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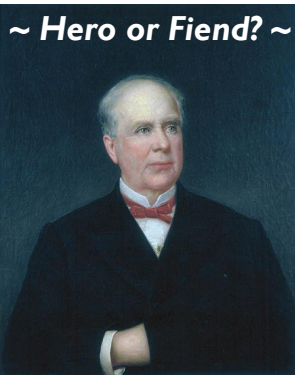


GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs
Bermuda National Library
Technical Services

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BERMUDA NATIONAL LIBRARY

Bermuda History ~
Epidemics,
Yellow Fever,
& Biowarfare
in the 1800s?



Luke P. Blackburn served as governor of Kentucky from 1879 to 1883. This portrait by Nicola Marschall is on exhibit in the Hall of Governors at the Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History, Kentucky Historical Society Collections.

At your service, Bermuda!

YELLOW FEVER DEATHS IN BERMUDA

Year	Civil Population		Military	Convicts & Officers	Total Deaths	Total Population	Percent of Population
	White	Coloured					
1843	82	102	193	119	496	9930	5%
1853	130	160	361	163	814	11092	7%
1856	80	160	4	37	281	11092	2.5%
1864	217	20	206	28	471	13536	3.5%

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

Bermuda National Trust Museum and Shop on Duke of York Street, across from St. Peter's Church.
The **Ferry Reach Military Cemeteries** located at Ferry Reach Park, St. George's. The first is the small walled cemetery close to the house at the end of Ferry Point and the second can be found just off the Railway Trail overlooking the North Shore to the east of Whalebone Bay.
The **Military Cemeteries in St. George's** – one at Grenadier Lane, the other at Secretary Road, north of the St. George's Golf Course.
Watford Cemetery in Somerset, on the right going to Royal Naval Dockyard immediately after crossing Watford Bridge, hidden at end of footpath from car park.
Online source: <http://www.bermuda-online.org/britishmilitarygravesbda.htm>

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Bermuda - 1860s

Bermuda was faced with a suddenly booming economy, espionage, blockade running, biological warfare, conspiracies, and assassination plots.

[Please note: At this time it was thought that Yellow Fever was transmitted through contact and unsanitary conditions. It was not known that mosquitoes spread the disease.]

St. George's

Bermuda's first centre of commerce has a tumultuous history that is well outlined in sources available at the Bermuda National Library. One aspect of St. George's history is the role of the Town during the American Civil War (1861-1865). This is addressed in several books on blockade running. During that time of economic abundance, however, Bermuda also suffered from a Yellow Fever epidemic starting in April of 1864. Accounts of this epidemic record that it was one of the least tragic – based on the number of deaths. It was also, however, one of the more dramatic times in St. George's history.

Yellow Fever

Imagine Bermuda in April 1864. A yellow fever epidemic has struck again in an indiscriminate manner attacking people in all levels of society, laying low sailors, workers and members of the British Garrison. Dr. Luke Pryor Blackburn, the foremost authority on yellow fever at the time and a well-respected Southern doctor, then living in Canada, volunteers his services.

Dr. Blackburn, credited with stopping epidemics in Kentucky and Florida, is regarded as a true

hero by his former patients and by the people of Bermuda. Ships' passenger lists show that Dr. Blackburn travelled from Bermuda to Halifax several times between April and October. Newspaper accounts tell of his meetings with the local medical community to instruct them on quarantine practice and his method of treating patients.

Foiled Plot

When Dr. Blackburn left Bermuda in late October 1864, however, a Mr. Edward Swan contacted the US Consul, Mr. Charles Allen. Mr. Swan informed Mr. Allen that the Doctor's trips to Bermuda had been paid for by the Confederacy. He also said that Dr. Blackburn had left three trunks of soiled clothing and blankets that should be sent to him in Halifax, upon his request.

The US Consul instructed the Health Officer to investigate and the trunks were soon located. The trunks and their contents were then burnt to stop the spread of contamination. A warrant was issued for Dr. Blackburn leading to his arrest in Montreal on May 25, 1865. The authorities could not charge him directly for treason, so he was charged with violating Canada's Neutrality Act since the clothing was being dispersed from Canada.

During the trial a Union informer, Godfrey Joseph Hyams, testified that he had transported trunks of soiled clothing given to him by Blackburn to Boston, Philadelphia, Washington and Norfolk. For this deed he was promised \$60,000. He further testified that he arranged for one trunk to be shipped to New Bern. Soon after, yellow fever broke out in New Bern killing over 2,000 people. Joseph Hyams attributed these deaths to

the trunk of clothing he sent.

Dr. Blackburn was scandalized in the newspapers in the United States and in Canada. He was called "a hideous devil." The Yellow Fever Plot was branded one of the "most fiendish plots concocted by the wickedness of man."

Ironical Outcome

In October 1865 Dr. Blackburn was acquitted due to the lack of evidence as the trunks of clothing had been destroyed. Dr. Blackburn then returned to his medical practice in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1878 Dr. Blackburn helped to fight another yellow fever epidemic, this time in Kentucky. His heroic efforts were rewarded, in part, with his election to Governor of the State.

A Brief History of Epidemics in Bermuda

Yellow Fever outbreaks occurred in Bermuda in the following years:

1779, 1796, 1818, 1819, 1820, 1821, 1822, 1843, 1853, 1856 and 1864.

It was referred to as Gaol Fever during the earliest outbreak as the supposed origin was in the gaol (jail) where prisoners of war were confined.

Bermuda experienced a Dengue Fever epidemic in 1882. According to the *Commissioners' report on the dengue fever epidemic of 1882*, the fever first appeared among Dockyard workers on the 10th or 11th of August. The fever is recorded as 'arriving' with the "HMS Sparrowhawk" and broke out among other HMS ships at the Dockyard and among the inhabitants of Ireland Island, with the last case reported 12th October 1882. Like Yellow Fever, at the time it was not known that Dengue Fever is transmitted via mosquitoes.

The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919 killed somewhere between 20 and 40 million people throughout the world. Like the Yellow Fever epidemics of the 1800s, the disease spread along trade routes and shipping lines. The first outbreak of Influenza occurred in the spring of 1918 and a second wave of infection occurred in September. This is when Bermuda became part of the pandemic. It is thought that the crews of visiting warships brought the Spanish Flu to Bermuda. 114 deaths are recorded as being caused by the Spanish Flu; 18 are attributed to pneumonia with 7 due to relapse. The total number of deaths in Bermuda is recorded as 139 out of a population of approximately 20,000.

Definitions Adapted from www.medterms.com

Dengue: An acute mosquito-borne viral illness of sudden onset that usually follows a benign course with headache, fever, prostration, severe joint and muscle pain, swollen glands and rash. It is also known as "breakbone fever" or "dandy fever."

Epidemic: The occurrence of more cases of a disease than would be expected in a community or region during a given time period. The word is from the Greek "epi-", "upon" + "demos", "people or population" = "epidemos" = "upon the population."

Pandemic: An epidemic (sudden outbreak) that becomes very widespread and affects a whole region, a continent, or the world.

Yellow fever: A body-wide illness caused by a virus called a Flavivirus. Symptoms may include a red tongue, flushed face, and reddening of the eyes. In severe cases, it causes a high fever, bleeding into the skin, and the death of cells in the kidney and liver. Severe jaundice is caused by the damage to the liver, leading to the descriptive "yellow" in "yellow fever." It was also known as Yellow Jack or black vomit, or sometimes as American plague.