It is of interest that the first white man to set foot on Texas soil, unwilling visitor though he was, was a medical man. Cabeza de Vaca, according to the well known authority Dr. Carlos Castañeda of the University of Texas, came through what are now Austin, San Marcos, New Braunfels and then the Indian village of Yanaguana, later to be called San Antonio de Bexar. While he had no particular knowledge of medicine, and while he was coerced through threats of death from the Indians, whose captive he was, to undertake his healing powers, he was in the minds of these Indians a real worker of miracles. This was in 1534.

Before and after the time of Cabeza de Vaca, the Indian medicine man thrived. His ability was no better than that of the ship-wrecked Spaniard, probably not as great because Cabeza de Vaca, with death constantly in the offing, learned early to "pray with all earnestness of God our Lord that He would give health and influence". The Indian healer had only charms and incantations as his equipment and these failed him too often.

Beginning in 1718, a series of Spanish expeditions reached the San Antonio area. In all of these, there was repeatedly enacted a strange historical paradox: the soldier with the sword as the symbol of might alongside the priest with the cross as the symbol of mercy. It appears that the early Spanish explorers of Texas did not bring physicians with them. There is one statement that in San Antonio in 1778, "There were no representatives of the learned professions, not even a physician". The first record of a physician coming to San Antonio is in 1793. In that year Dr. Augustin G. de Spangerberg, a young German of twenty-eight years, began to practice medicine in San Antonio. He stayed here only a short time, however, and then went to Coahuila. The first effort to do anything in a medical way in San Antonio was in 1805. On October 19 of that year, the Provisional Governor of Texas, Némico Salcedo,
began to use the Alamo as a hospital. He provided beds made of reeds which were placed on the ground. A year later he built thirty beds out of lumber and these served the purpose for five years, when the hospital was no longer used. Fortunately at that time Dr. Frederico Zerván came to San Antonio and he was the physician at the Alamo for three years. Following him, Dr. Don Jayme Gurza had charge of the hospital.

There are records which show that various diseases occurred in San Antonio at that time. Among these were malaria, typhoid fever, smallpox, syphilis, and influenza.

Yoakum, in his History of Texas, makes an interesting comment about Doctor Zerván and the people of San Antonio in that day. "Society", he said, "had been greatly improved in San Antonio by the officers of the army as well as the new settlers. Among the leaders of fashion and polite manners were, next to the Governor, Father McGuire, Dr. Zerván, Captain Ugarte and his lady, and Colonel Delgado. These attended to the hospitalities of the town and introduced among the inhabitants a suavity of manners and a fondness for social intercourse which served much to make San Antonio by far the most pleasant place in Texas. . . . The people having no care of politics passed their leisure time in playing at games, in dancing, and in conversing, mostly upon one of the subjects of money, women or horses."

It is much to the credit of the King of Spain that as early as 1806, he was sending smallpox vaccine to Texas and was requiring all his subjects to be inoculated. This is particularly noteworthy because it was only six years prior to this date that Jenner had announced his discovery of vaccination against smallpox.

After the time of Dr. Don Jayme Gurza, very few physicians came to San Antonio. In the Bexar Archives, we find repeated requests for physicians, but it appears that none were sent. (For quite a long period Baron de Bastrop lived in San Antonio and he knew something about medicine and took the place of a physician. It will be recalled that Baron de Bastrop played quite a part in Texas history. It was he who made possible, through the Spanish authorities in San Antonio, for Stephen F. Austin to bring in his first colonists.)

With the advent of the colonists from the United States, there came a few physicians, but these were wholly inadequate to take care of the civilian population.
From 1821 to 1836 most of the people of Texas did without doctors and learned very well to apply first aid and household remedies to their ailments. Practically every account written of Texas of that period has something to advise along lines of health and illness.

