

Margaret Eunice Snyder

(June 7, 1916 to August 9, 1939)ⁱ

The Season of Too Soon to Die





Margaret Eunice Snyder or Eunice Margaret Snyder was the fourth child and third daughter of Thaddeus Sobieski Snyder and Eunice Margaret Chapman. She was named for her mother, using "Margaret" as her name most of her life except on her marriage certificate which listed "E. Margaret Snyder".

Her brief twenty-three years of life ended by a disease not fully understood at the time but death noteworthy enough to be included in the local newspapers of Washington, D.C. and Virginia.

The family stories regarding Margaret's death suggested mystery if not potential criminality. Some family members attributed her death to falling asleep and choking on chewing gum, suffering from severe anemia but refusing to eat liver, or suffering a head injury due to a car accident or fall from a bicycle. Her sister, Martha, stated emphatically that she had died of encephalitis perhaps based on the death certificate which reported the same. But due to the status of medical testing of infectious disease at the time of her death, there remained some doubt.



What was undoubtedly the case, as suggested by the extreme measures taken by the emergency squad who treated her and the deemed news worthiness, was the tragedy of such a young, beautiful woman dying.

Margaret was born on June 7, 1916 in Wyandotte, Ottawa, Oklahoma. She died at 9:30PM on August 9, 1939 in the Gallinger Municipal Hospital in Washington, D.C. after being transferred from the Providence Hospital in in the same cityⁱⁱ. Margaret was buried in Forest Park Cemetery in Joplin, Jasper

County, Missouri. Her parents and siblings paid the cost of shipping her body home. Between those events, Margaret married Willard Ray Greene on October

21, 1937 at the Baptist Church in Fairfax, Virginia. Russell J. Urgerhart officiated the marriage.

Willard Ray Greene was born on October 8, 1913 in Flat Top, Mercer County, West Virginia. At the time of their marriage he was a Marine private in Company E, Second Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment of the Fleet Marine Force.ⁱⁱⁱ His hometown newspaper wrote that he had been assigned to Quantico sometime around March 19, 1936. The Fleet Marines had a reputation as an elite group.^{iv} As to the Fifth Regiment, its motto, "Retreat, Hell" speaks for itself. Prior to Willard's enlistment in 1934, the Second Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment was stationed at Quantico. Commencing in 1935, the



Battalion engaged in a number of exercises which contributed to the development of the Marine Corps Amphibious Doctrine. After Willard's discharge, the 2nd Battalion joined the newly formed 1st Marine Division at New River, North Carolina in 1941. During WWII, the battalion fought at Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, Peleliu and Okinawa. After the war, it served as an occupational force in North China until 1947.

In writing about her sister, Martha, and brother-in-law, Ralph McFarland, being reunited when Ralph got work in the area, Margaret wrote "They are where they can be together now. That is the main thing of married life. Me, I know. I spent practically a year away from my husband." Willard had been deployed to several local duty stations. One was the Marine Barracks, Naval Torpedo Station, at Newport, Rhode Island with a muster roll showing him there at least from April 1 to April 30, 1938. He was also on a detachment to the Maryland Bellevue Magazine until at least June 30, 1939. He had returned to the Marine Barracks, Navy Yard, Washington, DC by July 1939. Following her death in September and October 1939, Willard is found on the muster rolls for the Marine Barracks, Navy Yard, Washington, DC. Willard was discharged at the end of November 1939.^v

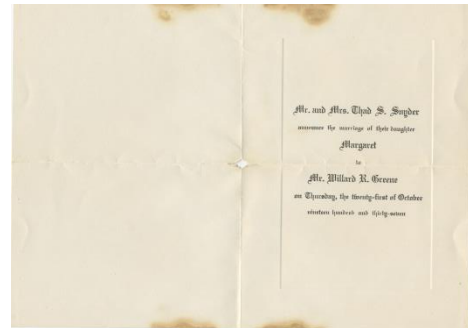
By April 15, 1940 Greene was living in Washington, DC working as a cargo handler for Pennsylvania Central General Airlines at the Washington-Hoover Airport in Arlington, Virginia according to the 1940 US Federal Census. He was a lodger and stated that he was a widower. He registered for the draft on October 16, 1940.

