

**Resource Set: Yellow Fever**  
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No disease has gripped New Orleans, and the whole of Louisiana, like yellow fever. The mosquito-borne infection attacked the liver and caused numerous painful and uncomfortable side effects, often resulting in death. Those who survived were immune, or “seasoned,” against further infection. At least 41,000 people died of the disease between 1817 (the first year with a certified casualty count) and 1905 (the year of the last New Orleans epidemic, and only five years after the disease’s cause was identified). The disease spread from the poor immigrant communities, notably the Germans and Irish, to the established upper classes of the area, killing two wives and a daughter of William Claiborne, the first governor of Louisiana. Some in the upper class worried that the fever would be bad for business, as John C. Calhoun’s son remarked in a letter to him in 1845, but others believed the disease provided a beneficial check on the continuing flow of immigrants to the city.

The worst outbreak was in 1853, when 7,849 were killed and almost 30,000 New Orleanians were stricken with the “saffron scourge.” Multiple depictions of the disease and its effects on the city, as well as on Memphis and Vicksburg, are represented in the 1878 engraving “The Great Yellow Fever Scourge.” City and parish governments across Louisiana established quarantine zones throughout the city, marked by a now-infamous yellow flag, and newspapers published first aid guidelines on how to avoid and treat the fever. Doctors from around the world published research on the epidemics in Louisiana, such as French physician Pierre-Frederic Thomas’s “Traite Pratique de la Fièvre Jaune” in 1848, and Bennet Dowler’s “Tableau of the Yellow Fever of 1853,” published a year after that epidemic. The first major, comprehensive work on the history of yellow fever outbreaks in New Orleans is George Augustin’s “History of the Yellow Fever” from 1909, just four years after the end of yellow fever in the city. The last New Orleans epidemic saw a citywide mobilization against the disease, and residents were fined for not properly screening their windows and cisterns from mosquitoes. In his 1905 visit to the city, President Theodore Roosevelt praised New Orleanians’ resistance to the outbreak, saying, “They took hold of it after it had started, and when it had got well under way, and they controlled and conquered it.”

**Letter from Patrick Calhoun, New Orleans, to his father, John C. Calhoun, Pendleton, So. Carolina**  
[MSS 419.14](#)

**The Great Yellow Fever Scourge - Incidents Of Its Horrors In The Most Fatal Districts Of The Southern States**  
[1981.216 i-xii](#)

**Quarantine : proceedings of the Board of Aldermen, Town of Opelousas. . . . Sept. 15, 1897. . . . Quarantine ordinance to protect the town of Opelousas against yellow fever.**  
[2001-259-RL.1](#)

**First Aid Advice, Rules To Be Observed In Yellow Fever**  
[1974.25.11.158](#)

**Traité pratique de la fièvre jaune observée á la Nouvelle-Orléans**  
[81-157-RL.1](#)

**Tableau of the yellow fever of 1853 : with topographical, chronological, and historical sketches of the epidemics of New Orleans since their origin in 1796, illustrative of the quarantine question**

[69-190-LP.7](#)

**History of Yellow Fever**

[82-271-RL](#)

**Theodore Roosevelt in Parade on Canal St.**

[1981.369.169](#)