It is not generally known that there were at least three physicians at the fall of the Alamo. These were Dr. Amos Pollard, Dr. D. Michison and Dr. John W. Thompson. These men, of course, along with the others had an opportunity to leave San Antonio before Santa Anna and his army reached the city. They chose to cast their lot with the rest of that gallant group under the leadership of Travis, Bowie, Crockett, and Bonham. The medical profession finds great consolation in believing that these three men added something to the comfort of that gallant galaxy of Texas heroes who did so much for Texas liberty.

The practice of medicine made very little progress during the nine years that Texas was a Republic. There are records of a few doctors who came to San Antonio and Bexar County during that time, but the records are very incomplete. The first real progress along medical lines in Bexar County was made after Texas became a state.

In the year 1853 a small group of physicians met at Austin and the State Medical Association was organized. Bexar County was honored in that Dr. George Cupples was elected the first president. In the same year Dr. George Cupples and Dr. Ferdinand Herff and a small group of other physicians organized the Bexar County Medical Society. The charter was issued on September 22, 1853, and this charter, 102 years old, hangs at the present time on the walls of the Bexar County Medical Society building at 202 W. French Place. This small group of earnest physicians did a remarkable work. Most of them were well educated and several of them, including Doctor Cupples and Doctor Herff, had come from Europe. They had many epidemics to deal with, especially epidemics of cholera. There was a very severe epidemic of this disease in 1849, which was very completely described by Mrs. Mary Maverick who lost one of her children from the disease. This epidemic lasted six weeks and over 800 people died out of a population of 5,000. Another serious outbreak of cholera occurred in 1866.

Some of the early doctors of that period were Dr. H. P. Howard, Dr. J. H. Lyons, Dr. F. M. Giddings, Dr. A. M. Dignowity, and Dr. George H. Franklin.

At the time of the Civil War and for many years afterward, economic and
social conditions in San Antonio were very bad and as a result medical conditions were bad. The physicians were willing to do what they could, but very little progress was made in furthering the interests of scientific medicine. There was no meeting of the State Medical Association and no meeting of the county society until 1869. From 1869 to the end of the century there was renewed interest on the part of the medical profession. We see, in addition to Doctor Cupples and Doctor Herff, such names as Dr. B. E. Hadra, Dr. E. F. Kingsley, Dr. G. Graham Watts, Dr. L. L. Shropshire, Dr. J. V. Spring, Dr. F. M. Hicks, Dr. Frank Paschal, Dr. F. E. Moss, and many others who had come to San Antonio to make their home and to practice their chosen profession. At that time, there were practically no restrictions as to who might practice medicine. Any one with a diploma, whether true or false, could hang out his shingle and represent himself as a physician.

The State Medical Association met in San Antonio in 1869 and at that meeting Dr. George Cupples was the first to start a movement which led to the creation of the Board of Medical Examiners for the State of Texas. It is true that his recommendations were not carried out but it was he who initiated the movement which was not consummated until the year 1907. (It is interesting to quote this from Doctor Cupples' address at that meeting: "Charlatanism and imposture, the offspring of ignorance, reign rampant in the land; no legislative check restrains the indiscriminate and unregulated practice of physic by unqualified persons, the incredible and destructive abuse of nostrums and secret remedies; humbug is the order of the day".) It might be said in passing that any one who is properly qualified, regardless of what type of medicine he proposes to practice, can go before this Board of Medical Examiners and take the examination. If he passes he can practice medicine in any way that he sees fit, whether it be by massage, or manipulation, or whatnot. The Board's only requirement is that the applicant have proper educational preparation and that he has mastered anatomy, physiology, chemistry, and the other basic branches of medicine. The Board's primary purpose is to protect the sick and the suffering from the dangers incident to entrusting the treatment of their bodies to the hands of people who are not learned in the science and art of medicine and surgery.
The most progressive and far-reaching step in the progress of medicine in Bexar County was taken in 1903. In this year the American Medical Association undertook a plan of reorganization. This plan made the component county medical society the unit of organization. The combination of all the county units would constitute the state association and the union of state associations would comprise the American Medical Association. On July 9, 1903 the Bexar County Medical Society was reorganized under this arrangement. Dr. T. T. Jackson was elected its first president. Under his able leadership, interest in the society was greatly increased and its membership had enlarged. Charter membership contained such names as Dr. F. M. Hicks, Dr. Frank Paschal, Dr. Russell Caffery, Dr. Frederick Terrell, Dr. J. H. Burleson, Dr. J. Braunnagel, Dr. M. J. Elixm, Dr. W. B. Russ, Dr. G. Graham Watts, Dr. Marvin L. Graves, Dr. Wm. Wolf, Dr. J. P. Oldham, Dr. Dalney Berrey, Dr. Adolph Herff, and a large number of others who saw the increased opportunities which were to be found in an organization about which they could gather and discuss subjects of common medical interest.