Greene would eventually live in the same area of Margaret's nieces in Alexandria, Virginia before his death at 92 years, five months and ten days in 2006. Greene had re-married to Joan Laree Crouse and had a son, Richard Spencer Greene. When Margaret's niece contacted some of the family members they said that Greene had not mentioned that he had a previous marriage.

Margaret grew up in Quapaw, Oklahoma. Her achievements in school included awards for penmanship and participating in an eighth grade school plays (as one of the villagers.)^{vi} She graduated with 15 other students from Quapaw High School on May 25, 1934.^{vii} Margaret was socially active giving "courtesy" parties for her sister, Louise, who lived in Joplin while attending college, and appeared at other gatherings with friends,^{viii} On January 13, 1935 she joined the YWA. Her other social activities during 1935 included church-related activities, post and pre wedding parties and visits to her mother's (Eunice Margaret Chapman) relatives in Joplin, Missouri.

Margaret went to Washington, DC with her older sister, Louise, on September 5, 1936. Margaret was to stay the winter in Washington, DC. Louise had returned home to visit her parents.^{ix} Margaret, like Louise, got a job in Washington, DC. Louise worked for the Treasury Department, Internal Revenue Service, as a stenographer^x. Margaret worked for an attorney, Charles Patton Henry, at 900 Twentieth Street NW, Washington, DC.^{xi} Both Louise and Margaret returned home to visit their parents in August 1937.^{xii}

Thaddeus and Eunice announced her engagement to Willard in the Miami Daily New Record on August 29, 1937, most likely Margaret informing them of the impending wedding during this home visit by Louise and Margaret. On September 26, 1938, Margaret sent her brother a formal announcement from Washington, DC.^{xiii}



Margaret had a sense of humor, enjoying teasing her brother, Thad Allen Snyder, about his marriage to Dorothea Irene Keck in a letter dated March 20, 1939. Margaret referred back to an earlier time when she and Irene talked about marriage and worked on their typing skills and her musings if her brother would ever marry and conclusion that Irene would make a nice sister-in-law. She expressed her love for her husband, happiness with their marriage, and desire to visit home. That was not to be.

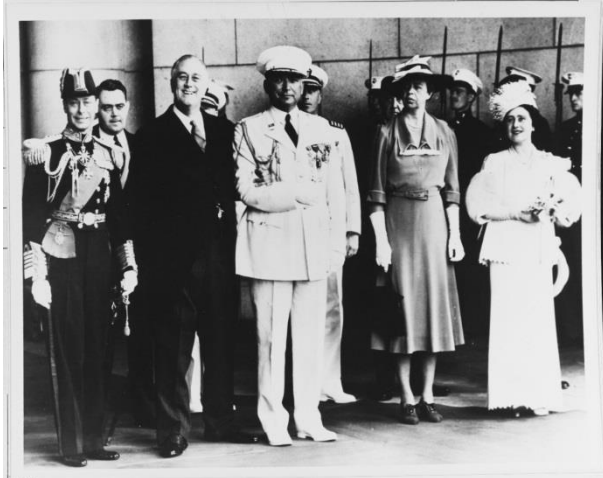
At the time of her marriage she was living in the Lombardy Apartments at 2019 Eye Street, NW, Washington, DC. Louise and Charles would later list this address on the 1940 US Census as their residence.^{xiv} As such, it is most probable that Margaret was living with Louise prior to her marriage. At some point in time, it is likely that Margaret lived with her half-aunt, Izora May Scott, a prominent officer of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and lobbyist in Washington, DC.^{xv} At least Martha's mother and sister, Louise, had done so.

Prior to her death, Margaret and Willard had moved to 2112 "F" Street NW^{xvi}, which was about a half a mile to the Navy Dispensary. Margaret described their apartment as follows: "We live right over the furnace room and boyee is it nice and cosy (sic). Just right without turning on the heat." Willard had fixed up the apartment, cleaning it and fixing the furniture. He put some shelves in the kitchen, bath and closet and covered them with oil cloth. In 2013, one of her nieces visited the address to find that the apartment building had been replaced by medical office building.¹ In 1910, known architects and builders, Albert H. Bears and Harry Wardman built apartment buildings at 2106 and 2112 F Street NW, Washington, DC. They were twin apartment buildings called the Atherton and Claremont respectively. They were four stories, brick with white stucco, stone lintels and quoining. Each contained forty apartments. The Claremont was sold in 1911 to Lucy J. Brody in 1911 for \$110,000. The Atherton and Claremont, frequently confused by the newspapers, were sold in 1911 to different investors, noting that one investor was to receive \$1100 per year in rent. They were demolished in 1982-83 due to the pressures of encroaching needs of the George Washington University and commerce.



