

Chalmers I (2010). Joseph Asbury Bell (1904-1968).



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A year after Joseph Bell's death, the *American Journal of Epidemiology* celebrated his contributions by publishing a memorial issue (1969; Vol 90, No.6). The editorial introduction concludes as follows: "We honor Joe Bell for his uncompromising scientific integrity, his productivity as an epidemiologist, his ability to stimulate and guide collaborative research, and for those qualities which made him such a good friend and mentor to many epidemiologists".



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The chronology of Bell's life below has been prepared by Iain Chalmers using autobiographical details in the thesis Bell submitted for his doctorate in public health ([Bell thesis 1948](#)), and from a biographical appreciation authored by a former colleague (Leake 1969).

1904	Born Trinidad, Colorado, USA
1921	Graduated Manual Training High School, Denver, Colorado
1921-23	University of Colorado, Boulder
1923-29	University of Colorado School of Medicine, Denver
1929	Graduated MD
1929-30	Rotating internship, US Marine Hospital, San Francisco
1930	Commissioned Assistant Surgeon, US Public Health Service
1931-32	Maritime Quarantine and Medical Examination of Aliens, US Quarantine Station, Angel Island, California
1932-33	Hospital practice of internal medicine, US Marine Hospital
1933	Commissioned Passed Assistant Surgeon, US Public Health Service
1933-34	Medical officer in charge of US Quarantine Station and Second Class Relief Station, and Medical Inspection of Aliens for Port of San Diego and Mexican Border
1935	3-month course at the National Institute of Health
1935-36	Assistant Chief of Foreign Quarantine and Immigration Division (Chief: Assistant Surgeon General FA Carmelia), US Public Health Service, Washington, DC; Acting Director, Pan American Sanitary Bureau (Director: Surgeon General Hugh S Cumming)
1936-37	Postgraduate study at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health

- 1937 Graduated Master of Public Health
- 1938-39 Instructor in Epidemiology, Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health
- 1937-43 Epidemiology Section (Chief: Dr JP Leake), Division of Infectious Diseases, National Institute of Health, Bethesda, Maryland
- 1942 Commissioned Surgeon, US Public Health Service
- 1943 Commissioned Senior Surgeon, US Public Health Service
Four month course at University of Virginia in Military Government (under General Wickersham), then Allied Military Government School at Tizi Ouzou, near Algiers
Military Director for Health for the provinces of Enna and Caltanissetta, Sicily
- 1943-44 Epidemiologist, Allied Control Commission, US Typhus Commission, Naples, and at Supreme Allied Headquarters, London. Designed and conducted a school for training Allied Military Government officers for public health operations in Europe
- 1945 Chief, Public Health, US Group, Central Council for Germany
Awarded Legion of Merit by the US Army
- 1945-48 Chief, Epidemiology Section, Division of Infectious Diseases, National Microbiological Institute, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland
- 1947 Course in the Army School of Atomic Medicine
- 1947-48 Candidate for degree Doctor of Public Health from Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health
- 1948 [Graduated Doctor of Public Health](#)
- 1949 Commissioned Medical Director, US Public Health Service; certified Diplomate by the American Board of Preventive Medicine
- 1950 Member, WHO Expert Committee on Communicable Disease in Children
- 1951 Chair, US delegation, International Sanitary Regulations for Control of Communicable Diseases
- 1952 Elected President, American Epidemiological Society
- 1953 Asked to direct an evaluation of the efficacy and safety of the Salk polio vaccine, but resigned after criticism of his proposal for a study with adequate blind controls
- 1962 Awarded Distinguished Service Medal of US Public Health Service
- 1964 Compulsorily retired for physical disability after repeated myocardial infarcts, and receiving a graft for abdominal aortic aneurysm
- 1968 Died suddenly at home, while supervising the installation of heating and air conditioning improvements

Among Joseph Bell's continuing responsibilities up to his death, were:

- From 1950 Member of the subcommittee on the Control of Communicable Diseases of the American Public Health Association; lecturer on preventive medicine and research at various schools of hygiene and public health (Johns Hopkins University, Harvard University, University of Pittsburgh, and the US Army and Navy).
- From 1953 Associate member, Commission on Influenza, Armed Forces Epidemiological Board; member, WHO Expert Advisory Panel on International Quarantine
- From 1957 Member, Medical Advisory Board, Welfare Department, District of Columbia
- From 1960 Member, Governing Council, American Public Health Association
- From 1962 Consultant to the University of Colorado on the design and conduct of studies on the health effects of long term low grade exposure to uranium
- From 1964 Chief consultant in epidemiology, Department of Health, Montgomery County, Maryland

Sources

Bell JA (1948). Autobiography. In: The epidemiological principles and procedures involved in a study of the prophylactic value of an alum-precipitated mixture of diphtheria toxoid and pertussis vaccine. Thesis submitted to the Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Public Health, pp 81-82.

Leake JP (1969). Joseph Asbury Bell, 1904-1968: a biographical appreciation. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 90:464-470.

[Home](#)

[Contents](#)