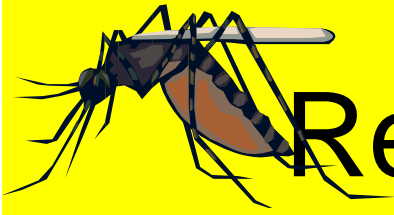




# Mid Atlantic Women and the Fight Against Yellow Fever, 1793-1878

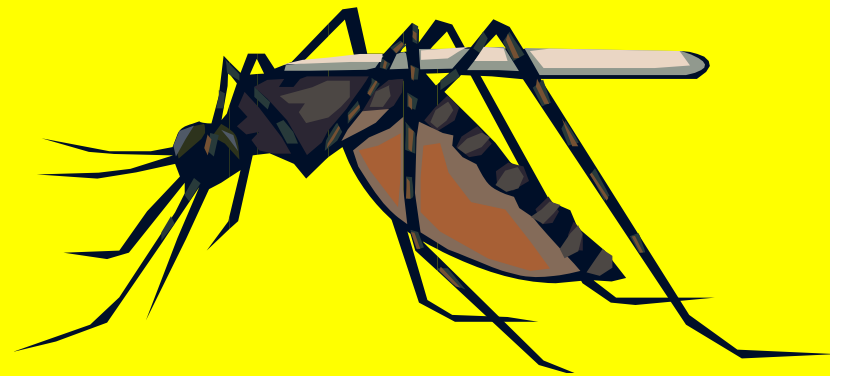
By Benjamin H. Trask

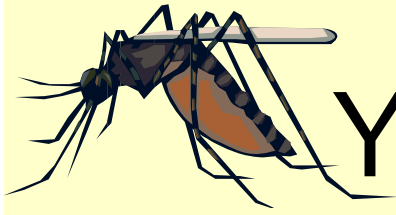




# Region's Major Outbreaks

- **Philadelphia:** 1793, 1796, 1820, 1853
- **Baltimore:** 1794, 1795, 1800, 1802, 1805, 1819, 1821, 1822
- **Norfolk/Portsmouth:** 1795, 1798, 1800, 1802, 1803, 1820, 1821, 1855
- **Wilmington:** 1821, 1862
- **Charleston:** 1699, 1700, 1730-9, 1745, 1790, 1817, 1818, 1819, 1824, 1827, 1839, 1852, 1854, 1856, 1862, 1871, 1876
- **Savannah:** 1820, 1821, 1854
- **Brunswick:** 1871, 1876
- **St. Mary's:** 1808





# Yellow Fever Symptoms

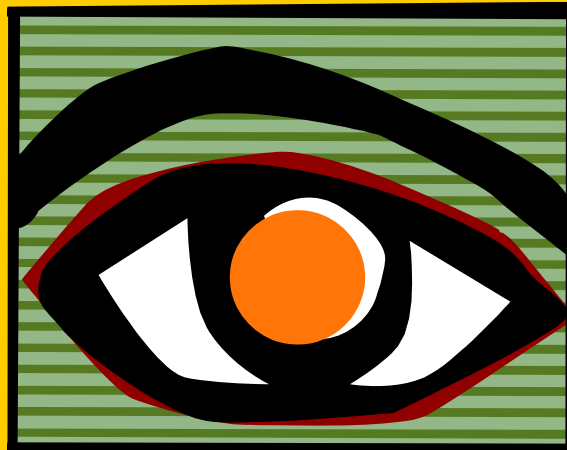
- Pain in back, limbs, and eyes
- Fever but may have slow pulse
- Internal and external bleeding
- Regurgitation of blood, i.e. **Black Vomit**
- Attacks kidneys, liver, and heart
- Delirium
- And...



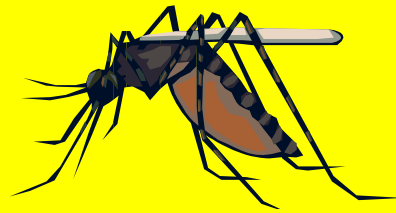


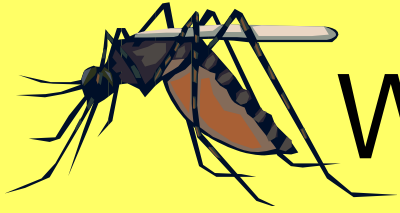
# Yellow Fever Symptoms

- **Yellowish complexion, also described as pumpkin, orange, and bronze**
- **Yellow conjunctiva**
- **Death rate could be as high as 50 % in recognized cases**
- **However, there were many mild cases**



# Environment: Urban vs. Rural





# Who were the Women?

## Women From All Walks of Life

Est. residents & incoming volunteers

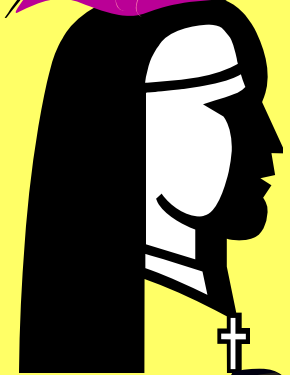
Teenagers & mature females

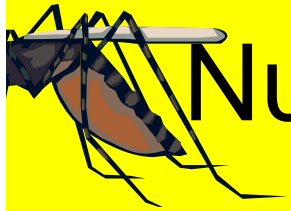
Symbols of death and spirited survivors

Slaves & mistresses

Nuns & prostitutes

Illiterate & educated renaissance women





# Nursing Duties During Epidemics

- Min. 12 hours on duty; up to 48 hours
- Nursing one to six patients
- Prepare meals and sometimes find food
- Clean house and wash clothes
- Take care of children
- Prepare dead for burial





# Philadelphia, 1790s



Yellow fever regularly racked the temporary capital of the United States. In the summer of 1793, about 4,000 residents died.