Of the two letters received from Margaret by her brother, she exhibited her youth, optimism and happiness by using such words as “kiddos”, “daffy”, “swell”, “grand” and “betcha”. As with many employees, Margaret used her employer’s time and supplies to write one of the letters. She thanked her brother and sister-in-law for the purse that they sent to her for her birthday, remarking that “Those beaded bags are all the rage her this summer so now I will be right up in style.”

She also provided some local news about the King and Queen visiting Washington, D.C. possibly for the benefit of Irene, her sister-in-law, who had a special interest in the Royals, which apparently some of the locals did not have. She wrote: “The king and queen are here but I think they are leaving sometime today to go on to New York. I bet I know a lot of people will be glad for them to go.” Her niece would express similar sentiments 70 years later when tourist and dignitaries disturbed the flow of traffic and increased the congested on her way to work at the Department of the Interior.



Margaret was a little homesick, asking for any “scandal or some news about happenings in Quapaw.” She wished that she and Willard could come home again. Her target month was November but more than her death prohibited the trip as suggested when she wrote on June 10th “It looks now like there isn’t any prospects of me getting to come home for a long time. I am hoping that something will pop and we will be able to surprise you all by coming home. Willard says he will have to start looking for a job as soon as he gets out of the Marines [November 1939] and if he does that, there is no hope of us getting to come in November. Maybe we will have a windfall and get to come though.” She had prophetically written earlier, however, “ ... but you never can tell what will happen between that time [November] and now. I hope for the best though.”

While there is a family story^{xvii} that suggested that she may have married Willard as the second choice, her letters home confirm that she was happy with her marriage remarking “I knew I had a nice brother but I think I will just cross cut that nicest man in the world, cause there just aint no man any nicer than the man I married. I just dare you to say you married a nicer one. Now do you feel light!!!

Just the same even though I am married now. Mean as ever.” She considered herself not a newlywed anymore but not sorry as she felt better about being an “ole married lady.” She looked forward to her two year anniversary noting that the day following the letter date (March 21) would be her one year and six month anniversary. The Greene’s would not celebrate their second wedding anniversary.

Three months and one day from the date of her last letter home, Margaret died. Margaret’s death was described in the newspaper. She was first taken to the historic Providence Hospital. On February 6, 1939, Providence Hospital had held celebration of the institutions 78th year. The hospital’s history was filled with many firsts in treatment of patients and dedication to the caring for its patients in war and peace. It was a busy place. In 1938, 61,340 patients had been treated in over 22 clinics. The formal celebration was an open house at the hospital followed by a “card party” at the Willard Hotel.^{xviii} The Providence Hospital, with other hospital in the area, experienced a dramatic increase in patients during the war years while lacking funds to improve the facilities. The Providence Hospital would eventually relocate to new buildings leaving the older facilities to succumb to vandals, use of land as a parking lot and finally a park.



Margaret was transferred to Gallinger Municipal Hospital^{xix} where she was placed in an iron lung in an attempt to help her breathe. Her lungs were “paralyzed”. Under the WPA^{xx}, Gallinger Municipal Hospital had renovated a ward for “crippled children” which included those affected by polio. Three members of the Fire Department No. 1 had given her artificial

respiration and fed her oxygen until she could be placed on the respirator. But it was to no avail as she died three hours after arriving at the Gallinger Municipal Hospital.

The newspaper also noted an autopsy was to be performed to determine the cause of death. Her death certificate confirms that an autopsy was done and states that she died on “acute encephalitis.” Her sister, Louise who was then

married to Charles W. Stovall^{xxi}, provided the information on her death certificate. Her sister, Martha, recalled that Louise arrived too late and made no mention that Willard was in attendance.

