

# TROPICAL DISEASES AND PUBLIC HEALTH

## OPERATION OF THE VITAL STATISTICS LAW IN ARKANSAS.\*

BY C. W. GARRISON, M.D.,  
State Health Officer,  
Little Rock, Ark.

In the Spring of 1913, after a very tedious dry labor extending over a period of several years, Arkansas gave birth to what has appeared to some to be an obstreperous monstrosity, which caused very severe lacerations. It was immediately reported and named by the accoucheur as Public Health Act. No. 96, 1913. An attempt at repair was immediately undertaken, but union by first intention failed and it is now healing by granulation.

Under the above Act, authority was delegated to the State Board of Health as follows:

"Sec. 7. That the State Board of Health shall establish a Bureau of Vital Statistics and provide an adequate system for the registration of births and deaths, by formulating and promulgating rules and regulations prescribing the method and form of making such registration.

"Sec. 8. That the Secretary of the State Board of Health shall be the State Registrar of Vital Statistics, and it shall be his duty to carry into effect the rules, regulations and orders of the State Board of Health. The Board shall provide suitable apartments, properly equipped with fire-proof vaults and filing cases, for the permanent preservation of all official records.

"Sec. 9. That for the purpose of this Act the State Registrar shall divide the State into registration districts, defining and designating the boundaries thereof and appointing Local Registrars in each district. Each registration district shall have at least one township therein.

"Sec. 10. That each Local Registrar shall be paid the sum of twenty-five cents for each birth certificate and each death certificate properly and completely made out and registered with him, correctly recorded and promptly returned by him to the State Registrar, as required by the rules and regulations. And in case no births were registered during any month, the Local Registrar shall be entitled to be paid the sum of twenty-five cents for each report to that effect, but only if promptly made in accordance with the rules and regula-

tions. All amounts payable to a registrar under the provisions of this section shall be paid by the treasurer of the county in which the registration district is located, upon certification by the State Registrar. And the State Registrar shall annually certify to the treasurers of the several counties the number of births and deaths properly registered, with the names of the local registrars and the amounts due each at the rates fixed herein."

On request, Dr. F. L. Watkins, of the Federal Bureau, was detailed to aid in formulating the rules and regulations in accordance with and acceptable to said Bureau. Not until February 1, 1914, was the Bureau ready for operation. Thus Arkansas has been collecting vital statistics just a little over a year and a half. The State was divided into 1,393 registration districts, each city, each incorporated town and each township constituting a primary registration district, except where two or more primary registration districts were combined to facilitate registration. The Local Registrars are appointed for a term of four years and may be removed for cause by the State Registrar. Each Local Registrar, in turn, immediately upon acceptance as such, is required to appoint a deputy to act in his stead in case of accident or disability. With the approval of the State Registrar the Local Registrar may appoint a Sub-Registrar who is authorized to receive certificates and to issue burial and removal permits. The Sub-Registrar is required to forward all certificates in ten days, and in all cases, by the fifth of the following month to the Local Registrar, who shall forward all certificates of births and deaths to the Bureau by the tenth of the month.

### SYSTEM

No corpse shall be interred, entombed, cremated or otherwise disposed of unless a burial or removal permit has been properly issued by the Local Registrar of the district where death occurs. A removal permit issued by a Local Registrar shall be accepted by the Local Registrar in the district where the body is to be interred or otherwise disposed of.

\*Read in Section on Public Health, Southern Medical Association, Ninth Annual Meeting, Dallas, Texas., Nov. 8-11, 1915.

It is made the duty of the undertaker or person acting as such, to file the certificate of death with the Local Registrar of the district where death occurred, and no person in charge of any premises on which interments are made, shall inter or permit to be interred, or permit other disposition of any body unless accompanied by a burial or removal permit. And such person must return all permits, properly endorsed, to the Local Registrar and keep proper records of all bodies disposed of.

The rules and regulations governing the transportation of dead bodies conform to the requirements of federal or interstate laws. No disinterred bodies shall be transported to any other state without the approval of the State Health Officer.

It is made the duty of every physician, midwife, or person acting as such, or the father and mother in case no one is in attendance, to report the birth in due form within ten days, to the Local Registrar. A stillborn is registered as a birth and also as a death and treated separately as such.

It is also made the duty of every physician, midwife, and undertaker to register his or her name, address and occupation with the Local Registrar, and in thirty days after the first of each January, the registrars are required to file this list with the State Registrar.