# Philadelphia: Black Nurses

“Many die without nurses. Some perish from want of a draught of water. Parents desert their children as soon as they are infected, and in every room you enter you see no person but a solitary black man or woman near the sick.”

Dr. Benj. Rush, Sept. 18, 1793



# Philadelphia: Dolley Todd



Eliza Payne Todd lost her husband and child to the fever. With the help of her new friend James Madison she was able to gain her rightful estate. She later married Mr. Madison and became known as Dolley Madison and a social trend setter in Washington DC.



# Philadelphia: Quaker Women

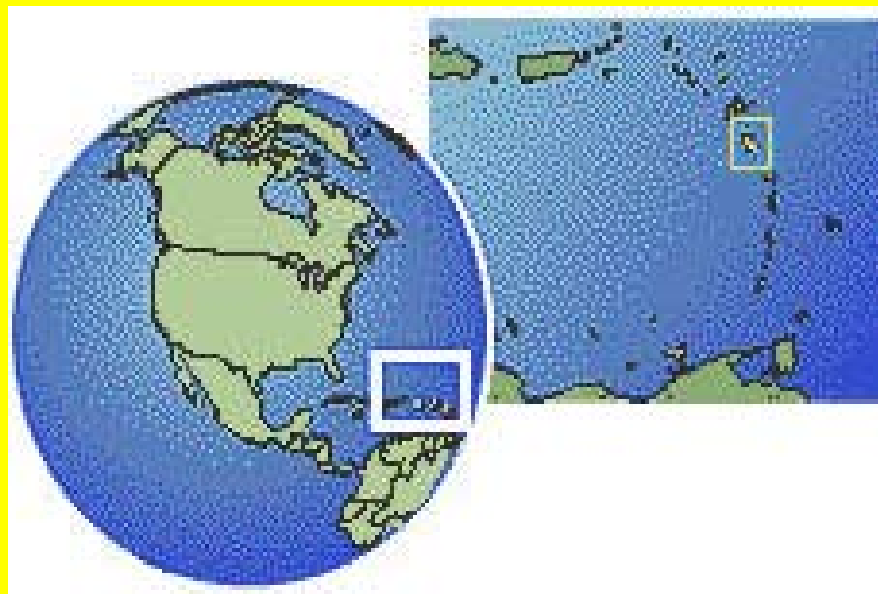
Elizabeth Drinker and 22 other Quaker women est. the Female Society of Phila. for the Relief and Employment of the Poor. The Society was one of the first female-run charitable organization in the U S. Known first as the "Friendly Circle," the women distributed food, clothing, and money to widows and orphans.





## Baltimore, 1790-1820s

The bay city's lucrative wheat trade with the West Indies put Baltimore in constant contact with yellow fever.





## Baltimore: Polly Elliott, 1800

During the epidemic, the 12 year old from the Eastern Shore, was apparently abandoned by her guardian and died after being refused admission to a temporary hospital. For the Baltimoreans, Polly gave a name to the scores of fever victims. And the events concerning her death became a lightning rod of debate.



## Sisters of Charity of Emmetsburg, MD

prior to the Civil War the Sisters of Charity developed a national reputation for nursing during epidemics. The motherhouse was in Emmetsburg. Sr. Elizabeth Ann Seton founded the order. In 1963, she was beatified by the Pope.



# Baltimore: Sisters of Charity

The sterling reputation of the Sisters earned them free passage on the Old Bay Steamship Line for more than a century.



# Norfolk and Portsmouth, 1855

The epidemic consumed more than 3,000 souls, or 10 % of the urban population of the two cities.



# Norfolk: Prostitutes to Nurses

*Spark of the Angel Left.*—... abandoned women  
... have... been most unceasing in their attention  
to the sick, and have proved the most valuable  
nurses. They have been the means of saving a  
number of lives, and, ... [their] angelic labors  
[have been] ...performed by the former daughters  
of sin,--several of them have died....”



*The Liberator* [Boston], October 12, 1855



## Norfolk: Herron

Anne P.B. Herron, remained to nurse her slaves. She perished. It was her wish to establish a hospital with her home....





## Norfolk: Herron

er wish is now known as the Bon Secours DePaul Medical Center. Originally, the Sisters of Charity ran the hospital.





## Wilmington, NC, 1862

The blockade runner *Kate* transported the fever into the port from Nassau. Many citizens fled and about 700 people perished.