Encephalitis is an acute inflammation of the brain caused by either a viral infection or the immune system mistakenly attacking the brain tissue. Acute encephalitis presents itself as a fever, headache, aching muscles, and other “flu-like” symptoms. If not treated, the brain swells and the patient can die. The term, “Encephalitis”, is descriptive of a pathological or clinical condition unrelated to the cause.^{xxii}

Margaret went to the Navy Dispensary starting on July 31, 1939. The Navy Dispensary was located in the Main Navy Building then located on the National Mall. The Main Navy Building had been built in 1918, along with the Munitions Building at the suggestion of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the then Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Although meant to be temporary, it was constructed of concrete to make it more fire-proof and quickly filled with Navy and Army personnel ensuring that the buildings dominated the west end of the Mall just south of Constitutional Avenue until they were demolished in 1970. Roosevelt would later express his dismay and fear of retribution for destroying the public park area with these buildings.

The Navy dispensary was located in the south end of the Main Navy Building. Martha’s nephew-in-law went to the dispensary to get shots in 1954 before the deployment of his father, mother and self to Alaska. Years later the niece of Margaret would work at the Department of the Interior that was in line-sight of the Navy Building. However by her



arrival in Washington, DC in 2003, the area was a park in which she would take noon-time walks, eat lunch and view the Viet Nam Memorial. No doubt Roosevelt would have been relieved by the results.

Navy doctor “K” or “H” Macron stated in the death certificate that he treated Margaret from July 31, 1939 until her death.^{xxiii} This notation suggests that Margaret had notable symptoms which eventually led to her death. Margaret also wrote in her letters to her brother in March 1939 “They tell me you can tell whether or not you’re in love if you bump in doors and trees. Willard accuses me of being completely daffy because I can’t seem to make the door way without bumping into the sill.” Margaret had also complained of headaches during her life. Viruses causing encephalitis has a quicker progression than months. Margaret’s headaches and stumbling about suggests other possible causes to the swelling of her brain and “paralyzed lungs.”

For 1939, the Vital Statistics of the United States separately reported those deaths caused by “Acute encephalitis (lethargic)” and Intracranial or non-epidemic encephalitis. For the year 1939, there was reported only one female death by poliomyelitis or poliomyelitis-encephalitis (acute), however, the age was given as between ages 30 to 34. As such, her death may have been included in broader categories. By the 1940 Vital Statistics of the United States report, the categories of “acute” encephalitis had expanded showing “acute infectious encephalitis (lethargic)” with several subsets and “Acute poliomyelitis and acute polioencephalitis.”

The focus of the medical community in 1939 was on “acute encephalitis” causing outbreaks in such cities as St. Louis. As noted at page 83 of Chapter IV, Neurotropic Virus Diseases by John R. Paul, M.D, that from 1917 to 1942, the diagnosis was a loose one.^{xxiv} He referenced Dr. Albert B. Sabin^{xxv}, stating “Clinical records from civilian as well as military medical practice indicate that the diagnosis of encephalitis is commonly made whenever clinical manifestations suggestive of cerebral disturbance (ranging from mild lethargy to coma, from slight delirium to complete disorientation, from restlessness to convulsions) are associated with an otherwise undiagnosable febrile illness. The diagnosis is not infrequently made when the syndrome of aseptic meningitis is associated with what may be interpreted as lethargy or unusual restlessness. It is made not only when the cerebral disturbance is associated with pleocytosis,

but also in its absence, and indeed not infrequently when toxic encephalopathy is associated with certain bacterial infections.”

As later reported in 1951^{xxvi}, there were over twelve types of viruses identified with encephalitis transmitted by anthropic vectors^{xxvii} and more were anticipated. In addition, encephalitis was associated with mumps, measles, vaccinia, and other toxic agents. To confirm the cause, one had to conduct immunological and virological tests. It is not probable that Margaret’s doctors did so. Starting in 1942-42 such testing was done but in 1939 such testing for human patients was definitely in its infancy with only a few laboratories in the United States capable of carrying out the tests. Multiple studies were or had been conducted starting in 1933 in attempts to identify methods of diagnosis of various strains. These included experimental studies on mice were being reported in 1937; analyzing brain tissue from patients dying from symptoms associated with encephalitis; and blood from living patients who had survived encephalitis.

The removal of Margaret from Providence Hospital to Gallinger Municipal Hospital to be placed in an “iron lung” would have been consistent with the current medical practices which linked poliomyelitis and encephalitis. As offered by Stanley L. Wolf, MD in the Medical Annals of the District of Columbia, Vol. XXI, August 1952, No. 8 page 417,^{xxviii} “Symptoms of encephalitis are exceedingly common in poliomyelitis Commonly, Encephalitic signs are not due to the virus but to hypoxia and will often disappear after oxygenation takes place.”