In this same year of 1903, Dr. Frank Paschal was elected president of the State Medical Association and he was very instrumental in starting that organization in the way of increased usefulness. Since that time these San Antonio physicians have also served as president of the State Medical Association: Dr. W. B. Russ, Dr. G. H. Moody, Dr. T. T. Jackson, Dr. J. H. Burleson, Dr. C. S. Venable, and Dr. J. L. Cochran. Doctor Cochran is the present president.

During the ensuing years, there has been tremendous progress in the science of medicine. The compound microscope had been perfected some years before and the cause of one infectious disease after another yielded up its secret. At about the same time Lister and Pasteur were doing their work in demonstration of the fact that infection was the cause of pus in wounds and especially surgical wounds. Under their teaching, the prevalence of sepsis and antisepsis came into their own and as a result surgery, which hitherto had limited itself to emergency operations only, came into its Golden Era. Operations which had not been dreamed of hitherto have in recent years become commonplace. At the outset of this era, surgery was rather limited to the Eastern medical centers, but gradually as the newer methods became more generally known good surgery was being done all over the United States. By 1955 the surgeons
of San Antonio are equipped to do any operation that can be done elsewhere.

And advances in medical treatment were being made as well. It was long realized that the cure of a disease could not very readily be found until its cause was established. So that as the cause of one disease was uncovered, the cure was often times close at hand. As a consequent result of these advances, many diseases which were the most prevalent cause of death 50 years ago are practically unheard of today; notably among these were typhoid fever, malaria, diphtheria, smallpox, and whooping cough. And great advances have been made in the treatment of many other diseases, such as syphilis, pneumonia, diabetes, goitre, and the acute infectious diseases. One very notable advance has been the great decrease in the death rate of tuberculosis. (This disease is not yet under control, inasmuch as it together with cancer and the degenerative diseases of the heart, liver, and kidney constitute the major problems that face the medical profession today.)

The medical profession of San Antonio and Bexar County compares favorably with that of any other community. The Bexar County Medical Society has an alert membership of over 500. It has a regular biweekly meeting at which various medical problems are presented and discussed. In addition, there is held in January of each year the International Medical Assembly to which are invited experts in all lines of medical practice. To this meeting come physicians from all over Texas.

The county medical society owns its own home and has a library which is probably equal to that of any other in the state. It subscribes to more than 165 medical journals and buys all the worthwhile medical books as they are published. Its members have published textbooks on various subjects and have made worthy contributions to the practice of medicine and surgery, contributions that have been recognized as epoch-making.

In addition, there is a collection of old and rare books which is not equalled in Texas. Some of these go back nearly 500 years. All these are not safely housed. The medical profession is even now making plans for a modern fireproof building which will take care of all the needs of the profession.

Closely associated with the Bexar County Medical Society is the Bexar County Medical Library Association which has developed and fostered the library.
The main function of the Bexar County Medical Society is to cure disease to advance the profession. Its members are worthwhile citizens of Bexar County. They have their problems and their ambitions just as all other citizens do. They want to serve their patients to the best of their ability and at the same time they want to carry out all the duties which good citizenship demands of them.