Exciting developments at LHS-Chicago’s Special Collections and University Archives: A Choreography of Contagion and Private War

by Megan Keller Young

The exhibit A Choreography of Contagion: Absence and Presence of Black Bodies in Health Visual Culture takes an interdisciplinary approach to show how people of African descent have been represented in the media and public health campaigns through visual arts concepts. The exhibit incorporates poetry, news articles and op-eds, photographs, charts and other media in its presentation.

The exhibit is split into three sequences. The first is Black Bodies, which shows the efforts of Black communities to have quality health care and education through the examples of Provident Hospital and the National Negro Health Week. Shaping Places, the second sequence in the exhibit, discusses epidemics in global Black communities and the impact the quarantined areas have on those deemed infected or at risk and the health care workers who help them. Some of the epidemics featured in the exhibit include the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak, the Tuskegee syphilis experiments, and the current anti-vaccination movement. The third exhibit sequence, Spaces of Contagion, discusses the impact health epidemics have and continue to have in global Black communities both physically and mentally. This sequence discusses violence as a public health issue that has the potential to be “contagious.”

A Choreography of Contagion was created by Dr. Mario LaMothe from UIC’s African American Cultural Center and includes records from UIC’s Special Collections and University Archives as well as from other special collections libraries. The exhibit will be in the Special Collections and University Archives department at LHS-Chicago until June 2. It is a traveling exhibit, so if anyone is interested in hosting it please contact Megan Keller Young at megank@uic.edu.

A little-known part of World War II medical history will soon be more available to the public with the digitization of Private War: Memoirs of a Doctor Soldier, by Dr. Eugene Lazowski. LHS-Chicago holds the only English translation of this compelling memoir in existence. The memoir is one of most-requested items in LHS-Chicago’s Special Collections and University Archives. Unfortunately, the uniqueness of this item prevented inter-library loaning, requiring researchers to travel to Chicago to read the book. Dr. Lazowski’s daughter, Alexandra Gerrard, who translated the memoir into English, has kindly given permission for the book to be digitized. Once digitized, this
book will be freely available, allowing people worldwide to view it and learn more about Polish medical history during World War II.

Typhus was a common disease during World War II. Lazowski knew a typhoid epidemic would be disastrous for the Germans, who were using slave labor for their work force. Lazowski and his colleague, Dr. Stasiek Matulewicz, found a way to test for typhus without having to send the test to a lab. They discovered that an intramuscular injection of the bacteria did not infect the person, but did give a positive typhoid result. The two doctors staged a fake typhoid epidemic to save the area’s residents. Slowly they began to inject patients to simulate the stages of an epidemic. The Germans stopped deporting these people for their work camps, saving many lives.

After the war, Lazowski moved to the United States with his wife and daughter and continued to practice medicine. He became part of the University of Illinois at Chicago’s faculty in 1967 as an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics. He died in December 2006.

Megan Keller Young
Instructor & Special Collections Librarian
UIC Library of the Health Sciences-Chicago

khc@uic.edu