

SEARCHING FOR YELLOW FEVER - THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION, HADDOW TOWERS, MONKEYS, AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE ZIKA VIRUS

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The serendipitous discovery of the Zika virus in 1947 by a team of investigators from the Yellow Fever Research Institute of the Rockefeller Foundation is one of the great stories in tropical medicine. Yellow fever was a dreaded global scourge through the 1700's and up to the beginning of the twentieth century. During that time, a connection between arthropods and human disease remained largely unknown, and yellow fever was believed to be spread by direct human contact. Following the discovery by Carlos Finlay and a team of investigators lead by Walter Reed in Cuba that yellow fever was transmitted by mosquitos, the recently established Rockefeller Foundation made the control and eradication of yellow fever an international priority. Following World War II, Rockefeller Foundation investigators looking for a new location to study yellow fever transmission came across the Zika Forest, an isolated area of dense vegetation and swampland in Eastern Uganda (ziika means overgrown in the Luganda language, the second "i" was dropped by Europeans). Located in the Buganda Kingdom, the 62-acre forest was situated adjacent to an inlet of Lake Victoria approximately 15 miles from the capital city of Kampala, and was a little-known area even to the people of Uganda. This presentation will discuss the efforts of the three Foundation staff members - George W.A. Dick of the National Institute for Medical Research in London, Professor Alexander J. Haddow, a physician and entomologist from the University of Glasgow, and Dr. Stuart F. Kitchen of the Rockefeller Institute Yellow Fever Laboratory – as they constructed the Zika Forest Laboratory and, eventually, discovered and isolated the Zika virus. The discussion will be highlighted with original photographs made by the Rockefeller team members, and excerpts from their original manuscripts and published works.