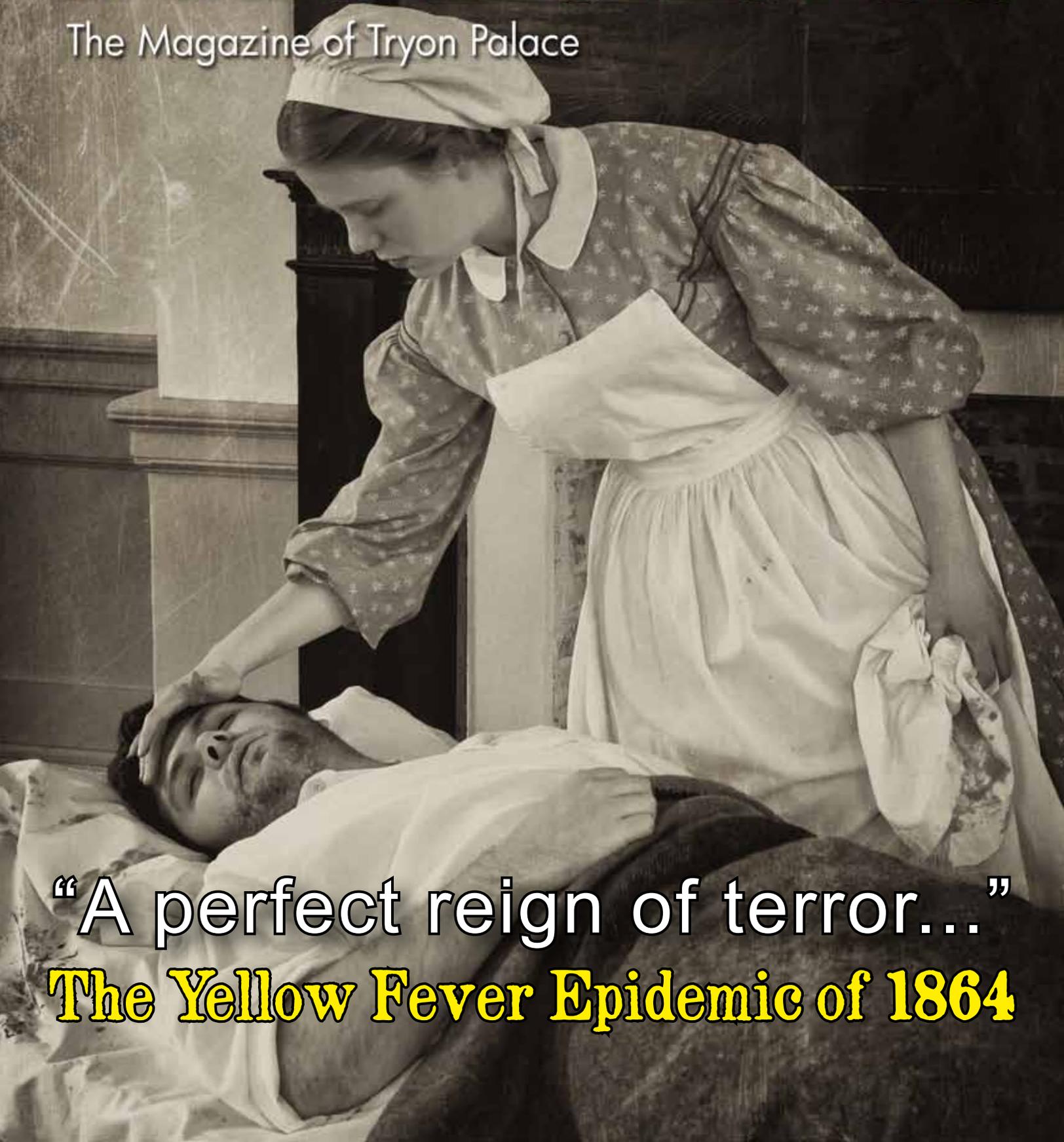


Summer 2011

The Palace

The Magazine of Tryon Palace



“A perfect reign of terror...”

The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1864

If the definition of patriotism is love for, and devotion to, one's country, then surely the definition of a true patriot implies someone who is knowledgeable about his or her country's history. How can anyone be a patriot if he or she doesn't understand to what we owe allegiance – or gratitude? We don't just cherish this piece of land we occupy, we treasure the ideals, the philosophies, the mistakes and successes that went into creating our state and our country.



The inalienable rights that Jefferson so elegantly articulated – life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – only have meaning when we understand why many of our countrymen have, throughout history, been willing to sacrifice their own life, liberty and happiness in order to build a nation and safeguard those rights for future generations. “With liberty and justice for all” is just a nice turn of phrase, without also understanding what defines liberty and justice – and how our country arrived at those definitions. It's not enough to pay lip service to the notion of patriotism, it's not enough to talk the talk – we also need to walk the walk.

That's where Tryon Palace comes in. Museums and historic sites like Tryon Palace are keepers of memory, guardians of the stories of those who have come before us. At Tryon Palace, we aim to act as a bridge between what happened in the past and our ability to experience and understand it in meaningful ways today. It's an important mission because without reminders, it's easy to get caught up in the challenges of dealing with modern life and forget those important stories; it's easy to lose our sense of perspective. In accepting the 1995 National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, the great historian and teacher of history, David McCullough, gave an impassioned argument in defense of history stating, “Indifference to history isn't just ignorant, it's rude. It's a form of ingratitude.” To that, I would add, it's unpatriotic. We owe our ancestors a great debt of gratitude, one that can be paid only by remembering their stories and by preserving and acting on the knowledge they have so painfully gained over the course of time.

These are challenging times for our country and for the museums and historic places that endeavor to keep the flame of history alive. We all need to be strong advocates for the teaching of history – its preservation is a collective responsibility, a job that belongs to “We the people.” For many years, Tryon Palace's mission to teach and preserve history has been accomplished through a very successful public-private partnership. It's a partnership whose continuing success is important for all North Carolinians.

In this issue of *The Palace*, we acknowledge and recognize the many private contributors who have joined our state government in ensuring that Tryon Palace can carry out its important educational mission and remain a vibrant and responsible keeper of memory. We thank you – we cannot do it without all of you.

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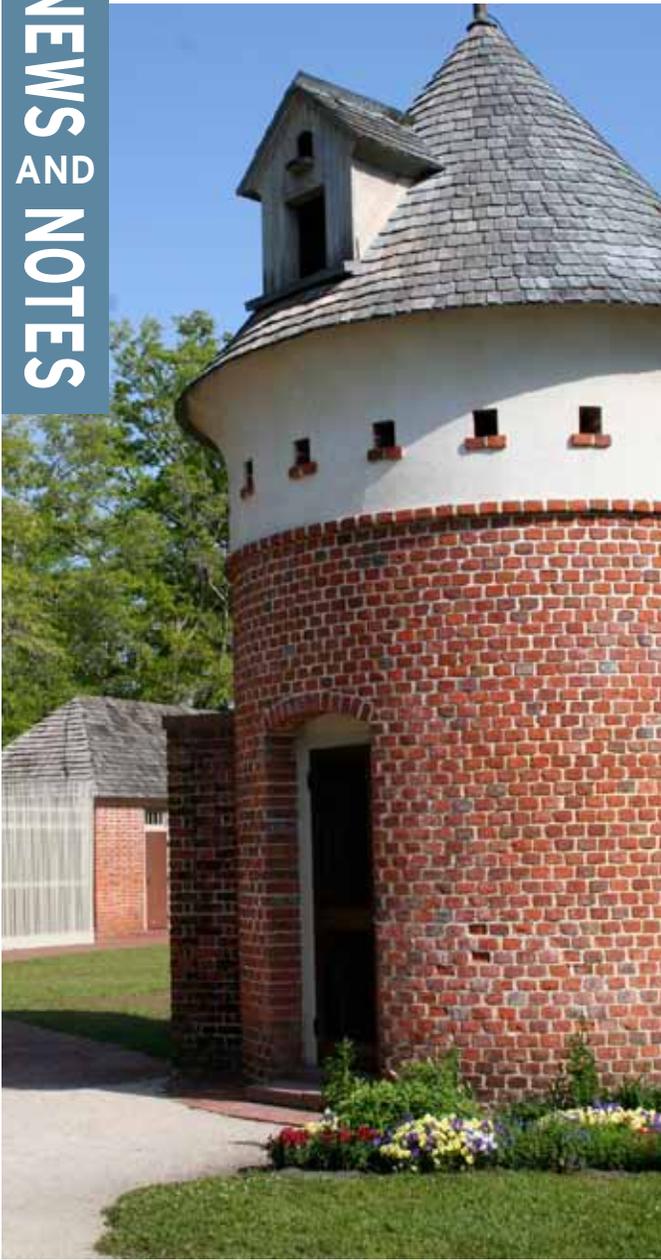


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LIVE the Fourth!

From a 19th-Century Town Celebration on the New Bern Academy Green, to crafts, games and the music of the Fife & Drum Corps at the Palace, the festivities are red, white and blue during the **Tryon Palace Independence Day Celebration on July 3rd & 4th**. Come listen to the stirring words of the Declaration of Independence and honor the ideals and sacrifices that led to the creation of our country. Most events are free. **For more information, check out our complete calendar of events at: www.tryonpalace.org**





It's not only fine feathers that make fine birds...

...it also takes a fine house. In colonial America, doves and pigeons were prized for the same reason they were kept in the “mother country” since at least the 12th century – as a plentiful and fairly inexpensive source of eggs, meat and fertilizer. Pigeon houses – also called dovecotes, culver houses and colombiers – were constructed to ensure an ample supply of tasty birds, especially handy during the lean winter months when fresh meat was hard to come by. The design and construction of dovecotes can be traced back to Roman times; in Europe, they were considered a sign of wealth, power and status. Ownership rights, known as the *droits de colombier*, were regulated by law and restricted to nobles and ecclesiastical houses. Not only were the birds an important food source, but the sale of their droppings for use as fertilizer, and sometimes as a tanning agent, was quite lucrative for the gentry. Unable to own their own pigeon houses, the hapless peasants could only stand by while the legally-protected aristocratic birds fed on their crops. In France, the restrictions on *colombier* ownership were so resented that the *droits de colombier* was one of the first aristocratic privileges abolished by the French Revolution.

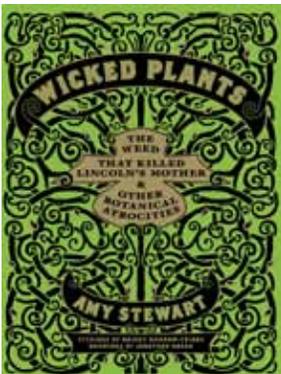
“Dovecotes were also quite popular among the wealthiest of the colonists here during the 18th century,” says Tryon Palace Curator of Architecture, Peter Sandbeck. “Brick was a common material for the best ones. Our research files show that there are surviving accounts or invoices from 1772 and 1773 submitted by Palace architect, John Hawks, to Governor Martin to have payments made for ‘Materials & Labor in Erecting a Smoke House, Pidgeon [sic] House & Poultry House and for Sundry other improvements and alterations in & about the Palace.’” Like their European counterparts, pigeon houses in early America came in a variety of shapes; they could be attached to a house or barn, or free-standing like this lovely one on the grounds of Tryon Palace. Often they were constructed away from large trees that could harbor predators such as hawks and owls, and they were kept protected from strong winds. Dovecotes generally had smooth sides with a protruding band, in this case of bricks, to protect against climbing predators like rodents, cats and squirrels. Inside, a dovecote could contain anywhere from 500 to up to a thousand breeding pairs of the prolific birds. On your next visit to Tryon Palace, be sure to stop by this beautiful abode for our feathered friends; even the smallest buildings have a story to tell!

When Plants Turn Bad

As if they didn't have enough to contend with, settlers on the American frontier had much to fear from a botanical killer, the *White Snakeroot*. This common, but very toxic, weed spread its deadly effects via grazing cows who passed on its poison to the humans who consumed milk products or beef. “Milk sickness,” as it was called,

killed thousands of settlers in the Midwest and the South; it wasn't unusual for entire families to succumb to its deadly effects. Abe Lincoln's mother, as well as other members of her family, fell victim to the Snakeroot while the Lincolns were living in Indiana; young Abe carved the pegs for his mother's coffin. The rest, as they say, is history.

