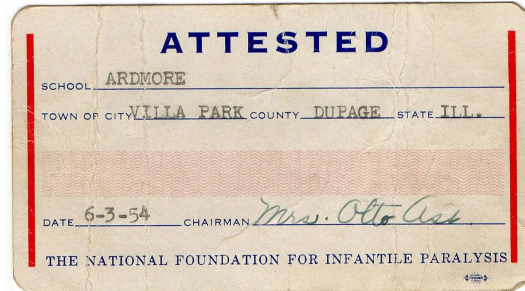
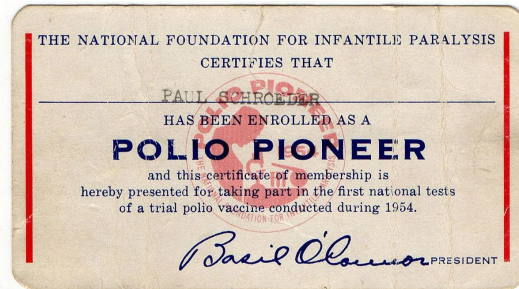


I was a "Polio Pioneer" by Paul Schroeder



The Heart of Maine Community Stories project, which is gathering stories about living during the corona virus pandemic, also invites contributions to the Emergency Archive, reflections on other times of crisis. This reminded me that when I was in the second grade at a public school in Illinois, in 1954, I was part of a national test for the first vaccine for polio, another rampant virus.

It's hard to imagine now, since the polio vaccine is effective and widely administered, that polio caused great fear in the general population, especially among parents for their vulnerable children. I remember for instance on a visit to the famous Riverview amusement park in Chicago being told to absolutely not touch any stair rails or other similar things. But how were we supposed to hang on when we went on the rides? I have no idea. But polio was certainly a fearsome disease. The *History of Vaccines* page about polio (www.historyofvaccines.org/blog-categories/22) says "Fifty-plus years ago, it ravaged children around the globe in an indiscriminate manner, leaving many of them unable to breathe on their own."

I do remember the day that we received the trial vaccine (or the placebo - it was the first 'double-blind' study, with nearly two million participants) our class was brought to the school gym and given shots. My card says this was June 3, 1954. That's all I remember! *This Day in History* website says the trial began in April, 1954, and that the vaccine was declared safe and effective on April 12, 1955.

Now we are in another, much more widespread, viral pandemic. Let's all work together in the hope that medical history will be written again, and that a new vaccine for this new virus will be developed. And thanks to Heart of Maine Community Stories for providing a place for me to tell mine.

Second grade, Ardmore School, the Polio Pioneers