#### MORBIDITY STATISTICS

The following diseases are made notifiable:

Asiatic cholera, poliomyelitis, epidemic cerebrospinal meningitis, chickenpox, diphtheria, hookworm disease, leprosy, malaria, measles, ophthalmia neonatorum, pellagra, plague, scarlet fever, smallpox, trachoma, tuberculosis (laryngeal and pulmonary), typhoid fever, typhus fever, whooping cough, and yellow fever.

In the case of yellow fever, Asiatic cholera, bubonic plague and smallpox, notification shall be made at once to the local health officer having jurisdiction, and the State Health Officer notified by wire or telephone. Other diseases named shall be reported within twelve hours to local health officer, all reports to be filed with the county health officer, whose duty it is to forward them to the State Health Officer by the 5th of each month.

In the execution of these rules and regulations, much opposition naturally arose

when they were first instituted. Physicians, midwives and the lay citizens disapproved because no restriction or requirement had ever before been made in this State (except probably in a few of the larger cities) on bringing babies into the world or disposing of any lifeless form, human or otherwise.

A watchful waiting policy was adopted, but every effort was made to secure co-operation by education and persuasion. From February 1, 1914, till December 31, 1914, 32,728 births and 16,764 deaths were reported. From January 1 till June 30, 1915, 14,329 births and 7,518 deaths were reported. These comparative figures are interesting because they show that fewer birth and deaths were reported the first six months this year than for a corresponding period the first year.

In order to prevent as much lost motion as possible, and to avoid opportunity for the county judges to block payment of the fee bills, as many of the judges had been opposed to the passage of the bill unless they were given appointive power, the bill was drawn to read "the State Registrar shall annually certify to the treasurer of the several counties the number of births and deaths, etc." Thus the fee bills coming due in 1915 were accordingly filed with the county treasurers. Some of the county treasurers paid the claims in accordance with the bill; others did not because there were no funds in the treasury; and still others did not because the county judges objected. It was discovered that the county judge is given authority to O.K. and allow all claims presented against the county under the constitution of the state. Twenty counties are still standing behind this clause. In two counties where Local Registrars have entered suit for payment of claims, the Circuit Court has reversed the ruling of the county judges, holding that the bill is not invalidated and ordering settlement of same. In one instance the judge complied. In the other, decided October 20, 1915, the judge advises that he will appeal to the Supreme Court. Thus in most of the counties fee bills were delayed and in twenty counties the registrars have never received compensation. This has made it very difficult to secure registrars.

Many doctors object to making reports unless they receive a fee and loudly protest

when they are compelled to furnish postage in forwarding certificates to the registrars. In a few instances the penalty has been invoked for violations; but the Bureau has had so much to do and so little with which to do it, that general prosecutions have been deferred until the legal points are cleared up.

The bill also provides that county judges shall concur with the State Board of Health in the appointment of county health officers. In many instances an agreement could not be reached, and in several counties the county judges have refused to pay any salary to the county health officers, authority being given to them to fix the salary. Consequently very incomplete reports of notifiable diseases have resulted; and where so much opposition is encountered from officials who have control of the finances it makes it very difficult to secure co-operation. However, decision from the Supreme Court is expected this Winter that should clarify matters considerably.

The limited appropriation prevents the employment of an adequate office force, and consequently the counterchecking of the reports of the registrars with those of undertakers, etc., and the follow-up work that is so essential, must necessarily be dispensed with. The requirement of burial permits has caused more annoyance to and objection from the rural population than any other regulation. It is contemplated to meet these objections, in the future by appointing casket dealers as Sub-Registrars where there are no Registrars, and appointing more Sub-Registrars in inaccessible communities.

Since the father and mother are required to make reports of births and deaths where physicians or persons are not in attendance, and since they are required to submit the name of the baby to the Registrar subsequent to the time the accoucheur makes report, provided the baby is unnamed, the writer is of the opinion that it would be better to place all responsibility on the parents and require them to report all births.

To further increase the efficiency of the Bureau of Vital Statistics the writer is of the opinion that the law should be amended so as to empower the Registrar to fine all violators and collect the fee without recourse to court proceedings and be allowed

to keep as his own such fees collected as reward for his vigilance.

#### METHOD OF NUMBERING REGISTRATION DISTRICTS.

In the method adopted by the Bureau in Arkansas, a number is given to every primary registration district. In case the primary district stands alone as a registration district, the primary number serves as the registration district number.