You can read all about the Snakeroot and other murderous plants in a morbidly fascinating little book, **Wicked Plants, The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother & Other Botanical Atrocities**, available in the **Tryon Palace Museum Store** at the North Carolina History Center. We warn you: you might never look at your garden the same way again.



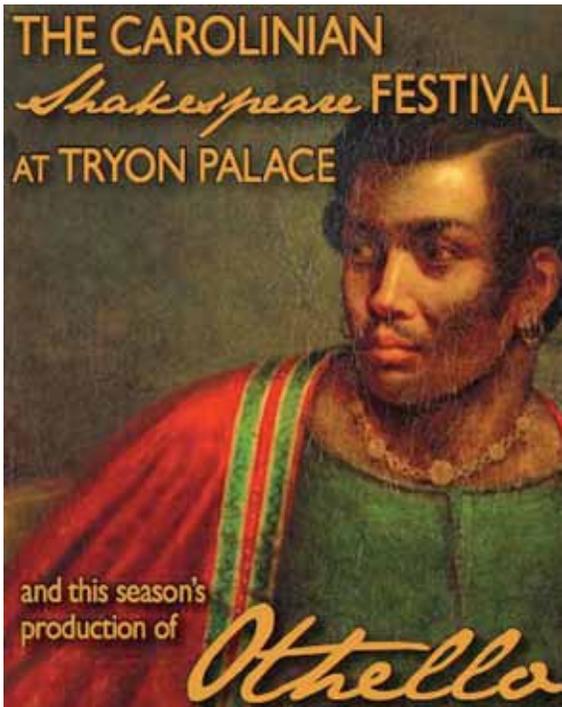
Easy Rider

Volunteer Bob Strickland is one of the friendly drivers behind the wheel of our new shuttle service at Tryon Palace. These vehicles are available to transport visitors between the Tryon Palace historic area and the **North Carolina History Center**. Hop aboard next time you visit!



Bee Cool

Fourth-grade students from **West Smithfield Elementary** recently took part in a high-tech quilting bee, designing their own quilt top at the Pepsi Family Center in the North Carolina History Center. This interactive exhibit features a “lady of the house” who provides a little guidance in helping piece together squares to form an original quilt design. Take a look at their finished product. We think these guys did a great job!



“O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!”

The Moor of Venice comes to New Bern, as the Carolinian Shakespeare Festival presents *Othello*, Shakespeare’s masterful tale of passion, betrayal and jealousy. Performances take place **August 4** through **August 21** in the **Cullman Performance Hall** of the North Carolina History Center. Please see our website www.tryonpalace.org for specific performance dates, prices and times.

From the Cabinet of Curiosities

For hundreds of years before the advent of indoor water-closets, the humble chamber pot, a bowl or mug-shaped vessel generally stored under a bed or in a bedroom cabinet, fulfilled a vital, if earthy, function. Well into the 19th century (and beyond in many rural areas), the chamber pot was a nocturnal savior, eliminating the need to venture out into the cold, dark night when the call of nature summoned.

Some basic needs never change and the use of chamber pots can be traced back to ancient times. The Greek dramatist Aeschylus reputedly called them “missiles of mirth,” perhaps in reference to the practice, over the ages, of emptying the contents out of a convenient window. The Romans even passed a law making it an offense, subject to fine, to throw or pour anything from an upper chamber down on a road frequented by passengers or pedestrians. Some linguists attribute the British slang “loo” to the practice of crying: “*Gardylloo!*” (a mispronunciation of the French *Garde l’eau*, meaning “*Watch out for the water!*”) as a warning to unsuspecting passersby that the contents of a chamber pot were on the way out. Apparently, the warning was not always successful, as in this illustration from the 16th-century *Praxis rerum criminalium*, a manual on the practice of criminal law.



With its dainty sprays of blue flowers and bands of orange, blue and gold decoration, this late 18th-century Chinese export porcelain chamber pot in the Tryon Palace collection is deceptively elegant.

But, a surprising bit of bathroom humor awaits inside; on the bottom of the receptacle is a small portrait of a man remarking, “Good God, what do I see?” Even the mundane has its hidden charms.

We can only hope that the servant charged with emptying out the smelly contents found it equally amusing. The chamber pot is on exhibit at the **Regional History Museum** of the North Carolina History Center.





Sprucing Up
the

Right: In 1966, the Stanly House makes its way through the streets of New Bern on its way to its present location on George Street.

Bottom: Unfortunately, John Wright Stanly was unable to enjoy his Georgian home for long. He and his wife both died of yellow fever in 1789, less than a decade after the house was completed. The Stanlys left 9 children, the youngest of whom was 3 months old at the time of his parents' death. Portrait c. 1770, artist unknown, Tryon Palace collection.



By: Nancy E. Packer,
Director of Collections

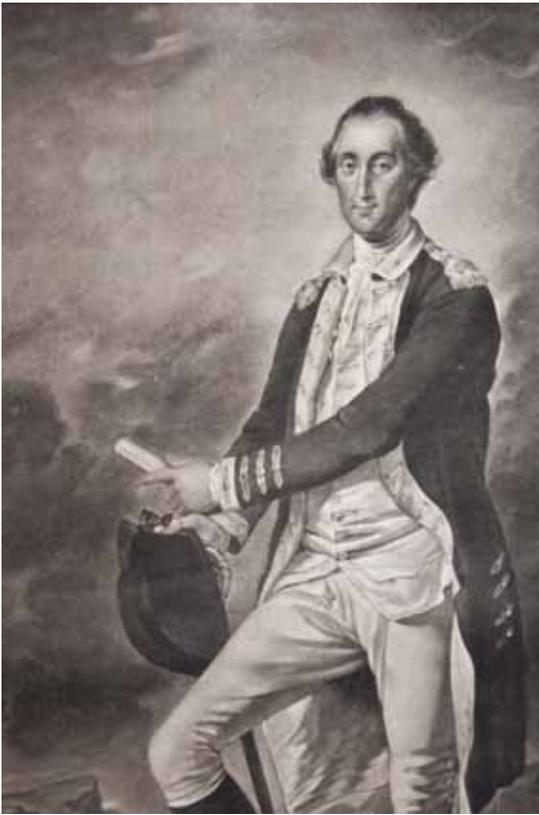


House cleaning takes on an added dimension when the house in question is over 230 years old and filled with valuable artifacts. Director of Collections, Nancy E. Packer, takes us behind the scenes as a Tryon Palace team tackles the first phase of a “Downstairs Upstairs” spruce-up of the John Wright Stanly House.

Spring cleaning came early to Tryon Palace this year, as Collections and Facilities staff joined forces in early January to launch a floor to ceiling cleaning of the John Wright Stanly House – one of the finest Georgian structures not only in New Bern, but in all of North Carolina.

Built sometime between 1779 and 1783 for the prominent merchant and patriot John Wright Stanly of Philadelphia and New Bern and his wife, Ann Cogdell Stanly, the house originally stood on Middle Street, between Broad and New Streets. While the architect has never been identified, the stylish interiors have long been associated with the work of Palace architect John Hawks. In fact, the interiors of the Stanly House – second

Stanly House



George Washington **did** sleep at the Stanly House and called it “exceeding good lodgings.” This is a detail from a 1781 mezzotint by London printmaker Valentine Green from a painting by American John Trumbull. Green’s print became one of the first representations of Washington to reach an extensive European audience and was a source for numerous European portrayals of the great American. Tryon Palace collection.

in sophistication only to those of the Palace – bear a distinct resemblance to the elaborate woodwork found in the Georgian houses of Philadelphia and the Delaware River Valley, and may well reflect the involvement of Philadelphia craftsmen in their construction. Sadly, John Wright Stanly and his wife Ann lived in the house with their family less than a decade before both succumbed to New Bern’s virulent yellow fever epidemic of 1789. George Washington later characterized the house as providing “exceeding good lodgings” when he stayed there during his southern tour in 1791. The house was sold by the Stanly family in 1834 and, nearly a century later, was moved to face New Street to make way for the construction of the new Federal Building in 1932. From 1935 to 1965, the structure housed both the New Bern Library Association and apartments, before being acquired by the Tryon Palace Commission. On December 12, 1966, it was successfully moved to its current George Street location, and restoration began. With First Lady Pat Nixon in attendance, the Stanly House opened to the public as an historic house museum in 1972.

Preserve a Window to the Past

When the campaign to preserve the windows at the Stanly House was announced to the Tryon Palace Commission at the end of April, Commission member Julia Daniels couldn’t contain her excitement. “How do I sign up?” she demanded. As it turns out, Mrs. Daniels once lived in the Stanly House, and, as a curious young 7-year-old, had her fingers soundly smacked by a rogue 18th-century window sash falling at an inopportune moment. Happily, she holds no hard feelings towards the window in question, and was even eager to be the first contributor to our new **Preserve a Window to the Past** fundraising effort.

One of the first questions that arose when the Stanly House cleaning began in January was, “What can we do about the windows?” Each of the individual panes in the house’s large and impressive windows had been fitted, over two decades ago, with a pane of smoked Plexiglas. The intent was to protect the historic contents of the house from damaging ultraviolet rays from outside. But any ultraviolet protection the smoked glass had once provided became defunct years ago, and the panes, which dim the interior to a degree that makes it difficult for visitors to see the house’s marvelous architectural details and superb furnishings, were actually contributing to the deterioration of the original 18th-century windows, by trapping condensation and moisture that rots the surrounding wood.

Happily, today’s technologies now offer a better solution. Crystal-clear OP-3 acrylic blocks 98% of damaging ultraviolet light without compromising clarity or visibility. It’s lightweight, so it can be installed in sheets the size of a full window sash – thus overcoming the problem of trapped moisture. It’s also relatively inexpensive: just \$175 will cover the cost of outfitting a single window in one of Tryon Palace’s historic structures. However, with 32 windows in the Stanly House alone, and nearly 180 in all of the historic sites currently open to the public, the prospect becomes much more daunting. We hope you will consider joining Julia Daniels to help us preserve these windows to the past for future generations!

Contributions are fully tax deductible. Please make your check payable to “Tryon Palace” at PO Box 1007, New Bern, NC 28563, and note that your contribution is for the **Preserve a Window to the Past** campaign. Thank you!



The Stanly House, like any historic structure, has maintenance and preservation needs that far outshadow those of a modern home. While each of the historic house museums under Tryon Palace's care has a regular cleaning and maintenance schedule established to ensure its ongoing protection, more intensive cleanings are required at intervals to address serious preservation issues that sometimes arise over time. Concerns about a potential mold problem in the Stanly House during the winter months prompted plans for a thorough, room-by-room cleaning. The process required the removal of all furnishings, including textiles, paintings, lighting fixtures, furniture and other decorative objects, by the Curatorial and Conservation staff. Conservation staff also dismantled all of the window and bed hangings, thoroughly vacuuming and cleaning them to eliminate any dust, pests or mildew. With the rooms empty, Facilities staff gamely climbed onto ladders and scaffolding to thoroughly wash by hand all the walls, woodwork and floors by hand using mild detergent, rinse water and, where needed, a dilute bleach solution. Areas of damaged plaster were repaired, and minor damage to the painted surfaces of the walls and woodwork were touched up to match the existing paint colors. At the same time, Curator of Architecture Peter Sandbeck undertook a comprehensive inspection of the exterior and interior of the house to identify needed repairs and critical preservation issues.



Top: Conservation, Curatorial and Facilities staff collaborated to plan and carry out the cleaning of the Stanly House.

Center: Conservators Richard Baker and Dave Taylor, with the assistance of intern Sue Gurley, examined and cleaned the first floor's 18th-century furnishings.

Bottom: Electrician Danny Rouse and painters Derreck Bell and Lynn Ford rewired lighting fixtures and carried out plaster repairs as part of the preservation process.



Top: Stanly's drawing room was lavishly finished with North Carolina's most architecturally sophisticated and stylish woodwork of the late Georgian period. The boldly patterned marble fireplace surround, obtained from a quarry in King of Prussia, near Philadelphia, was considered an essential decorative feature in the finest rooms along the Atlantic seaboard during the last decades of the 18th century.

Right, top (L-R): North Carolina Governor Robert W. Scott; Tryon Palace benefactress, Mrs. May Gordon Kellenberger; First Lady, Mrs. Richard Nixon and John Kellenberger at the April 19, 1972 dedication of the John Wright Stanly House.

