all of the south side; a five-year-old boy and 25-year-old man of the west end and a three-year-old boy, of the downtown district.



News Release — February 3, 2004

The Provincial Museum of Alberta presents *Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience*

Edmonton – In 1954, 37,000 of Alberta's children participated in one of the largest medical experiments in human history – the field trials of the Salk polio vaccine. In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Alberta's worst polio outbreak, **The Provincial Museum of Alberta** presents *Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience*. This fourth exhibition in the Museum's *Spotlight Gallery* series opens on February 7 and runs until September 12, 2004.

This new exhibition explores the dimensions of Alberta's encounter with one of the 20th century's most dreaded diseases. The themes explored in *Every Mother's Fear* include the history of polio, stories from polio survivors, the Albertan contribution to the Salk vaccine, technology and Post-Polio Syndrome.

Few diseases have inspired the same sort of fear as polio. Memories of suffering, school closures, fears of public places, and that most terrifying symbol of polio – the iron lung – have remained vivid for many who lived through polio epidemics. Our cultural understanding of polio is largely defined by that fear, remembered so well by people who can recall the panic aroused by a stiff neck or a slight flu during polio season.

Every Mother's Fear seeks to explore that fear and the personal, social, and cultural transformations produced by polio.

Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience will open with a media event starting at 10:30 am on Thursday, February 5, 2004.

The Museum houses 13 different curatorial programs and corresponding collections that contain over two million artifacts. The *Spotlight Gallery* series of exhibitions interprets the story of Alberta through our curators and their collections.

The Provincial Museum of Alberta is located at 12845-102 Ave., Edmonton.

For further information phone (780) 453-9100. Visit our website at www.pma.edmonton.ab.ca.

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Exhibition Overview

Through photographs, newspaper clippings, artifacts, radio spots and evocative texts, *Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience* will initiate visitors into the personal, social and cultural significance of polio in our province.

Thoughts from Matthew Wangler, Curator of *Every Mother's Fear*

For me, polio reveals the paradoxical essence of human beings: their bodily frailty and their spiritual and psychological strength. This research has made me aware of the great gifts that crisis and tragedy can bear – how human suffering can call forth the most remarkable resourcefulness, courage, intellect, and compassion. The exhibition focuses on polio survivors and those who care for them, but it can also illuminate our own lives in profound ways.

Features of the Gallery

The gallery offers a compelling narrative that extends beyond the people and places it describes. It illuminates the suffering and vulnerability of the human experience, as well as the remarkable capacity of humans to respond to crises with intellect, courage, compassion and even joy.

Visitors to the gallery will encounter:

- powerful photographs that document Alberta's polio epidemic,
- March of Dimes radio spots in which the media luminaries of the 1950s and 60s encourage the public to support the fight against polio,
- story boards presenting stories from people affected by the disease, and
- the iconic symbol of polio – the iron lung.

Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.

author Susan Sontag

Polio Facts

- The first documented case of polio was carved into an Egyptian stele roughly 3,500 years ago.
- The government of Alberta began building the Provincial Special Hospital for Poliomyelitis in 1927 on the grounds of the University of Alberta. It was the first institution of its kind in Canada.
- In 1927, Alberta responded to the first wave of polio epidemics to sweep across the nation with what one scholar has described as “the most aggressive, comprehensive and well-coordinated provincial health program undertaken in Canada until 1937.”
- In 1954, 37,000 of Alberta’s children participated in the largest medical experiment in human history – the field trials of the Salk polio vaccine. The provinces of Manitoba (Winnipeg excepted) and Nova Scotia were the only other parts of Canada to participate in the trials.
- Connaught Laboratories, a branch of the University of Toronto, contributed two essential elements to the development of the Salk vaccine: the discovery of a medium in which the poliovirus could be safely cultivated and the means to cultivate the virus in mass quantities. Connaught supplied American vaccine producers with 3,000 litres of virus fluid. Without this contribution, the Salk field trials of 1954 could not have occurred.
- The savage polio epidemic of 1953 led to the development at the Royal Alexandra Hospital of what many believe to be the first Intensive Care Unit in the province.
- Ellen Fairclough, the first woman appointed to the federal cabinet, was part of the famous Marching Mothers campaign that raised money across Canada for the fight against polio.
- The push to eliminate polio worldwide has succeeded in reducing the incidence of the disease by 99% in less than 20 years. In under 20 years, more than 2 billion people have been immunized during the campaign.
- In recent years, a new condition called Post-Polio Syndrome has emerged that afflicts many of those who had polio decades ago.
- Neil Young and Joni Mitchell are both polio survivors.

Q & A with Matthew Wangler

Curator, *Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience*

How did your interest in Alberta's polio experience develop?

I was working on a number of other projects here at the Museum when **The Folklife Program's** curator, David Goa, asked me if I'd be interested in helping him on a research and documentation project on polio. I've always been intrigued by the subject - my uncle and godfather, William Sayers, was profoundly disabled by polio and lived out the last years of his life in an iron lung. During that time, he wrote a book by holding a pen in his mouth. I never knew him – he died months after I was born – but I found the possibility of coming to understand his experience very compelling.