Provisions are very few here & manly all the stores are shut up the town looks lonesome most all the people has left these are eight or ten doctors here from Savannah & Charleston & nurses the feaver seems to be quite so bad.”

Bella De Rosset, 1862



# Charleston, 1699 to 1876

There were at least 42 outbreaks of yellow fever in Charleston.

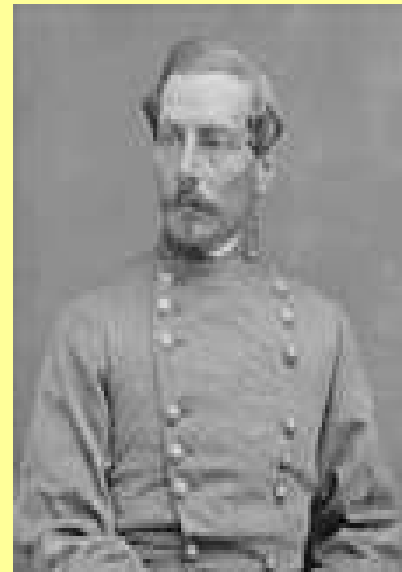




## Charleston, 1862



From Charleston, the mayor dispatched  
Wilmington doctors and the Sisters  
of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy.  
Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard sent members  
of his staff. The general, a native of  
New Orleans, suffered the loss of  
family members to the fever.



# Savannah & other Georgia Cities

For more than sixty years the towns of Savannah, St. Mary's, and Brunswick experienced yellow fever epidemics. In turn the Georgians were quick to lend their expertise and resources to other ports.

# Savannah: Slave nurses, 1855

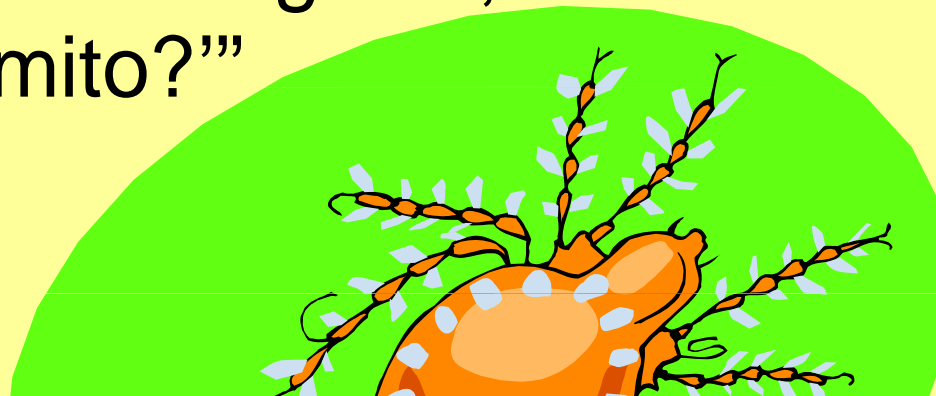
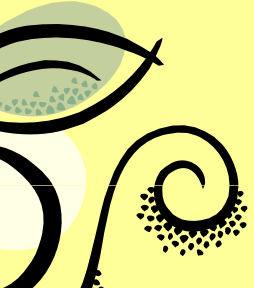
Some of these nurses were slaves...and one might reasonably suppose they abandoned their comfortable homes ...with reluctance, if not under compulsion. Such was not the fact. They were volunteers in this mission of mercy, entered cheerfully upon it, and seemed to feel as deep an interest and solitude for the suffering whites of Norfolk as did their more enlightened and Christian masters.”

(Norfolk paper) *New York Daily Times*, Sept.19, 1855

# Savannah: Charlotte De Bernier Taylor (1806-1861)

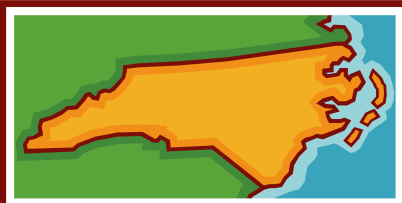
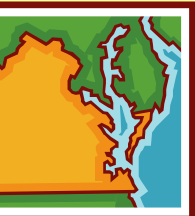


As a naturalist, she speculated could ammonia generated by decaying vegetable matter carried by mites carry the fever? And “the yellow fever may not be generated from the effluvia of ammonia filled with these mites floating in it, and at last ending in the ‘vomito?’”



# Beyond the Mid Atlantic Region

After 1865, epidemics subsided in the Mid Atlantic region but yellow fever continued to be a threat to the nation. The people of the region quickly sent aid and dispatched doctors and nurses to the Memphis and the Gulf Coast states when needed.



# Questions?

f not.....



The End

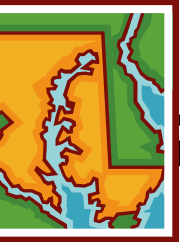


nurses

f







## Baltimore: Margaret HaffG

sh-born, Gafney, was orphaned by yellow fever. Later, she and her husband relocated to New Orleans. After the death of her child and husband, she est. businesses to support the orphanage she founded. This beloved humanitarian was one of the first women in America to have a statue erected in her honor.

all