Bottom: First Lady Pat Nixon with consultant Edward Vason Jones at the official opening of the Stanly House. Images courtesy of the North Carolina Office of Archives & History.

The cleaning process also provided the ideal opportunity to carefully assess the condition of the extraordinary collection of paintings and decorative arts on display at the Stanly House. Second only in historical and artistic value to the collections exhibited in the Governor's Palace, the Stanly House collection of American and English furnishings and artwork is one of not just regional, but national importance. Highlights include the life-sized portrait by Charles Willson Peale of Ann and John Stanly's two children, painted in Philadelphia around 1782; a pair of elaborately-carved, Chippendale-style, Boston side chairs once owned by Massachusetts patriot Josiah Quincy, Jr.; two silver teapots made for John Stanly by the prominent Philadelphia silversmith Edmund Milne; rare examples of furniture crafted in 18th-century New Bern, and a significant collection of 18th-century English paintings and prints. As artifacts and artwork were removed prior to the cleaning process, Curatorial and Conservation staff inspected each object, assessed its condition, and carried

out any necessary cleaning or conservation treatments prior to their reinstallation. A key strategy for the ongoing preservation of this important collection was also initiated, with the installation of the first set of ultraviolet-filtering Plexiglas panels on the west windows of the Stanly House [see pg. 8].

In April, the long and arduous process of cleaning and reinstalling the first floor of the house, including the grand public spaces of the drawing room, dining room and entrance hall, was completed. Astonishingly, the Stanly House was closed to visitation just ten days during that process, during the treatment of the first floor passage and grand staircase. As the number of visitors began to surge with the spring flowers, the first phase of the cleaning project came to an end. But with the turn of the leaves in the fall, the buckets, vacuums and dustcloths will emerge once more, and Collections and Facilities staff will once again launch their assault on the enemies of historic buildings and objects that may lurk above-stairs! ■

A House Of Many Stories...

As part of his architectural assessment of the Stanly House, Tryon Palace Curator of Architecture, Peter Sandbeck, delved into the files documenting the original restoration of the house in the 1960s and '70s. His research provided important insights into the details of that work, including the choice of paint colors, materials and architectural details.

Carried out under the supervision of Georgia architect and interior decorator Edward Vason Jones, who also served as a consultant in the decoration of the White House and the Diplomatic Reception Rooms at the U.S. Department of State, the restoration and furnishing of the Stanly House was a model for its era. "At the time the Stanly restoration was begun in 1966, the field of historic building paint color analysis was in its infancy," says Sandbeck. "We know from the surviving correspondence that interior and exterior colors we see today on the Stanly House were based on the aesthetics of the 1960s rather than on the careful study of the original 18th-century colors." While some changes have been made to the original furnishings plan in the decades since, many aspects of the house's appearance – particularly the paint colors and many of the textiles – still reflect Jones's decorative legacy. Yet much historical knowledge has been gained in the intervening years that contradicts some of the restoration and furnishing decisions made by Jones. "We have long felt a need to learn everything we can about the



original color scheme so that we can present the house to visitors as accurately as possible, and at the same time help educate visitors about the color and decorating tastes of the Stanly family and 18th-century New Bern," says Sandbeck.

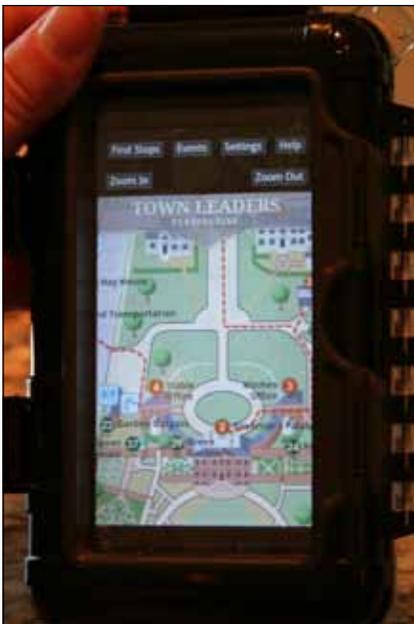
Over the coming months, Curatorial staff will begin the long, but fascinating process of gathering and assessing all of the historical evidence – architectural, documentary and visual – that is available about the original appearance of the house and its furnishings, as well as the lives of the Stanly members who inhabited it. Architectural remnants will be scrutinized; tiny fragments of paint will be scientifically analyzed; and period inventories and letters will be painstakingly dissected for any new evidence that they may yield. "We are excited about the potential for new discoveries about the Stanly House," says Sandbeck. "Recent advances in the field of scientific historic paint color analysis should allow us to determine the actual palette of colors that the Stanly family selected – perhaps including bold wallpapers in some of the principal rooms. We still have a lot to learn about this magnificent house!"



Taking a Walk

Before I headed off on my Navigator walking tour, I checked out the history time-line in the Gateway Gallery.

on the Tech Side



An orientation map for each of the different tour tracks clearly labels your walking route.

When we looked for a reviewer to “test drive” the History Navigator, our new hand-held history explorer, we turned naturally to a member of the younger generation. Jessica Dimattia, a senior at New Bern High School, is typical of most kids her age; she’s never far from some sort of technology. Like most members of her generation, she takes technology as a given – whether it’s communicating with her friends, or with the historical past.

By: Jessica Dimattia

As a teenager, it goes without saying that I love using technology. I can’t live without my laptop, or my iPod, or my smartphone. So I was kind of intrigued when I found out that Tryon Palace’s North Carolina History Center was joining forces with technology as a way of getting people more engaged with history, and I decided to give one of their new techno-tools a try. Much to my surprise, I found that while, in terms of size, the History Center may dwarf in comparison to a Smithsonian, it’s leading the way for a true 21st-century history lesson.

My experience began in the newly built North Carolina History Center where I was confronted with colorful images, videos about different subjects and artifacts dating back centuries. Since I was on a mission, I headed straight to the Gateway Gallery, where a timeline spanning the history of the area filled one wall and a full model of the gardens and buildings acted as the centerpiece. There, the helpful, friendly staff explained the function and use of the gadget I wanted to try out: the History Navigator. The electronic, hand-sized touring device was accompanied by a set of headphones and contained eight different tours. The user of the Navigator chooses a track for his or her desired tour. The tracks are tours focused on history as seen from different points of view such as women, African-Americans, architecture and the gardens.

Because of the open and self-guided nature of the electronic tour, I was able to see an overview of a tour track before I even left the History Center. A handy map in the History Navigator assigns a number to each potential stop for all the tours. The numbers of the attractions related to a user's chosen tour are highlighted in orange. The Navigator then creates a suggested route to visit all of the related sites. The user has the freedom to follow the suggested path or stray from it, or start again and explore something completely different. Now, with my History Navigator in hand, I set off on my tour.

After viewing the Navigator's orientation video for the African-American Perspective tour, I headed to my first stop, the Governor's Palace. I could see on my map that this first stop was quite a distance from the History Center so I decided to make use of the Center's new shuttle service. I found the shuttles and their experienced and friendly drivers waiting patiently outside the History Center building. The short ride to the Governor's Palace was fun and convenient. When I arrived at the Palace, I let my History Navigator know I was there and was shown a corresponding video. The video explained a brief history of the Palace and its owners. The video also recounted the stories of two of the many slaves who worked at the Palace. In addition to this overview video, I could choose to see more information about North Carolina and the slave trade. Every stop contained from one to as many as five videos explaining the tour stop and its relation to African-Americans and their history. It was truly like having a tour guide – but I had complete control of the tour.

I have one tip, though: experiencing the tour with the History Navigator is walking-intensive. I definitely recommend using the shuttle system and wearing comfortable shoes. Since spring and summer are the prime touring months as well as the hottest months of the year, it is easy to become overheated. One of my favorite stops on the tour was the Stanly House which had a small, shady garden area with benches to rest on.

“Touring the grounds and gardens of the Tryon Palace historic sites with the History Navigator was a fun experience. These devices bring an entirely new aspect to history education that’s a lot more interesting than what we get in a classroom.”

These breaks also give a user time to regroup and review his or her plans for the rest of the tour. And the Navigator is an outdoor “tour guide” only; inside the Palace and the historic houses, you will still interact with a regular human guide!

One of the greatest parts of the History Navigator technology is its ability to be used on various devices. One can access the Navigator's content through the browser on most smartphones and computers. While I recommend the full experience of trying the Navigator device from the History Center, accessing the content on a smartphone or computer also has many benefits. Although accessing the Navigator content from home can give a user the ability to plan a tour ahead of time, the number of tour options and attractions

make it nearly impossible to experience everything in one day. With a smartphone or computer, anyone can finish a tour watching the videos from home or even share it with far-away friends and family so they can experience the Tryon Palace visit along with you.

Touring the grounds and gardens of the Tryon Palace historic sites with the History Navigator was a fun experience. These devices bring an entirely new aspect to history education that's a lot more interesting than what we get in a classroom. As the technology continues to improve and expand, I am sure that the use of the History Navigators will become a very popular part of the historic Tryon Palace experience. ■

History Navigators are available for a small rental fee at the North Carolina History Center. If you have your own smartphone, you can view History Navigator tours at no additional cost. It works on phones with Android, iPhone or Windows mobile platforms.

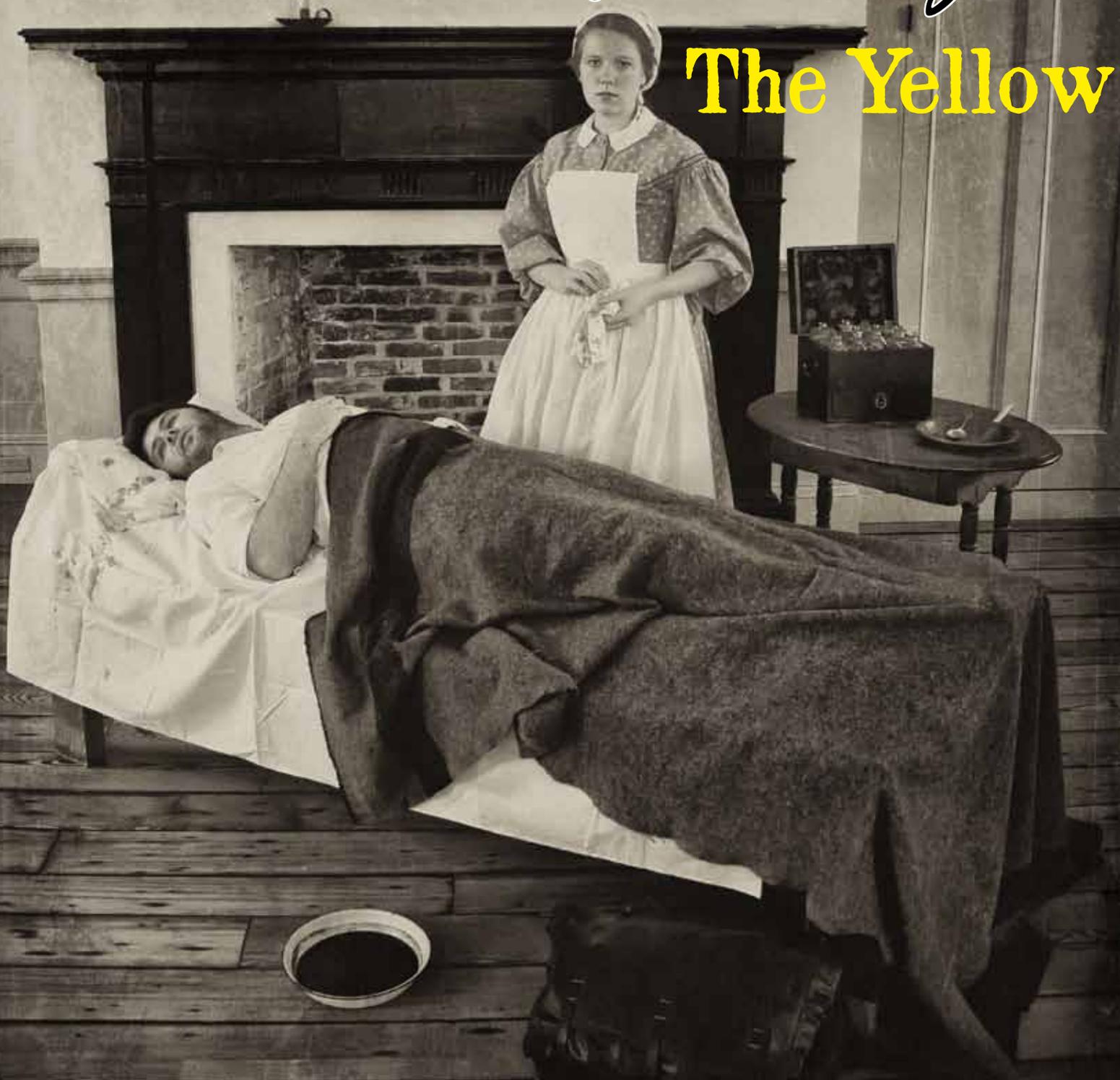


The Stanly House garden is a relaxing spot to watch some video on the History Navigator.