What would you like Albertans to learn from this exhibition?

That it - the polio epidemic - happened, for starters. Many younger people have no idea what polio is. Those who lived through the epidemics have vivid memories of the fear it evoked and remember their pity for polio survivors, but I don't think a lot of them have a sense of the complexity of the polio experience – its joys, its subtleties of psychological, spiritual and emotional tone.

I want people to be aware of its meaning for the polio community and the general public – and that it is still with us, in the continuing presence of polio in parts of the world and in the emergence of Post-Polio Syndrome among those who contracted the virus decades ago.

Above all else, I'd like people to have an opportunity to get to know the polio community and perhaps, through that, come to a richer sense of disabled people, of themselves, and of our shared lives. I also want to accomplish something with the polio community. I want them to hear their own stories. It sounds odd, perhaps, but hearing your own story told to you can be tremendously meaningful and therapeutic – it can trigger memories, arouse emotions and illuminate one's life.

What insights have you gained since this project began?

Too many to count. The main insight for me has been the seemingly paradoxical co-existence between bodily fragility and spiritual strength. I think we have a tendency to define disabled people by the most tragic dimensions of their disability, but there is much more to their lives.

My great epiphany about the polio community came while I was reading a book called *Thou Art That*. The book helped me recognize that the perceived chasm that lies between the able-bodied and the disabled is rooted in the fear that we all share the same bodily fragility. Once you can recognize this fear – and the psychological distance it fosters – you can see polio survivors as the complex, wonderful people they are. And in so doing, we can come to a much deeper understanding of our lives and our selves.

Q & A with Matthew Wangler

Curator, *Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience*

How was the greater community involved with this exhibition?

We've developed wonderful working relationships with several people and organizations. There are currently two Alberta groups centrally concerned with polio – the *Wildrose Polio Support Society* and the *Southern Alberta Post-Polio Support Society*. They – along with the polio doctors, nurses, caregivers, family, and friends – have been exceedingly generous in their willingness to share their (often quite intimate) accounts of their experiences with the disease. We have also had contact with a number of other community groups, including *Rotary International*, the *Canadian Paraplegic Association*, and the *Royal Canadian Legion*.

What are some of your current research projects?

I'm currently involved in a number of projects. Of course, I've been doing a great deal of work on polio. But there's more. I have been working with David Goa and others to produce a website on the meaning of Valentine's Day which will be launched shortly. I've also been involved in planning for the new Alberta History Gallery that the Museum is looking to develop.

What is your vision for the future of the Folklife program?

I'd like to see **The Folklife Program** reach out to religious and ethnic communities with whom there aren't current ties, and to reinforce the bonds already established. I hope that we can become a centre for religious and cultural knowledge and understanding. Personally, I'd like to do a lot more projects like this. It's been incredibly rewarding.



Esther Hendricks

Polio survivor Esther Hendricks and her mother, 1956.

Matthew Wangler

Curator, *Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience*



Matthew joined the Museum immediately after graduating from the University of Alberta in 1999 with a B.A. in English. Since his youth, Matthew has been captivated by the richness and profundity of human expression manifest in philosophy, religion, literature, and art. His work at the Museum has offered him the opportunity to explore these landscapes of meaning. He feels deeply privileged to have been mentored in fieldwork and the intellectual life by Curator Emeritus of **Folklife**, David Goa. Matthew is currently working as a part-time student at the University of Alberta in pursuit of his Master's Degree in History.

Matthew began his work at the Museum on the *Anno Domini: Jesus Through the Centuries* exhibition, offering his skills as a researcher and writer to both the physical and the virtual incarnations of that ambitious project. Since that time, Matthew has been engaged in a number of Folklife projects, including editing a publication on the Judaica collection at the Museum, researching and creating physical and virtual exhibitions documenting the role of Roman Catholic missionaries in the creation of civil society in western Canada, and, most recently, researching and documenting the history of polio in Alberta.

Matthew is currently involved in a number of major research projects for the Museum. The first is an exploration of the multi-layered meaning of this province's polio experience. This project focusses on the existential experience of polio survivors, doctors, families, and caregivers, and situates their struggles and joys within a historical and cultural context. Matthew has been captivated by the profound insights into human fragility and human genius that his polio research has revealed. In addition to this undertaking, Matthew is contributing to the Museum's proposed Alberta History Gallery. He will be responsible for the stories of religious and ethnic communities who have made this province their home. Matthew also recently collaborated on a virtual exhibition entitled, *Valentine's Day: Love and Romance Through the Ages*, currently up on the *Virtual Museum of Canada* website.

The Folklife Program

at the *The Provincial Museum of Alberta*

The Folklife Program at the Provincial Museum is concerned with the place of religion and culture in Alberta. The Program has produced research projects exploring the world's great religions and has been particularly interested with the distinctive traditions within Alberta's religious denominations and ethnicities. The Program has sought to collect and interpret stories and objects in order to explore how different people and groups understand life, society, culture and cosmos.