As such, the cause of Margaret’s conditions resulting in her death may have just been a guess. The autopsy would have revealed the results of the virus or other contributor. Perhaps in that autopsy, the coroner or pathologist found indicators of encephalitis such as “acute necrotizing encephalopathy, where typical brain findings are characterized by bilateral thalamic necrosis/petechiae with variable white matter edema.” It also should be noted that in Surgeon R.D. Lillie of the Pathology Division of the Public Health, who conducted studies of viruses associated with encephalitis^{xxix}, did report out analyzing one incident of encephalitis in 1939^{xxx}. The Department of Public Health was conducting studies on encephalitis during this time based upon brain samples.^{xxxi} As such there were local specialists working on encephalitis who may have had the expertise needed to identify the virus or cause of her conditions.

Margaret’s remains were shipped home to her parents. There was some family consternation about Willard not paying the transport. She was laid to rest in the

Forest Park Cemetery in Joplin, Missouri. Other family members buried in that cemetery are Margaret's mother, Eunice Margaret Chapman Snyder, and father, Thaddeus Sobieski Snyder.

ENDNOTES

Special thanks to Carrie Stern, daughter of Janna Margarette Snyder Stern, for use of the letters from Margaret to Thad Allen Snyder and Dorothea Irene Keck. These letters provide such insight into who Margaret was.

ⁱ Photo of Caption M2A3 light tank on parade during the Army Day Parade, Washington, DC, United States, 6 Apr 1939
_Photographer Harris & Ewing Source _United States Library of Congress Identification Code LC-DIG-hec-26434

ⁱⁱ The Providence Hospital was an aging and overcrowded facility. It was subsequently moved to a new site at 12th and Varnum Street.

ⁱⁱⁱ Also on 1 February 1941, the 2d Brigade was designated the 2d Marine Division. It is interesting to note that at the very threshold of the greatest expansion the Marine Corps had even seen, the Fleet Marine Force was temporarily disbanded. This development resulted from war plans that called for the establishment of a two-divisional expeditionary force with each fleet for the specific purpose of carrying out amphibious assaults as required. These amphibious forces were to be further supplemented by an additional division per fleet obtained from the Army and to be trained by the Marines. Upon the recommendation of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General Thomas Holcomb, the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions were assigned to the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets respectively, while the defense battalions of the Fleet Marine Force, which had been created in 1939 for advance base service, were distributed to other commands.

^{iv} The Raleigh Register, March 19, 1936, "Greene Assigned to Quantico", p.1

^v There are several men listed as "Willard Greene" in the Navy and Army during the war years. One is Willard D Green (3746264) and Willard E. Green (6554605). Tracking to confirm that Willard did not join the service after registering for the draft resulted in no listings for a "Willard R. Greene" after his discharge.

^{vi} Miami Daily News Records, March 3, 1933

^{vii} Miami Daily News Record, May 14, 1930

^{viii} Miami Daily News Records, May 7, 1933

^{ix} Miami Daily News Record, September 6, 1936,

^x Louise and her husband, Charles, lived on I Street in the Lombardy Apartments in the US Federal Census for 1940. He worked at the Navy Hospital as a pharmacy mate. She was a stenographer of the Treasury Department.

^{xi} He was born August 12, 1898 and died on January 27, 1973.

^{xii} Miami Daily News Record, August 30, 1937

^{xiii} Date derived from envelope containing invitation.

^{xiv} The apartments are now "Hotel Lombardy" and cheats a bit by saying it is on Pennsylvania Avenue due to the proximity to such street. The National Register of Historic Place Registration Form dated September 24, 2013 states that the building was constructed in 1927 with the architect being David L. Stein.

^{xv} H 2145 C Street NW ant 815, Washington DC.