"Hark! not the slightest sound disturbs the oppressive, dreadful silence. Oh, where are all the people? Is there no one in the town, none to tread the public ways? Are all gone? Is the town thoroughly, completely deserted? Are all the houses vacant? Poor plague-smitten New Berne! a grievous time is on thee, truly." — Walter Benjamin

"A perfect reign

The Yellow



of terror...”

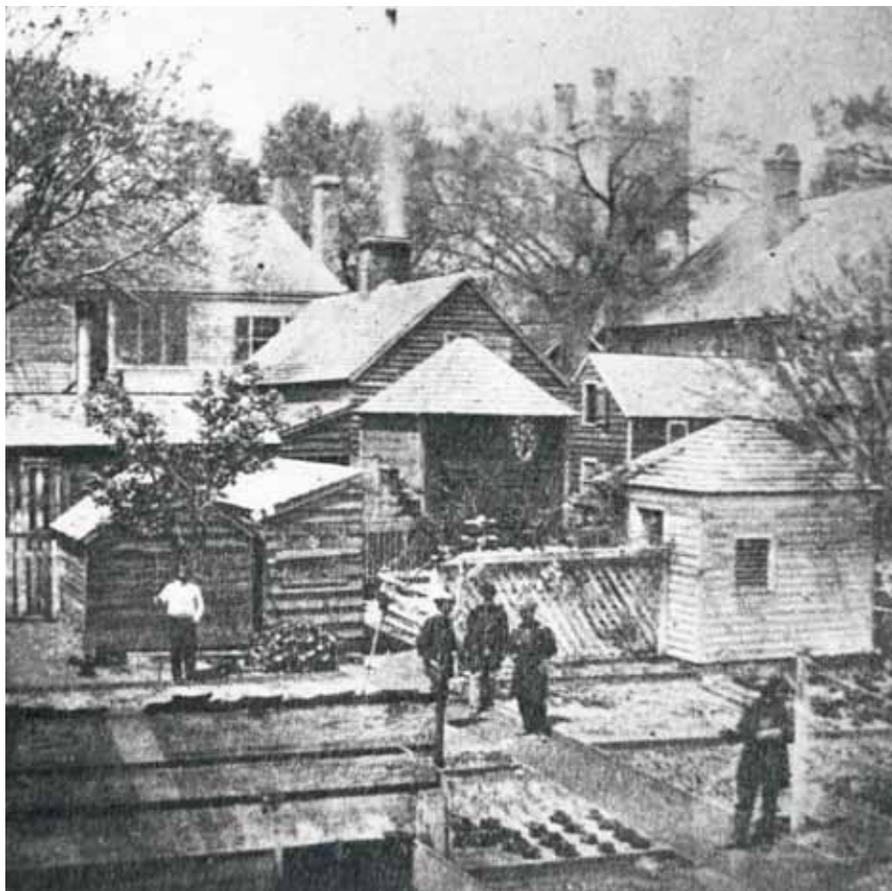
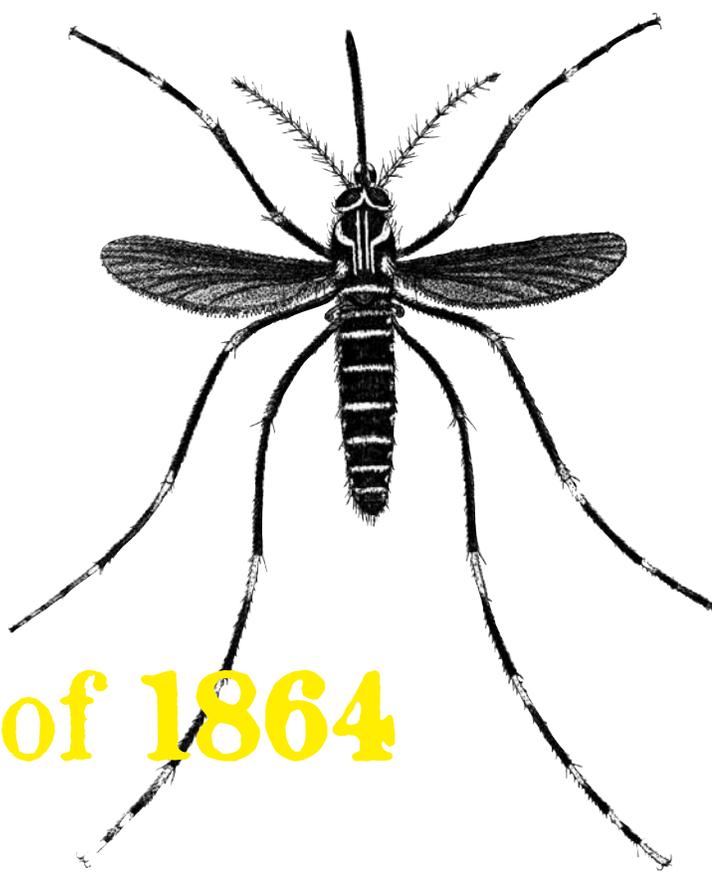
Fever Epidemic of 1864

By: Maria L. Muniz

Two years into the Union occupation, the summer of 1864 found New Bern, North Carolina a little the worse for wear. After an outbreak of smallpox the previous winter and an unsuccessful attempt by Confederate troops to retake the town, New Bern had returned to a state of wary and monotonous routine. Along with its civilian population, the town was teeming with thousands of Northern troops, Federal officials, war refugees, former slaves and the many missionaries and teachers who had come to provide services for recently freed African-Americans.

Surrounded by marsh and swamps, the low-lying town was experiencing a very wet and typically hot and humid summer. During the months of July and August, barely a day went by without rain, with nine inches falling in July alone. By August, the temperature at mid-day was averaging a sultry 85 degrees. The many elm and maple trees planted in the yards and throughout town did little to provide cooling shade; during the wet summer days they served only to keep New Bern under a damp and moldy canopy. With each rainfall, unpaved streets, normally suffering from poor drainage, oozed with mud. Privies and outhouses in tightly-fenced yards festered in the heat, while the surrounding swamps and stagnant puddles of water in town assured that mosquitoes, the bane of a Southern summer, were present in healthy numbers.

Conditions in the military camps that ringed the outskirts of town were not much better. Union General Benjamin F. Butler recalled approaching New Bern and being met by “an awful stench.” The general found to



The Aedes aegypti, responsible for transmission of “urban” yellow fever, is adapted to living near humans and breeds close to human dwellings. This Civil War era photo illustrates the fenced, shady yards of New Bern that offered a hospitable breeding ground for these mosquitoes during the wet, hot summer of 1864. Image courtesy of the U.S. Military History Institute. Mosquito image courtesy of Bettmann/Corbis.

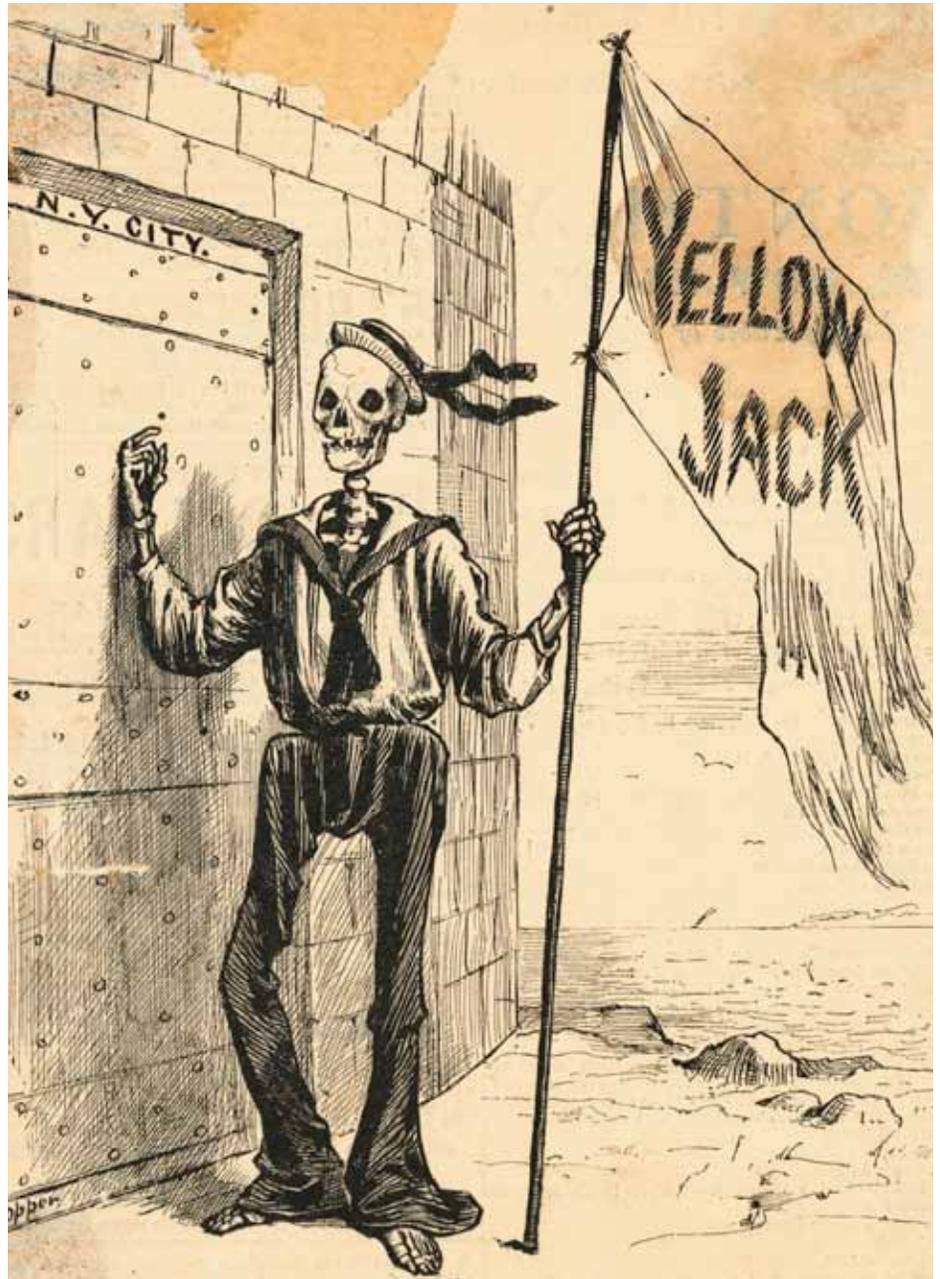
his disgust that in the Union camps, sanitation ditches were never filled in and covered; instead, “when they got unbearable the colonel would move his camp. This smell of human excrement, itself in decay, pervaded all New Bern...”

On provost duty in town, the men of the 15th Massachusetts remained busy trying to keep streets and sewers clean. When it came to odor, New Bern was fighting a losing battle. Strong southwest winds in August drove the waters of the river out, leaving extensive and smelly mud flats baking in the hot sun; a new embankment ordered by military authorities was being dug along the Neuse River, turning up and exposing large quantities of filth-saturated soil and adding to the panoply of unpleasant odors.

For the most part, these summer days passed slowly as soldiers coped with drills, duty and camp life, and townspeople labored under the ambivalence and uncertain loyalties that accompanied “enemy” occupation. Yet soldiers and citizens all shared one sentiment: as one chronicler of the 5th Rhode Island Heavy Artillery recalled, “The one desire of all grades of soldiers, and all classes of civilians seemed to be to get away from New Berne during the heated term.”

