



Joel A. Vilensky earned his PhD in 1979 from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, completed his postdoctoral fellowship in the Departments of Anatomy and Neurology at the University of Iowa, and is currently Professor of Anatomy and Cell Biology at the Indiana University School of Medicine in Fort Wayne. Dr. Vilensky became interested in aspects of the history of neurology after a career investigating the neurology of movement control. He has published numerous articles on various aspects of neurologic history including an analysis of the work of the father of neurosurgery, Sir Victor Horsley. Dr. Vilensky in 2005 authored a book on the WWI chemical warfare agent lewisite, which surprisingly had a critical role in the treatment of a severe neurologic disease, hepatolenticular degeneration (Wilson's disease). He became interested in encephalitis lethargica after acquiring films from the 1920s of patients with this condition. Besides the current book, Dr. Vilensky has authored five scientific articles on the disease. Dr. Vilensky is also co-author of two books on radiology and anatomy for medical students.

Advance Praise for  
*Encephalitis Lethargica: During and After the Epidemic*

“This richly informative and highly readable book distills the vast literature on encephalitis lethargica. Joel Vilensky and his co-contributors examine the several vexed questions in the understanding of this elusive disease and include poignant testimony of sufferers. The volume gains additional importance as a resource should the epidemic form of the disease ever re-emerge.”

—John Booss, MD, Professor Emeritus, Departments of Neurology and Laboratory Medicine, Yale University School of Medicine, and formerly National Program Director, Neurology Service Department of Veterans Affairs, West Haven, CT

From the Prologue by Richard Steele, Trustee of the Sophie Cameron Trust

“We were enormously impressed by his [JV's] encyclopaedic knowledge about EL, and ... felt that the book would not only provide a comprehensive resource for clinical professionals, but also would be useful to patients, family members, and friends who wanted to understand their experience and place it in a broader context.”

From the Foreword by Oliver Sacks

“Joel Vilensky and the many eminent contributors to this volume have given us a new perspective on the 'sleepy sickness,' one that is comprehensive and scholarly but also beautifully organized and vividly written.... He also brings together here a number of (often very poignant) self-reports, never before published or long forgotten.... I think this excellent book will find a much wider readership too, for it is a moving human chronicle with profound implications for anyone concerned with the themes of sickness and health.”

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Vilensky

Encephalitis Lethargica

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Edited by  
**Joel A. Vilensky**

# Encephalitis Lethargica

During and After the Epidemic

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*Encephalitis Lethargica* describes in meticulous detail a major medical mystery that appeared suddenly in the early 20th century and then, just as suddenly, virtually disappeared in the 1930s. It remains one of the great unsolved modern medical mysteries within historical times. During the 1920s and 1930s a strange, very polymorphic condition affected much of the world although not at the same time everywhere and certainly not with the same signs and symptoms. This condition, encephalitis lethargica, could cause death in a short period, or a Rip Van Winkle-type of sleep that might last days, weeks or months, but could also, surprisingly, cause insomnia. Its signs and symptoms encompassed almost anything imaginable, which made its diagnosis exceedingly difficult, to the point where its existence as a distinct neurologic entity was questioned. Furthermore, even in those patients who appeared to recover from the disease, there was a large risk that they would subsequently develop a more chronic and devastating sequel believed to occur in up to 80% of its victims: postencephalitic parkinsonism.

*Encephalitis Lethargica* thoroughly describes the disease during the epidemic period and also details all the cases that have been reported since that time. Using language that the non-neurologist can easily understand, this book identifies the core features of this disease and tries to identify its cause. This book also presents a thorough analysis of postencephalitic parkinsonism and its relationship to encephalitic lethargica.

Whether *Encephalitis Lethargica* solves the mystery of “the sleepy sickness” remains to be determined, but regardless, the number of clues available have been greatly increased.