In addition to research and collections devoted to mainstream Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, and Hindu communities, **The Folklife Program** has also explored Bahai, Druze, Hutterite, Jodo Shinshu, Mennonite, Old Believer, Doukhobour and Shinto communities, to name only a few of the unique religious traditions practiced in Alberta and reflected in Folklife's research and collections.

David Goa, Curator Emeritus of **Folklife**, created the Program in 1972 to address the remarkable lack of research into Alberta's diverse communities. In spite of a wealth of opportunity – Alberta is one of the most pluralistic regions in the world – there had been almost no serious scholarship done on the lives of this province's various ethnic and religious communities.

David engaged the problem actively, adopting a field research model to encounter these untapped sources of knowledge. He and his colleagues lived within these communities, documented their lives and rituals, encountered their histories, broke bread with them, and spoke with them for hours.

David chose to focus on the communities' religious lives – the deep and complex spiritual cores where tradition and modernity converge. David and his colleagues were invited to consider all those other spheres of life – political, aesthetic, social, intellectual – that make up the rich cultural understandings of Alberta's religious and ethnic communities.

The Folklife Program has collected more than 10,000 artifacts in the 30 years of the Program's existence. Countless hours of interviews and radio programs, ritual and musical performances have been taped and tens of thousands of photographs have been taken. The essence of **The Folklife Program** is not, however, the collections. The heart of **Folklife's** work over the past three decades has been the relationships established with communities and individuals and the gradual revelation of the many layers of cultural and religious experience within Alberta.

Acknowledgements

The Provincial Museum of Alberta would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their contributions to *Every Mother's Fear: Alberta's Polio Experience*.

Wildrose Polio Support Society

The **WPSS** provides support and information for northern Albertans currently coping with the effects of Post-Polio Syndrome. The Society has been lavish in their contributions to the project. For more information, contact **Pat Laird** by phone at (780) 992-0969 or by email at wpss_edm@hotmail.com.

Southern Alberta Post-Polio Support Society

The **S.A.P.S.S.** provides support and information for southern Albertans currently coping with the effects of Post-Polio Syndrome. We acquired many of our photographs and obtained a number of interviews through their kind assistance. For more information contact **Reny DeJong** by phone at (403) 265-5041 or by email at sappss@shaw.ca.

Polio Canada

This national polio organization offers information and support. **Polio Canada** was unsparing in their offers of information, photographs, and audio-visual material. You can visit their website at www.poliocanada.com/english/home.asp. For more information, please contact **Peggy Mann** by phone at 1-800-263-3463, ext 257 or by email at pmann@dimes.on.ca.

Aventis Pasteur Limited, Connaught Campus, Toronto

Aventis Pasteur is one of the world's leading vaccine producers and was vital in the creation of the Salk vaccine. The Public Affairs Department of **Aventis Pasteur Limited's Connaught Campus** in Toronto, and in particular, **Nancy Simpson** (Manager of External Communications) and **Dr. Luis Barreto** (Vice-President of Public Affairs) were very generous in their contributions to this exhibition. You can visit the **Aventis Pasteur** website at www.aventispasteur.ca.

Dr. Christopher Ruty

Thank you to polio historian **Dr. Christopher J. Ruty**, of **Health Heritage Research Services**, who facilitated the contributions of **Aventis Pasteur** to this exhibition and assisted with the development of content. For additional information about the history of polio, visit the **Polio History** page at www.healthheritageresearch.com and www.polio-vaccine.com.

Rotary International

Rotary International kindly donated a number of photographs and items to the exhibition. Their **PolioPlus** program seeks to eradicate polio by the year 2005. You can find more information on **Rotary International** and on **PolioPlus** at www.clubrunner.ca/5370.

Acknowledgements

This project was initiated by the Folklife program of the Provincial Museum of Alberta, but depended on the collaborative efforts of a large team. The Folklife program would like to recognize the following organizations and individuals and their commitment to excellence:

Organizations

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Museum Prices and Hours

Admission:

Reg.

Annual Mammoth Pass:

(Unlimited Admission plus benefits)

Adult (18-64 years)	\$10	\$35
Senior (65 and over)	\$8	\$30
Student (with ID)	\$8	\$30
Youth (7-17)	\$5	\$20
Family (Two adults and children 7-17)	\$28	\$70
Grandparent (Two grandparents and children 7-17)	NA	\$60

Hours:

Saturday to Thursday: 9 am to 5 pm

Friday: 9 am to 9 pm

Admission is half-price on Saturdays and Sundays between 9 am & 11 am

Upcoming & Continuing Exhibitions

Alberta Naturescapes January 24 to April 25

20th Century Gentlemen continues to March 14

Big Things 2 continues on the terrace to April

Through the Eye of a Needle March 27 – June 6

In the Shadow of Volcanos March 27 – June 6