Just a few short weeks later, the formerly bustling town would resemble a scene from a horror novel. Day and night, haze and acrid smoke from numerous tar and pitch fires enveloped its streets, sending black columns skyward. Public life ground to a halt, businesses and churches closed their doors, family and friends abruptly stopped socializing. Parents died and children were left orphaned. Residents died alone in their homes, their bodies lying unclaimed. Everyone who could leave fled, trying to stay ahead of a capricious enemy who struck with no mercy. “Yellow Jack” had arrived in New Bern and he was on a killing spree.

Nicknamed “Yellow Jack” for the yellow flag or “jack” flown by infected ships under quarantine, yellow fever is a viral illness transmitted to humans by the bite of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. To spread the disease, a mosquito has to bite a person already infected; when the mosquito bites and then infects another person, the disease is carried from human to human. As the number of bitten individuals multiplies, an epidemic is born.



Northern cities familiar with the ravages of yellow fever enforced rigid quarantine regulations on vessels from infected ports. On October 5th, the **Dudley Buck** left Beaufort carrying soldiers from the 25th Massachusetts and a number of civilian passengers. Soon after reaching Cape Lookout, it became apparent that several of the passengers were suffering from yellow fever. The soldiers held “an indignation meeting,” accusing authorities of deliberately smuggling on board “a lot of yellow fever stricken devils.” The men of the 25th declared that these citizens “were of no earthly use” and “as a measure of safety and self-protection it was voted to throw them all overboard.” Calmer heads prevailed when the captain pointed out that they would all be liable to a charge of “mutiny and murder at sea.” Four victims died during the voyage. When the vessel arrived in New York harbor, the remaining afflicted were taken off to a hospital ship and the **Dudley Buck** was quarantined for five days to ensure there were no further cases. As this 1878 newspaper illustration shows, Yellow Jack was not a welcome visitor in New York – or anywhere. Image courtesy of Bettmann/Corbis.

The “Notorious Dr. Blackburn”

In 1864, Kentucky physician Luke Pryor Blackburn was considered one of the foremost authorities on yellow fever, well-known for his knowledge of effective quarantine practices. When a serious outbreak of fever broke out in Bermuda, Dr. Blackburn volunteered his services. Refusing all payment, he became a hero to the people of Bermuda, bravely ministering to the sick and the dying with little regard for himself.

What none of them knew, however, was that Dr. Blackburn was also a rabid Southern sympathizer, and he was in Bermuda hatching a plot that one Northern paper called “one of the most fiendish plots ever concocted by the wickedness of man.” The good doctor was planning yellow fever bioterrorism. While tending to the sick in Bermuda, Blackburn was also busy collecting clothing, bandages and bedding stained with the black vomit, blood and feces of yellow fever victims. He intended to use the “infected” articles in a plot to spread the disease and topple the Union government.

In July of 1864, Blackburn arrived in Halifax, Canada, along with five trunks packed with the soiled items; he had already arranged with an accomplice, a disgruntled Arkansas cobbler named Godfrey Hyams, to distribute the trunks. The destinations: New Bern, North Carolina and Norfolk, Virginia (both cities under Union occupation), and Washington, D.C. Hyams would later testify that he sold five of the trunks at an auction in Washington and arranged to ship the rest to New Bern and Norfolk



Saint or Sinner? Dr. Luke Blackburn – eminent physician, notable governor, bioterrorist – defies easy classification. Image courtesy of Kentucky Historical Society.

as planned. When yellow fever broke out in New Bern in 1864, the conspirators believed their plot had succeeded, though there is no evidence that any of the trunks reached their intended destinations. Of course, neither of them knew the plot was always doomed to failure – the yellow fever virus is spread by mosquitoes, not people.

Unfortunately for Dr. Blackburn, he was careless in his acquaintance. Tired of waiting for the big money payoff promised to him by the doctor, Hyams made his way to Detroit where he spilled the beans at the U.S. attorney’s office in return for immunity. The game was up.

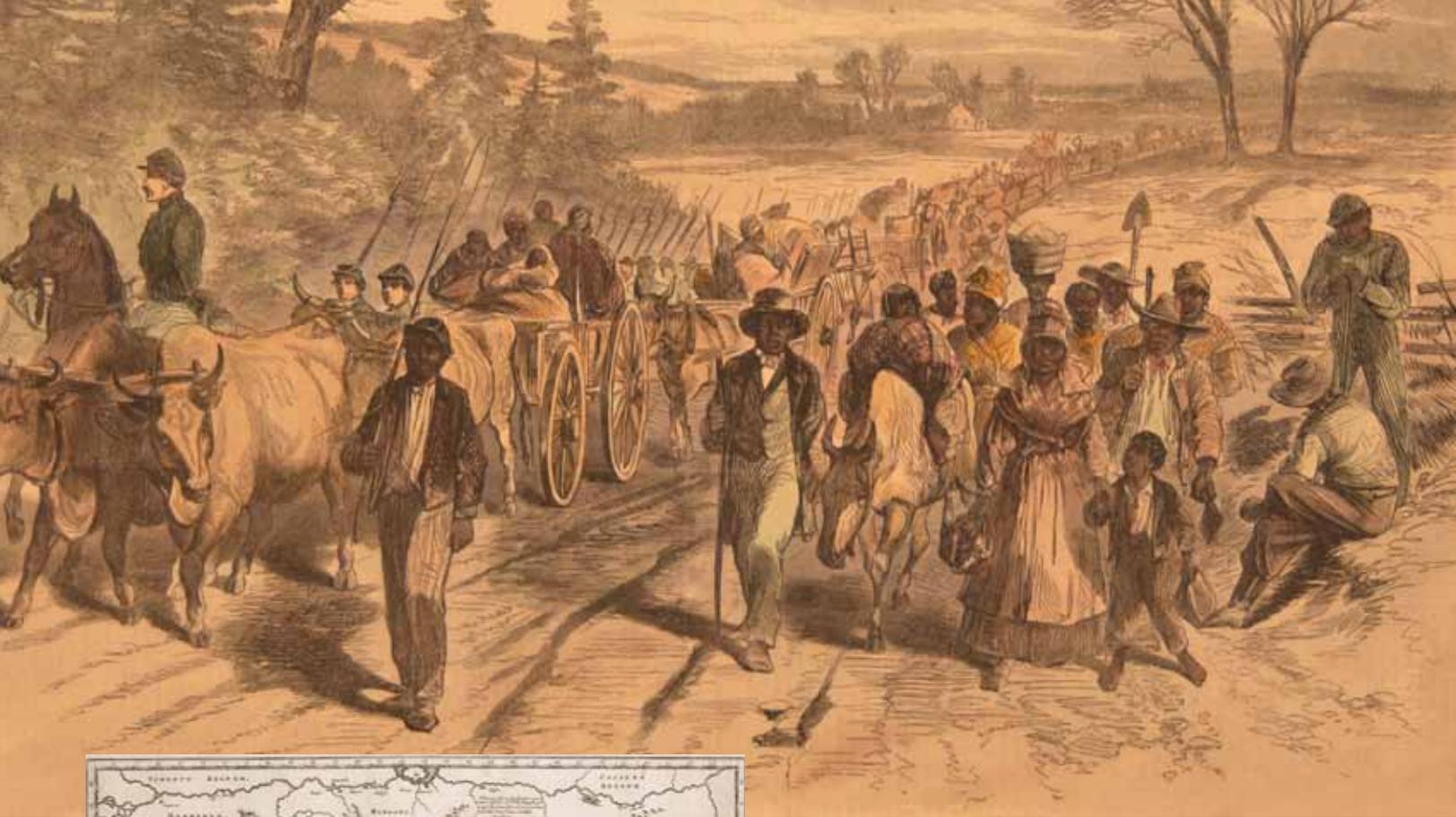
Dr. Luke Blackburn, the “fever fiend,” was charged with conspiracy to commit murder by the U.S. Bureau of Military Justice; however, Blackburn managed to remain in Canada and avoid U.S. authorities. The Canadians tried him for violating their neutrality laws, but he

was acquitted for lack of evidence.

Several years after the war, Blackburn was able to return to his native Kentucky and resume his medical practice; there, in 1878, he helped to fight another yellow fever epidemic. Luke Blackburn was considered a hero by the people of Kentucky, who rewarded him by electing him governor in 1879. The man who attempted to launch a bioterrorism attack on his country would be remembered as a humanitarian and a dedicated prison reformer. On his grave is a scene depicting – “The Good Samaritan.”



This dangerous looking item is a 19th-century paddle used to perforate mail in preparation for fumigation in case of yellow fever infection. At the time, it was believed that fomites such as letters, packages and newspapers could spread the deadly disease; as a precaution, mail was fumigated with sulfur in closed-up railway mail cars. Photo courtesy of the National Postal Museum.



Top photo: By 1864 New Bern's population had swelled, in part, from the influx of recently freed African-Americans seeking safety in the Union-occupied town. Although African-Americans were generally believed to be more resistant to yellow fever, they too suffered and died from the disease. How many perished is difficult to know; medical director D.W. Hand estimated that 150 African-Americans died, though given the miserable conditions many of them were living under and the shortage of medical care, the toll was likely much higher. Image from "Harper's Weekly," 1863, Tryon Palace collection.

Bottom photo: Along with their cargoes of human misery, slave ships carried the deadly yellow fever virus and the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito to American shores. Most African-Americans traced their ancestry to the African Slave Coast, the Gold Coast and the Ivory Coast of West Africa, illustrated in this 17th-century map. Tryon Palace collection.

Historians believe that yellow fever was imported to the New World during the African slave trade, possibly via mosquito larvae carried in ships' water barrels. For more than 200 years, yellow fever would strike American cities with a lethal vengeance. New York and Boston were ravaged by a number of epidemics; an outbreak in Philadelphia in 1793 killed an estimated 10 percent of the population and sent George Washington and Thomas Jefferson fleeing from the pestilence. Port cities along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts regularly struggled with what Henry Hall of the 3rd NY Artillery called "an enemy more terrible by far to its gallant warriors, than any to be encountered on the field of battle."

Yellow fever was already a disease that had changed the fortunes of America. In 1801, Napoleon sent a French army to Haiti to quell a slave rebellion led by Toussaint L'Ouverture. No sooner had the French army landed than it was attacked by yellow fever; of a force of more than 25,000 men, approximately 3,000 survived. Napoleon's failure to control Haiti and the destruction of his armies by yellow fever led to his decision to abandon his ambitious colonization hopes in America; he sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States and abandoned Haiti, paving the way for Haitian independence.

By the 1820s, yellow fever had firmly established itself as a scourge of the South. Unfortunately, when it hit New Bern in 1864, doctors knew little more about yellow fever than they did in 1693 when the disease first appeared in Boston.

Identification of the mosquito as the culprit in transmission was still many years away and doctors struggled to understand the causes of the fever. Medical theories abounded, with some blaming it on “miasmas” of local origin, noxious emissions that for centuries were believed to carry disease. Since outbreaks often began in port cities, other medical experts attributed the fever to direct importation on ships arriving from the West Indies where it was endemic; still others put the blame on fomites – objects such as clothing, linens, dishes, books or toys that can transmit infectious organisms from one person to another.

Puzzling doctors even further was the disease’s seemingly arbitrary nature. Perfectly healthy people could become ill without coming into contact with any infected person; furthermore, an infected person might contract the disease without spreading it to anyone else. There wasn’t any way to predict who would be infected or if it would spread. Doctors knew the fever came in the summer, but some summers there was little or no yellow fever. It was impossible to protect the public from an illness that seemed to defy explanation.

“Till you are with it you can have no idea of this dreadful fever; nothing else approaches it except cholera. The effect upon the spirits would alone be distressing enough; but then the agony of the patient, and his consciousness of the danger add so much to the horror. No one expects to live, and when the black vomit comes that look of despair with the ‘There is no show for me any longer’ makes your heart just full.”

– Mary von Olnhausen
Army Nurse, Morehead City hospital
September 30, 1864

One thing was indisputable – yellow fever was a horrible way to die. The onset of illness could come suddenly, a person seized with a severe headache and chills; neck, back and leg pains followed, accompanied by pain in the eyes and an intolerance to light. Nausea was a frequent symptom and a victim’s tongue had a white coating. In some of the afflicted, delirium set in immediately. And, deceptively, an initial period of illness was often followed by a short period of remission, before the worst occurred.

The second toxic stage of the disease brought weakness, frequent and forceful vomiting of a brownish black sediment resembling coffee grounds, and bloody stools. Victims were assailed by hiccups and severe abdominal pain; as their kidneys failed, their skin would take on a yellow tinge. Bleeding from the mouth, nose, eyes and stomach began. Bruises appeared on the skin when blood vessels ruptured and hemorrhaged. As blood from damaged arteries and veins began to fill the lungs, a victim would literally begin to drown in his own fluids. And it all happened over a period of, on average, 12 to 48 hours.