^{xvi} In 1910, known architects and builders, Albert H. Bears and Harry Wardman built apartment buildings at 2106 and 2112 F Street NW, Washington, DC. They were twin apartment buildings called the Atherton and Claremont respectively. They were four stories, brick with white stucco, stone lintels and quoining. The Claremont was sold in 1911 to Lucy J. Brody in 1911 for \$110,000. They were demolished

in 1982-83 due to the pressures of encroaching needs of the George Washington University and commerce. See “The Apartment Buildings of Albert H. Beers, A Thesis in The Graduate Program of Historic Preservation, Master of Science 1988, Roger Moss, David G. DeLong. University of Pennsylvania. <https://archive.org/stream/apartmentbuildin00harr#page/n7/search/2112> and Washington Times, “Two Big Deals in Real Increase in Market Activity” May 3, 1911, p. 13. This article refers to the building that was originally named “Atherton” as such the reference to the “Atherton” selling a few weeks before (April 13, 1911) to Evelyn Cromwell of Norfolk may be reference to the Claremont. In either case, both buildings were sold within the first part of 1911. Both apartment buildings had 40 apartments and at the time of sale had rents of \$11,000 per year. See also Washington Herald, “Finance and Realty”, April 13, 1911, p. 11

^{xvii} A boyfriend was planning to ask her to marry him. They were at a party, and he took Margaret’s friend into the bedroom to show her the ring. Margaret thought he was cheating and broke up with him.
^{xviii} Evening Star, “Providence Hospital to Mark 78th Year Tomorrow,” February 5, 1939, p. A-19, Image 19.

^{xix} Established in 1922 and became known as District of Columbia General Hospital in 1953. This facility was closed in 2001. The author contacted the hospital to determine if any records regarding Margaret were available, which they were not.

^{xx} District of Columbia Works Progress Administration, “Developing Hospital for City,” *Work: A Journal of Progress*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Sept. 1936, p. 21

^{xxi} Delay birth certificate gives middle name as “Walton” however known as “Walter”.

^{xxii} See “The Encephalitis Problem in the United States” by William C Reeves, PHD, MPH, * Presented at a Joint Session of the Inter-American Association of Sanitary Engineers and the Engineering Section of the American Public Health Association at the Seventy-eighth Annual Meeting in St. Louis, Mo., November 3, 1950. Published June 1951 in American Journal of Public Health, pp. 678-686.

^{xxiii} It is also noted that the doctor states that he treated her on August 8 and 9 suggesting she may have visited the Navy Dispensary the day before her death.

^{xxiv} MEDICAL DEPARTMENT, UNITED STATES ARMY, INTERNAL MEDICINE IN WORLD WAR II, Volume II, INFECTIOUS DISEASES, Prepared and published under the direction of Lieutenant General LEONARD D. HEATON The Surgeon General, United States Army, Editor in Chief, Colonel JOHN BOYD COATES, Jr., MC, USA, Editor for Internal Medicine, W. PAUL HAVENS, Jr., M.D., OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, WASHINGTON, D.C., 1963

^{xxv} Albert B.: Encephalitis. In Medical Department, United States Army. Preventive Medicine in World War II. Volume VII. Communicable Diseases: Arthropodborne Diseases Other Than Malaria

^{xxvi} Reeves, supra.

^{xxvii} **Arthropods** form a major group of pathogen **vectors** with mosquitoes, flies, sand flies, lice, fleas, ticks, and mites transmitting a huge number of pathogens. Many such **vectors** are haematophagous, which feed on blood at some or all stages of their lives.

^{xxviii} “Seasonal Variation in the Intensity of the Brain Reaction of the St. Louis Encephalitis in Mice and Endemic Typhus in Guinea Pigs [R.D. Lillie, M.D., Surgeon, C. Armstrong, M.D. and R.E. Dyer, M.D. Senior Surgeons and J.G. Pasternak, M.D., Passed Assistant Surgeon, United States Public Health Services. Presented at the joint meeting of the Washington Society of Pathologist and the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, February 24, 1937.

^{xxix} Lillie worked on the analyzes of the St. Louis encephalitis epidemic, reporting the results in 1933. See Armstrong, Charles, and Lillie, R. D.: Experimental lymphocytic choriomeningitis of monkeys and mice produced by a virus encountered in studies of the 1933 St. Louis encephalitis epidemic. Pub. Health Rep., 49: 1019-1027 (Aug. 31, 1934).

^{xxx} Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Services for Fiscal Year 1940, U.S. Printing Office, P. 76. "Autopsy material from other infectious diseases was received from ... single cases of bacillary dysentery, encephalitis, and trichinosis."

^{xxxi xxxi} Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Services for Fiscal Year 1939, U.S. Printing Office, p. 10. In 1940-41 report it is noted that there had been an increase in deaths from encephalitis but not considered significant in the total acute communicable diseases deaths in 1939.