It will be noticed in looking at the attached lists of counties, that the primary number of cities begins with 2001. With a few unused numbers left in each county, it will at any time in the near future provide for any town that may be incorporated as a city without destroying the system of numbering. The first incorporated town (Almyra), in the first alphabetical county (Arkansas), would be designated as 3001, and all other incorporated towns would be numbered in the 3000's. In the numbering of townships, it is well to arrange them in their alphabetical order, and begin with 5001, numbering them consecutively. The particular advantage in this system of numbering is that when you find a certificate bearing any number in the 2000's, you immediately know that this birth or death occurred in a city. If it bears one of the numbers in the 3000's, it is known at once that the birth or death occurred in an incorporated town. A certificate showing primary district in the 5000's, would show that this birth or death occurred outside the municipality, if one should be located within the township.

Under the head of cities, primary district numbers from 2002 to 2005 inclusive are not used. Likewise, under incorporated towns primary numbers 3005 to 3014, and under townships, primary numbers 5016 to 5026 inclusive, were left blank. The purpose of holding out these numbers in each group of primary districts (cities, incorporated towns and townships), has this advantage; that at any time a city or incorporated town is brought into existence, it may be given the next consecutive primary number. This same thing will apply to townships as well. By this means provision is made for many years hence, without having destroyed the system of consecutive numbering of the primary districts.

By referring to Arkansas County, you will notice we have provided for registration districts, 1 to 10 inclusive, and in the next alphabetical county, Ashley, the registration districts provided are numbers 11 to 20 inclusive.

In Arkansas County, it will be noted that under the list of primary districts cities, only one city is named, and it is designated as primary district No. 2001, and we had districts 2002 to 2005 inclusive, which were not used, these numbers being held in reserve for the reasons stated before. With this consecutive system of numbering, the primary districts under the head of cities in Ashley County would begin with 2006, but as there are no cities in Ashley County, five numbers are withheld, and so on through each county. This same procedure is followed in numbering primary districts under the head of incorporated towns and townships.

Each county in the State is taken up in its alphabetical order and primary district numbers assigned, using the method described herein.

A provision is made in the "Rules and Regulations" for the combining of a municipality with the township in which it is located, the wording of which is as follows: "Provided that the State Registrar may combine two or more primary registration districts into one registration district." In Arkansas County there are five municipalities, one city and four incorporated towns, and adopting this system of numbering, we combine the city primary registration district with the township registration district, designating it as:

Registration District No. 1,

Primary District No. 2001, Stuttgart City,

Primary District No. 5006, Gum Pond Township.

The next district would be the incorporated town of Almyra, combined with the township in which it is located, making the second combination in this county, taking the next registration district number as follows:

Registration District No. 2.

Primary District No. 3001, Almyra, Town.

Primary District No. 5011, Mill Bayou, Township.

It is at times advisable to combine two

townships into one registration district, although this is not to be encouraged. But when such a combination is made, the method of numbering the registration district thus created will be the same as that employed in any municipality and township.

## REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS IN DALLAS, TEX.\*

By EMMIT B. SUMMERS,  
City Registrar of Vital Statistics,  
Dallas, Tex.

Death registration in the city of Dallas began in the latter part of 1887. City registration of births began in February, 1910. Before 1910, Dallas never had any birth registration other than the few births that might have been reported to the County Clerk.

At the beginning of death registration only a portion of deaths, as compared to the present time, were reported. In giving the name of the deceased we often found only the initials stated, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to find the record of deaths that occurred at that time. The causes of death were often given in such manner that they could hardly be classified according to the international classification of deaths. Too often we find it reported as "Not Stated" when giving the cause of death. This was possibly the fault of the physician to a certain extent who furnished the death certificate, and not altogether the fault of the registrar. When the cause was assigned as "Tuberculosis" it did too frequently fail to state whether it was pulmonary, tuberculosis of the bone or the kind that it might have been, and the exact location.

In many instances we found where deaths had been reported in the city when, as a matter of fact, they really occurred some twelve or fifteen miles outside of the city limits of Dallas. Some of the deaths that occurred inside the city limits did not show the street address.

The occupation of the deceased is one

\*Read in Section on Public Health, Southern Medical Association, Ninth Annual Meeting, Dallas, Tex., Nov. 8-11, 1915.