Infected people could and did recover, especially in the early stages of the disease, or in milder cases; but once the “black vomit” appeared, the mortality rate was fearful.

“There, turning the corner of Broad and Middle Streets, is one who has just been seized by the fever, trembling convulsively from head to foot, and his pallid visage hidden beneath the collar of his coat. Young man, speed thee homeward, the saffron’s hue will soon o’ercloud thy face. The avenger has marked thee for his own, and the morning’s sun may see thee enshrouded in thy winding sheet.”

– William Benjamin
The Great Epidemic in New Berne and Vicinity, 1865

It’s unclear when people began dying in that summer of 1864, since medical authorities in New Bern were reluctant to admit to the presence of a disease guaranteed to cause widespread panic among both troops and civilians. As early as June, Dr. Hubert V.C. Holcombe, post surgeon for the 15th Connecticut, was convinced that yellow fever had already claimed one life. Unlike the majority of his medical colleagues, Holcombe had experience with cases of yellow fever – the result of a two-year residence in Mexico where the disease was common. When Holcombe tried to report his suspicions, he met a great deal of resistance from Union Surgeon D.W. Hand, the medical director. According to one account, Holcombe was placed under arrest for three days and ordered to amend the conclusions of a report he had written to the authorities.

Regardless, the stage was already set for the devastation to come. On September 5, Private Joseph Kittinger, of the 23rd New York Independent Battery, returned to the city after a furlough home and noted in his diary, “Old Newbern looks very much as of old, though the town looks rather lonely and deserted.” Nevertheless, on September 9, Kittinger and his fellow soldiers had at least one reason to celebrate: news had reached New Bern that Atlanta had fallen to Sherman. In celebration, one hundred guns were fired at Fort Totten, while bands played Yankee Doodle, Hail Columbia and the Star Spangled Banner. “Thanks to the Great God of Battles for this telling victory,” wrote Kittinger. “General Sherman’s late operations against Atlanta are Peace movements of the right stamp.”

The jubilation was short-lived. The same day Private Kittinger was celebrating Sherman’s victory, Sgt. Mason Rogers of the 15th Connecticut Volunteers died and had the dubious distinction of becoming the first officially acknowledged case of yellow fever. Once the news broke, anxiety among officers and enlisted men grew.

By the end of the week, Private Kittinger’s mood, and that of the town, had changed. “I have nothing very cheering to record tonight...Sickness in camp and around Newbern generally seems to be rather on the increase,” he wrote. “One thing that has caused a good deal of excitement and uneasiness is the breaking out of Yellow Fever in this town. There has, I understand, been quite a number of deaths by this disease, though it has been confined to a few cases yet.”

Writing home to his wife, Henry J.H. Thompson, serving with the 15th Connecticut, reported, “They have had one or 2 cases in this regt. but have kept it pretty still, for it is shure [sic] death.”

Voices from the Past: Army Nurse Mary Phinney von Olnhausen

Mary Phinney came from “excellent New England stock on both sides.” The fourth of seven “charming” daughters of lawyer Elias Phinney, Mary was of an “emancipated” turn of mind. She disdained ladylike pursuits, wore bloomers before they were fashionable and was determined to live an active, useful life. Obligated to earn her living after her father’s death, she pursued employment as a designer of calico goods in a New Hampshire cotton mill. At age 40, she met and married an exiled German nobleman, Baron Gustav von Olnhausen; two years later, she was left a widow. When the Civil War broke out, Mary von Olnhausen responded to Dorothea Dix’s call for volunteer nurses who were healthy, over 30 years of age, “very plain looking” and who dressed “with no bows, no curls, or jewelry, and no hoop skirts.” By 1863, the Baroness von Olnhausen was on duty as chief nurse of the Army Hospital in Morehead City, North Carolina; there she remained during the greater part of 1864 caring for many victims of the yellow fever epidemic that struck New Bern.



Her diary and letters paint a portrait of an opinionated, skillful and courageous nurse. In one of her letters, she gives an account of the different kinds of patients that she encountered: “It was singular how one could detect the nationality of a man, however poor English he might speak, by the way he bore suffering. Our men (I mean Americans) were impressible; the moment they were housed they were so cheerful and determined to get well that they usually did from sheer grit, however badly wounded. The Germans, though equally plucky in bearing pain, lay back with such a resigned manner, a sort of ‘As God wills’ air. An Irishman complained of everything, and a Frenchman was the hardest to please of all; he was always worse hurt and more wounded than any other.”

Though the Baroness dutifully tended to the “Reb” soldiers that came under her care, her Union sympathies were never far under the surface. Writing to a friend up North she recounts, “I have twelve wounds to-day, all, I reckon, that were wounded in that bloody battle of Newport Barracks. My crowning was a Rebel who was brought to me to-day [sic] with a good Union ball through his lungs; such a gaunt, haggard, emaciated specimen of humanity you never have seen, because such kinds of men are never found up there; they are peculiar to North Carolina, a true type of all. When I should tell he was dirty, you could not then understand the word in its full sense; you must see a Southern soldier first to understand. I had him washed and cut and clothed, and now I hope to be able to approach him without having my nose tied up.”

In spite of medical authorities’ reluctance to admit to an increasingly worrisome situation, rumors of an outbreak quickly spread. At the Morehead City hospital, Union army nurse Mary von Olnhausen had already heard the news. On September 18, she wrote home of “the rumors of the fever which is raging at New Berne...it is alarming, as so far all have died in a short time after being taken. I only half believe the stories; but every one who comes down seems tolerably frightened, and many families are moving away.”

“Fever everywhere, hardly a man has escaped.”
– *Diary of Private Joseph Kittinger*
September 22, 1864

Perhaps at the behest of the Union authorities, the local New Bern newspaper, *The North Carolina Times*, seemed intent on maintaining the fiction that there was “no cause for alarm.” As the month progressed and the death tally grew, the paper was still claiming that “as yet no infectious fevers or diseases have appeared.” Ironically, in the same edition of the paper, its proprietor announced that “in consequence of the prevailing sickness” he was suspending publication; he also announced that he was soon to leave town, carrying “into effect a long cherished purpose of visiting the North.” The newspaper would not resume publication until the epidemic safely passed.

Mary von Olnhausen was incensed; she wrote to a friend, “What do you think the New Berne paper of yesterday says? ‘Some people for some reason are trying to get up a panic, saying we have some infectious disease here, which is perfectly false; typhoid and swamp fevers are prevalent, but to no alarming extent, and there is no epidemic prevailing.’ Is it not a shame to publish such lies? Friday and yesterday each there were twenty-five burials, all of yellow fever. Whole families are found dead in their houses; four were found yesterday, the wife lying across the feet of her dead husband, and both children dead beside them; and with this knowledge, to say such lies!”

As fatalities increased, medical authorities and the Union command were forced to acknowledge the truth. An epidemic that began quietly had quickly turned into a rampaging killer. One eyewitness estimated that both soldiers and citizens were dying “at the rate of thirty to forty a day.” One week after official recognition of the disease, the medical staff was already overwhelmed. Dr.

J.W. Page, an agent of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, filed a report stating “[t]he dead-house is constantly full...the surgical staff is breaking down with overwork; we need medical help.”

Surgeon Nathan Mayer of the 11th Connecticut, temporarily in charge of the Foster General Hospital where many victims were taken, had to cope not only with his sick and dying patients but with a rapidly diminishing support staff. Nurses and cooks had to be regularly replaced by inexperienced staff as they themselves sickened from the disease. Clerks charged with keeping the hospital records died “one after the other.” The chief clerk of the hospital, W. Chester Case, was charged with the grim task of maintaining careful records identifying the heirs of deceased soldiers. “After the epidemic had passed, there remained two trunks of gold and silver watches, and a safe containing thirty thousand dollars left by these poor victims,” all of which were restored to relatives.

At the hospital, treatment was symptomatic and of dubious effect. Quinine, the drug of choice for malaria (as well as a host of other ailments from syphilis to rheumatism), was administered liberally both morning and night along with medicinal rations of whiskey. Hot mustard baths were applied in an effort to sweat out the fever. Calomel and castor oil were prescribed to purge it out. Sweet spirits of Nitre were given to try to keep the kidneys functioning and creosote supplied to aid nausea.

Nurse von Olnhausen, along with medical director Dr. Hand, blamed unhygienic conditions and lax authority for the outbreak of fever. She wrote home indignantly, complaining of officials “who filled in a whole square of the dock with condemned beef, pork, and vegetables. The barrels were thrown in just as they were, full, and were then covered with about three feet of earth. The fever originated there, and not one in that quarter got well. It then spread all over the town. Moreover, the town has never been drained, and every vault and sink, even of the hospital, is in an awful condition. It is too bad that so many lives should be sacrificed to such wanton neglect. It is said that dead hogs and dogs and other animals come floating down those two sluggish streams that surround New Berne (the Neuse and Trent) and make into an eddy at the piers; there they lie, putrid, till they finally melt away. What can one hope from such a town?”

At the direction of Dr. Hand, all the wooden buildings near the dumping site were burned, to eliminate the poisonous “miasmas.”

Some soldiers, like Henry J.H. Thompson, began to rely upon homespun remedies. On September 20, he wrote to his wife, “I feel younger tonight than I have in a month. I keep full of spices and peper [sic] bitters and Quinine [:] if the fever gets hold of me it will get hold of a spicy Henrie.” Five days later he admitted, “I have took so much spice and stuff that I am almost embarrassed.”

Officials turned to quarantines and some evacuations in an attempt to limit the fever’s spread. New Bern became a ghost town and, according to Henry Hall of the 3rd New



This illustration from a series of 19th-century images entitled, “The Great Yellow Fever Scourge,” shows a family of children at the bedside of their dying mother. It was a scene repeated all too often during the epidemic of 1864. In one sad case in Beaufort, North Carolina, Col. Thomas J.C. Amory of the 17th Massachusetts, his wife and mother-in-law died within hours of each other, leaving four children orphaned in occupied enemy territory. Image courtesy of Bettmann/Corbis.



In the 1860s, the drug of choice for treating yellow fever (and a host of other ailments) was quinine. During the Civil War, blockades ensured that the South suffered from a severe shortage of the drug and Southern doctors were forced to rely on black market quinine or homespun substitutions. This cartoon from an 1863 edition of “Harper’s Weekly” magazine pokes fun at both the South’s predicament – and the unpalatable taste of quinine. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.



This Civil War era medicine chest was taken from the home of a New Bern physician by a Union soldier. It contains an array of concoctions to treat a variety of ailments, including a bottle of sweet spirits of Nitre, used to stimulate the failing kidneys of yellow fever patients. Unfortunately, none of the remedies in this doctor's medicine chest would have done much for a yellow fever victim. There was no cure for the disease then and there is none now. Medicine chest, Tryon Palace collection.

York Artillery, “[a]n immense panic prevailed.” Stores closed and all business – save for coffin-making – came to a standstill. Mail service was paralyzed when the two delivery clerks died from the fever. Houses were shut tight with some residents refusing to leave for any reason. Five years after the epidemic, Dr. Charles Duffy of New Bern reported to his colleagues at the Medical Society of North Carolina about “an instance of a family of ladies escaping the disease by residing persistently on the third floor of their dwelling...These ladies inform me, their mother made a similar escape during the epidemic of 1811.”

“A feeling of apathy seemed to fall upon every one. It even extended to the men on the outposts, for they knew that New Berne was safe from any rebel attack while this fearful scourge was doing deadlier work than any human foe could do.”

– A History of the 5th Rhode Island Heavy Artillery, 1892

Each night, in every camp and on every street corner, immense bonfires of pine branches, tar and turpentine were burned in an effort to disinfect the poisonous air. Hundreds of civilians fled, though those who did not take a loyalty oath to the Union were forced to remain. Most of the Union troops were granted furloughs or sent to camps as far away from the contagion as possible; general headquarters issued a command suspending all drills and any unnecessary duty. In spite of the precautions, some soldiers had the misfortune of being caught at the wrong place, at

the wrong time. Several members of the 9th New Jersey, who had finished their term of service, died while waiting for a steamer to take them home, including one young soldier who had miraculously survived a ghastly head wound in battle.

