

and the help of many others, Houston became the home of the Texas Medical Center.

Spectacular Growth

When the three trustees of the Anderson Foundation determined that Houston should have a medical center, it was a daring resolution. There were—and still are—excellent medical facilities in Galveston, only some fifty miles away. They were aware that many nationally prominent doctors had trained there and its credentials were solid. A sizeable proportion of Houston's doctors were UT-Galveston alumni. They had a strong loyalty to The University of Texas Medical Branch, and many of them wanted no part of any plan to challenge its status as the primary medical training center for southeastern Texas.⁹

Then, there was the obvious. Prior to the 1940s, Houston's medical "center" was part of the downtown business district. The multi-storied Medical Arts Building was located there; the Baptists' Memorial Hospital was next to the downtown library; St. Joseph's large hospital was just south of the core of downtown; and a couple of other older hospitals were fanned out in other directions, but still near the center of town.

There were so many reasons that favored starting something new and big in a completely different location that it is almost impossible to list only one or two. Most of the existing facilities were small and aging; none had modern wiring or plumbing for the new equipment that was becoming standard in the major medical centers in the North and East; and none was air conditioned. Dallas had just finished air conditioning every building on its fairgrounds as part of the Texas Centennial Celebration, and in Houston, the new Foley's department store was centrally air conditioned, proving that people would go shopping just to be where it was cool. The idea of building a major structure without air conditioning was quickly becoming unacceptable. These new buildings often had a minimum of windows, but were often located away from the downtown area in a verdant lawn and tree oasis. Soon, this began to attract doctors to move their clinics to the suburbs, as well. Now, having the hospitals downtown meant having to drive back and forth sev-

DR. BENJY BROOKS

by Jenna Berger

Dr. Benjy Frances Brooks knew what she wanted to do with her life from the early age of four. At an age when many young girls would be happy playing with their dolls, the young Benjy Brooks had something else in mind. Her mother marveled as she watched her young daughter perform operations on her dolls using manicure scissors.¹ That was just the beginning of a brilliant career in medicine.

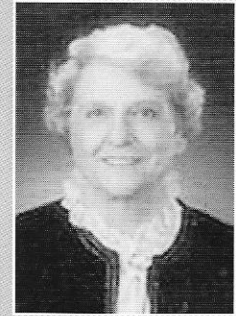
Born in 1918 in the small north Texas town of Lewisville, Benjy Frances Brooks never forgot her Texas roots. After receiving her MD from The University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Dr. Brooks explored the world around her as she became well respected in the field of pediatric surgery. She accepted positions at the University of Pennsylvania and Children's Medical Center in Boston, and became the first woman to join the department of surgery at Harvard University. However, she longed to return home. In 1958, she got her wish, becoming the first woman pediatric surgeon in Texas.² She joined the staff of Texas Children's Hospital in the Medical Center, four years after the hospital opened.

In addition to her time spent with patients, she continued the research she began earlier in her career, focusing on the treatment of burn victims as well as congenital defects, making great advances in those fields. She often attributed her success to a good childhood, growing up in Texas with "its long history of strong pioneering women."³

As if her plate was not full enough, she took on a volunteer teaching position at Baylor College of Medicine. Dr. Brooks' resume continued to blossom, and by 1973, she joined the faculty at the newly established University of Texas Medical School at Houston. She established and led the division of pediatric surgery for ten years.

Dr. Brooks has been praised for her work many times over. Many awards have been created in her name. Even a philanthropic foundation was established in her name by the grateful parents of one of her patients. They wanted the Benjy Brooks Foundation for Children to continue her legacy of exceptional surgical care for children. She is in the Texas Women's Hall of Fame and in 1994, received the honor of being one of "Houston's Pioneer Women and Today's Leaders." Just as she had admired Texas' strong, pioneering women as a child, Dr. Brooks had now become an inspiration to a new generation of girls.

When she passed away in 1998 at the age of 79, the *Houston Chronicle* remembered Dr. Brooks not only for her skill as a surgeon, but as a "strong child advocate."⁴ She once went to court, with bodyguards at her side, to testify in a child abuse case. Throughout her long career as a surgeon, researcher, teacher, and child advocate, Dr. Benjy Frances Brooks left her mark on the world and the Texas Medical Center.



Dr. Benjy Frances Brooks (1918-1998) Courtesy Texas Women's Hall of Fame, Texas Woman's University