On September 20, Northerner W.L. Crowell, who was living in New Bern, wrote to his brother in New Jersey, "The town is filled with smoke. Everybody is burning for so many are badly frightened...The board of health are tearing down old buildings, burning tar, etc. Everything collapsed [sic] with terror [sic], and I think fear has a great deal to do with the sickness. There is a regular stampede of Civilians and suthers [sic] as fast as they can get away. I did not run any from the Rebs when they were around us and I shall not leave even for the Fever." A few weeks later, Crowell would be listed among the dead.

Those on the front lines of the disease saw the situation deteriorate rapidly; army nurse Mary von Olnhausen wrote, "The news from New Berne grows worse each day, and sick men are continually being brought here...Dr. Hand wrote yesterday: 'The fever grows worse; God only can help us. I'm dreadfully blue and exhausted, I can scarcely get upstairs to bed after my work is done.' He is medical director of this department, and so far the only surgeon who has escaped; but they say he is worn to a skeleton."

While the army tended to its own, the civilian population suffered terribly. In response, a group of local residents banded together in a heroic attempt to aid the afflicted. Known as the

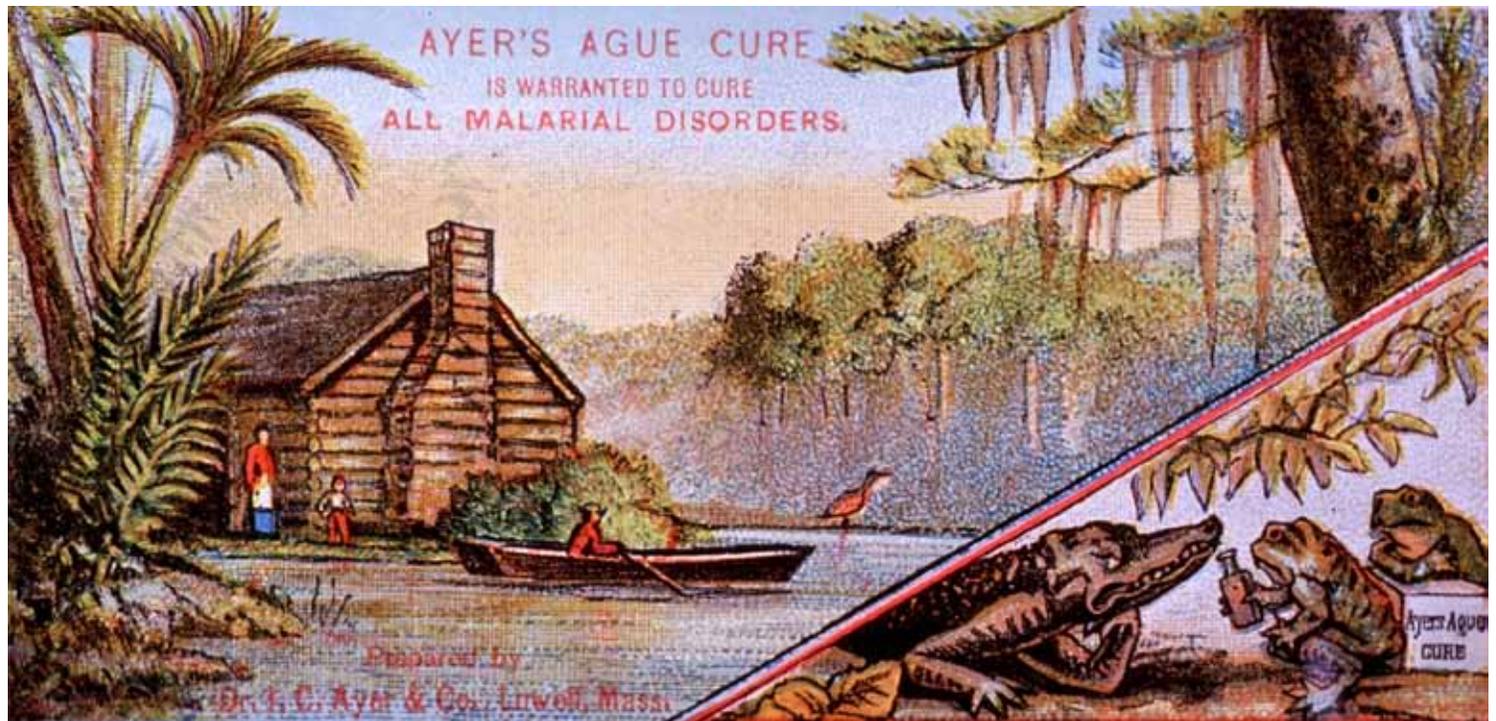
"Dead Corps," they visited the homes of the sick, providing what comfort they could and ensuring the burial of any corpses not collected by the provost soldiers. Of the 10 members of the "Dead Corps," half perished from the fever.

Hope kindled with the arrival of an early frost. On October 9th, Col. Stewart of the 3rd New York Artillery ordered all the stores in New Bern to open at night, to let in fresh air and "secure the full benefit of this frost." When some business owners refused, an axe was used to settle the matter and a guard posted to prevent looting.

"The scenes that were witnessed in the streets of New Berne were simply awful. Many times was I called upon to dismount and enter a house where the scourge had taken away some member of the household, and in several instances, where everyone of the family lay dead upon his bed, or on the floor of the house; many times was I obliged to send one of the guard for the customary pine box to convey the remains to the place of burial."

– Sheldon Thorpe
15th Connecticut Volunteers, 1892

In spite of the early frost, "Yellow Jack" was not finished. In town, the ranks of the hapless 15th Connecticut were being decimated; according to regimental historian Sheldon B. Thorpe, from the end of September through the end of October, "there



In the 19th century, there was no shortage of patent medicines that claimed both preventative and curative powers. In New Bern, Union soldier Henry J.H. Thompson swore by "Ayer's Ague Cure," saying it tasted better than quinine and firmly believing it would help protect him from yellow fever. On October 3rd, 1864 – in the midst of the epidemic – he ventured downtown, borrowed money and bought four bottles. He sold two and kept two for himself, vowing he "would not be without it on any account." Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

was scarcely a day in which one or more members (frequently four or five) of the 15th did not give up their lives to the terrible scourge.” During the week ending October 2nd, the chaplain of the regiment attended 32 funerals of both soldiers and citizens.

By early October, the 15th Connecticut was so weakened by the fever that orders were given for them to be relieved from provost duty by the 1st North Carolina Colored Heavy Artillery, a regiment of African-American soldiers. Whether the decision was made because the African-Americans were largely believed to be more acclimated to the disease – or because they were considered more expendable than white troops – the 1st North Carolina performed heroically. The black troops spread over 200 loads of lime around the dwellings, making the town appear blanketed in snow. In an effort to eliminate the “miasma” they were instructed to keep the city enveloped in smoke in order to destroy the germs; they cut down

trees and burned over 200 barrels of turpentine and 500 cords of wood. And, they buried the dead.

Horace James, a former clergyman who had been named Superintendent of Negro Affairs, wrote of the colored troops: “They shrank not from the task. Fortunate indeed were we in securing their valuable services. The city of New Berne did not contain, at this time, white people enough in a state of health to inter its own dead with the forms of Christian burial. As it was, not a few were left to die alone, and were carried to the grave without a friend to follow the hearse, or listen to the service.”

Superintendent James estimated that, “As many as one in four of the white population of New Berne went under the sod in the short space of six weeks.” The work of his own office was hampered when, in a short space of time, he lost four clerks, his assistant in Beaufort and one of the Bureau’s teachers to the disease. He himself nearly died of it.



Although this cartoon from “Harper’s Weekly” tried to throw a little levity on the situation, mosquitoes were no laughing matter. More than just a summertime nuisance, mosquitoes were responsible for the transmission of the deadly yellow fever virus. This band of merry stingers is getting ready for their warm-weather activities; the mosquito on the left is conducting from a score titled: “Midsummer Night’s Dream;” the ones in the middle are sharpening their stingers; and the ones on the right are having one for the road. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

From Beaufort, North Carolina, where many evacuees had fled, Navy steward James Gifford wrote to his parents in Massachusetts, "The hotel in Beaufort has been shut by the authorities. The people did talk of burning it down there have been quite a number of deaths there of Yellow fever. There have been times ashore since I have been out here that eight people have died with it, between dark and day break in the next morning."

"...the folks at home haven't no idea what a time we have had here, men taken into the Hospital at noon & buried at 3 in the afternoon..."

— Henry J. H. Thompson
October 11, 1864

The plague hit a deadly peak in mid-October. Streets remained empty, with Private Kittinger noting: "The hearse and dead wagon are about the only vehicles seen in the town, and the road to the graveyard and cemetery are much more traveled and worn than the not business streets." New Bern, he wrote, was under "a perfect reign of terror." On the 24th of October, Dr. Page of the U.S. Sanitary Commission reported that near his quarters, "in an adjacent row of dwellings, extending from Middle to Hancock Streets, not a white person survives."

Back in Morehead City, Nurse Mary von Olnhausen wrote home sorrowfully to report the death of her beloved supervisor, Dr. Bellangee, who had contracted the fever while helping in New Bern: "[he] suffered more than I am sure any poor mortal deserved. I can hardly remember the particulars now, it was so pitiful to us all. He suffered constantly, notwithstanding quantities of chloroform, till three in the morning, when he died; his screams will never be forgotten." She ends her letter saying, "I am a little weaker than usual from being over-tired."

Mary von Olnhausen was soon to become a patient herself, contracting a serious case of yellow fever. She proved to be one of the lucky ones; when well enough to travel, the nurse was taken north to recover.

U. S. A. General Hospital, Foster,
NEW BERNE, N. C.
October 9th 1864.

To:

I have to inform you that John A. Frost,
Private Comp. A, 2^d Regt. Mass Arty.
died in this Hospital October 9th 1864
Cause Yellow Fever

The said John A. Frost was last paid by Paymaster
Major Farr to include the 30th day of April 1864.

The following is an INVENTORY of the effects of the said Private
John A. Frost at the time of his decease:

ARTICLES.	NO.	ARTICLES.	NO.
+ Blouse	1	Cap	1
+ Pants pr	2	Hat	1
+ Shirt	3	Great Coat	1
+ Socks pr	2	Knapsack	1
Drawers pr	2		
Tree Coat	1		

+ Used for burial, one each. Respectfully,
Nathan Mayer
Surgeon of Regt. in Charge of Hospital.

Comdy. Officer Co. A.
2^d Regt. Mass Arty.

Among his many sad duties at the Foster General Hospital, Surgeon Nathan Mayer had to inform company commanders of the death of a soldier. With this form letter, Mayer reported the death from yellow fever of Private John A. Frost of Company A of the 2nd Massachusetts Artillery. He also lists the meager effects of the poor soldier – some of which were used to clothe him for burial. Tryon Palace collection.

“What, with fever and fire, the once beautiful town of Newbern is but the shadow of her former self.”

– *The Medical Examiner*
January 15, 1865

The weather finally turned considerably colder in November, putting a halt to the activities of the local *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, and the fever at last began to decline.

On November 8, Joseph Kittinger noted in his diary, “The Yellow Fever, I am glad to state, has almost entirely disappeared in Newbern, and business to some extent is beginning to be resumed... This has been a dreadful, gloomy, deathlike season.” Later on in the same entry he muses, “Would we were again on the seashore instead of this sickly pestilence-stricken hole.”

Sadly, New Bern’s troubles were not over. Fire broke out on November 19th, causing extensive damage. Several downtown buildings had to be purposely blown up to check the spread of flames. An unnamed correspondent to the monthly Chicago journal *The Medical Examiner* noted, “The cause of so much property being destroyed was the complete disorganization of the once efficient fire department, the yellow fever having carried off nearly all the men, so that the engines were out of order and the pumps nearly dry.”

Returning to New Bern in November after a 40-day furlough, Col. Henry Splaine of the 17th Massachusetts Regiment returned to a city that “presented a desolate and forbidding appearance. Many houses had been burned in efforts to stop the spread of the disease, leaving the bare chimneys to mark their former existence, while the remaining houses were black from the smoke of fumigation. Even the trees showed the effects of fumigation, being blackened and leafless, and everyone seemed in despair. The troops and surviving civilians seemed sorrow-stricken and disheartened, and looked as if they had been deserted and neglected.”

It’s difficult to know exactly the final death toll in 1864. Estimates vary dramatically from one account to another. The official Union army reports indicate that of 763 Union soldiers who contracted the disease, 303 died. Half of the 16 medical officers who had bravely remained to treat the sick perished. The civilian toll was very high, well over 1,000, many of them unable to seek medical attention from the overwhelmed Union surgeons.

New Bern slowly recovered from its ordeal, but Yellow Jack continued to wreak havoc in the United States. In the 1870s, yellow fever swept through the Mississippi River Valley claiming 20,000 lives; an 1878 epidemic reduced the population of Memphis by as much as one half.

Yellow fever would continue to puzzle the medical profession until the early 1900s, when Walter Reed and a team of courageous medical researchers proved conclusively that the fever is transmitted to humans by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. Aggressive public health initiatives and mosquito eradication efforts were initiated, bringing yellow fever under control in the

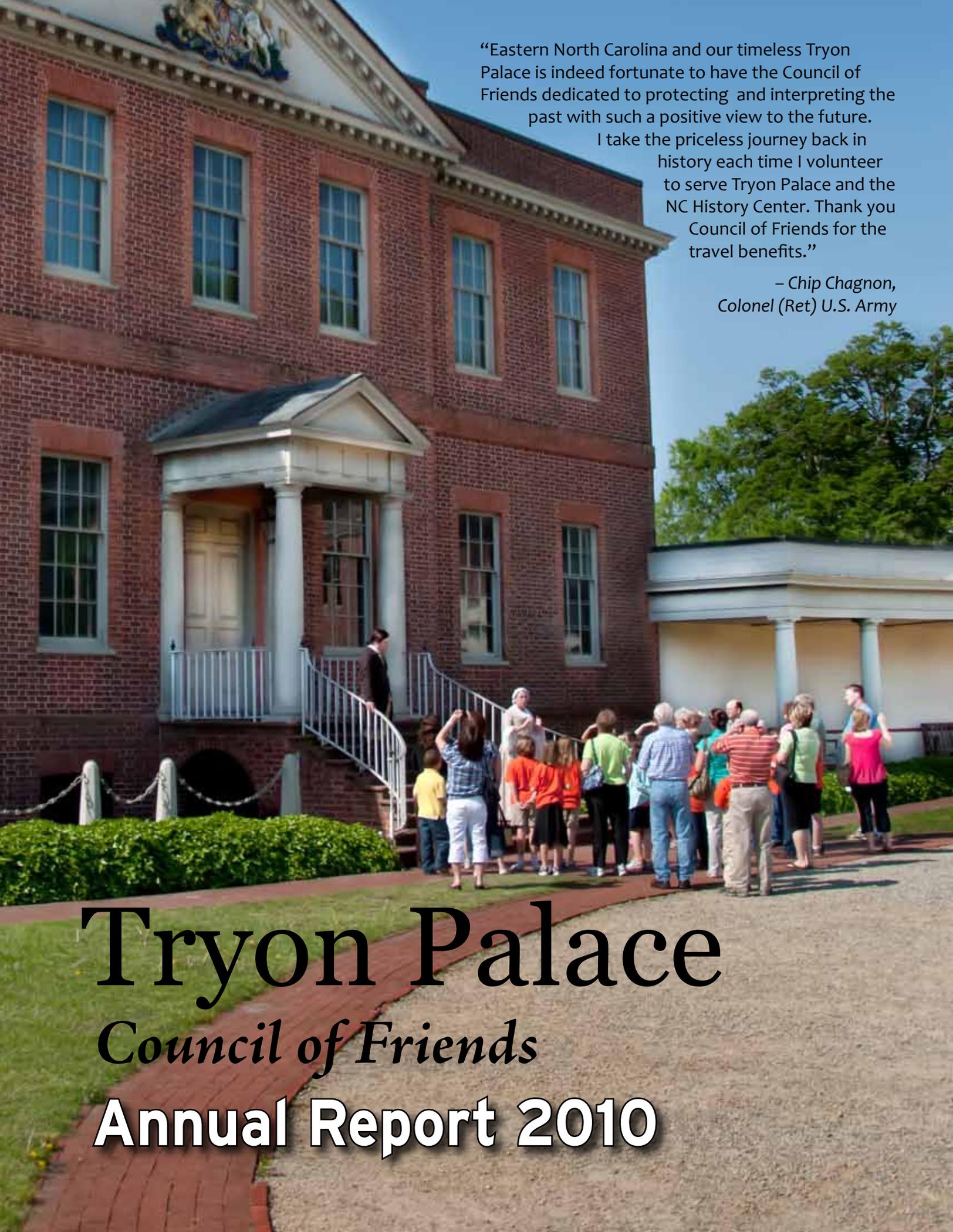
Western Hemisphere. There is still no cure for this viral illness, though there is a vaccine to protect against it. The last yellow fever epidemic in the United States occurred in New Orleans in 1905. ■

“Time is fast gliding onward and another winter is upon us. Cold chilly Northern blasts are the rule and bright sunny warm weather the exception. The Yellow Fever has entirely disappeared before the tramp of Old Boreus’ white hoards. Business in all its branches has been resumed and Newbern is fresh and lively as ever.”

– *Diary of Private Joseph Kittinger*
November 20, 1864

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“Eastern North Carolina and our timeless Tryon Palace is indeed fortunate to have the Council of Friends dedicated to protecting and interpreting the past with such a positive view to the future.

I take the priceless journey back in history each time I volunteer to serve Tryon Palace and the NC History Center. Thank you Council of Friends for the travel benefits.”

– Chip Chagnon,
Colonel (Ret) U.S. Army

Tryon Palace

Council of Friends

Annual Report 2010

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

In 2010, Tryon Palace marked a major milestone with the opening of the North Carolina History Center, a public-private partnership that is changing the way visitors young and old, from near and far, experience and learn about history.

I know you all share with me and with the Tryon Palace staff, the Tryon Palace Commission and all our donors a great sense of accomplishment now that this enormous undertaking has become a reality. In just a short amount of time, the beautiful North Carolina History Center has served as a catalyst for increasing the outstanding educational and cultural programming that are the hallmarks of the Tryon Palace experience, and it is encouraging visitor exploration and participation in ways we only dreamt of before. As Friends, partners, volunteers and financial supporters, you help make all this possible.

Your support is critical to everything we do at Tryon Palace. The continuing financial contributions of our devoted Council of Friends and the outstanding efforts of our volunteers sustain activities ranging from costuming to living history programming, from educational materials to holiday decorations – without you, none of this would be possible. In this issue of *The Palace* magazine, we want to take the opportunity to thank and recognize all of you who have supported Tryon Palace with your generous contributions. We are so grateful to you.

There are many exciting challenges ahead, work to be done, history to be made. And in this time of lingering economic uncertainty, your financial gifts – as well as your continuing advocacy for the educational mission of Tryon Palace – are even more important and appreciated. **Please remember to renew your Council of Friends membership and encourage others to join!** A Friends membership puts so many wonderful opportunities at your fingertips and all for a very modest investment. Spread the word about the good work being done here; it's a story worth telling.

I encourage you all to visit and visit often. Come experience what you help sustain. There is always something new to explore and learn at Tryon Palace; there are always fascinating connections to be made between past and present. Thank you for your continued engagement and for your interest and dedication to the mission of Tryon Palace. Let's keep working together!

Patricia Naumann
President
Tryon Palace Council of Friends



“Membership provides a connection to the heart of New Bern.”

– Ken and Nancy Kubik



“Being a Council of Friends member means being part of the ‘family’ and taking great pride in watching it grow.”

– Dr. Jim Congleton

“I carry my card with pride. I moved here from Washington DC – a city with some of the world’s greatest museums and gardens – and have friends from that area visit me regularly. To a person, they are in awe of the Palace, the History Center, the gardens and all the related sites and programs.”

– Nina Powell





At Tryon Palace, visitors meet the faces of history...and each one has an important story to tell. The generous funding provided by our donors makes it all possible.

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“Being a member of the Council of Friends has little to do with the benefits offered to me personally, which often go unused for the whole year. It has to do with enabling staff and volunteers to offer services...activities, if you will...to the public; activities that otherwise could not exist without support from the Council of Friends. And it is an honor to be part of that support system so vital to meeting the mission of Tryon Palace.”

– Keith Martin

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– William J. Ash





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Bravo!

In 2010, our volunteer program at Tryon Palace numbered 263 strong; our cross-generational team of helpers donated well over 15,000 hours of their time and talents in the service of Tryon Palace and its educational mission. Our dedicated volunteers are everywhere, helping to engage and educate our guests about the history of North Carolina and our nation, and working in a variety of areas throughout the Tryon Palace sites. Whether it's in administration, dress-making, gardening, interpretive roles or driving our new shuttles, our Tryon Palace volunteers know how to put their valuable skills to good use.

Volunteers are some of Tryon Palace's greatest assets and most important partners. They take our mission to heart and their efforts help us shape our visitors' experiences, sparking curiosity and making history come alive. In their dedication to telling the stories we have to offer, they serve as our advocates for the importance of history and for creating lasting connections between past and present. The volunteer program continues to expand and the opportunities to serve are endless. As part of a team committed to excellence, the volunteers of Tryon Palace shine brightly; we thank you for everything you do!



IN FOCUS

A grim fact of mid-19th century life is that many children did not live to adulthood. It is estimated that between one-fifth and one-third of all children in antebellum America died before reaching their 10th birthday. If you were a young slave, the odds were even worse. Estimates based on plantation records and contemporary documents indicate that the infants and young children of slaves were twice as likely to die as those of the free population.

The cards were stacked against children, free or enslaved. Pre-modern medicine was just beginning to make a definitive connection between germs and disease. The causes of many illnesses were poorly understood and medical treatment was frequently ineffective, if not downright dangerous. Childbirth remained a dicey proposition for both women and their infants. Too often, poor nutrition, inadequate sanitation and tainted drinking water helped matters along. Summers brought the threat of the dreaded yellow fever; other diseases such as measles, scarlet fever, smallpox, cholera, dysentery, tuberculosis, whooping cough and typhoid fever, spread quickly and with lethal results.

Disease played no favorites. For all levels of society, death was a familiar and unwelcome visitor. By the time he served his first term of office, Abraham Lincoln had buried two young sons, victims of typhoid and tuberculosis.

The boy in our portrait, John “Jack” Mushro Roberts, died in 1865 just shy of his 6th birthday. His grieving mother did what many bereft parents do, she looked for a tangible way to keep his memory alive. After Jack’s death, Lavinia Cole Roberts commissioned a portrait of her beloved young son. Memorial portraits, post-mortem photographs, mourning jewelry incorporating the hair of a loved one, and elaborate mourning dress and etiquette were embraced by 19th-century Americans as a means of keeping the deceased close to their hearts.

Many years after Jack’s death, his mother, now in her 70s, penned a tribute to him entitled “Little Jack.” It is both a highly sentimentalized portrait of the child and a fascinating glimpse at life in the midst of civil war. In her memoir, Lavinia paints an idealized image of contemporary race relations, portraying slaves as being bound to their masters not by ownership, but by “ties of devotion on both sides,” and she laments the end of a “loving bondage” that had lasted 200 years.

Lavinia recalls listening to the sounds of Union muskets and telling the then 2-year-old Jack and his sister, “[L]ittle children, listen, these guns are tearing

your father limb from limb. The Yankees are killing him - he will never return alive from this battle field. As long as you live think of this fearful day, never, never forgive them.” It’s little wonder that war took center stage, even during playtime, for Jack and his sister. His mother recounts a macabre tale of a beautiful doll from New York that had made it through the Union blockade and was the sole possession of her daughter. An older 6-year-old cousin declared the doll “a Yankee and a spy” that “must be tried for its life.” Lavinia’s daughter “loved her doll dearly, but she loved her country better.”



The doll was found guilty, hung by the neck, her eyes poked out and it was stoned until there was little left. Not surprisingly, Jack and his sister sobbed themselves to sleep that night. Later, when Jack and his family fled to the country from Union-occupied New Bern, the 3-year-old would play in the woods “sometimes falling desperately wounded, often bringing in prisoners. His prison was an old bird cage, his captives, sticks from the woods.” And, his mother remembers, the sound of his voice would ring out, “Boys, tell Lee I fell doing my dooty [sic].” ■

The portrait of John Mushro Roberts is on display in the Regional History Museum at the North Carolina History Center.