

## 1878 Yellow Fever Epidemic—Impacts on Vicksburg and Church of the Holy Trinity

The 1878 yellow fever epidemic that brought death and dismay to Vicksburg and our church is part of our lore. But it was just one of the major trials Holy Trinity's founders lived through in the years before the epidemic. That we, their inheritors, are here today gives us hope we too can weather the calamities of our time.

Vicksburg and Warren County		
	<b>Covid-19 2020 (to 9/22)</b>	<b>Yellow Fever 1878</b>
Deaths	50	1,149
Cases	1,384	5,000
Population	45,000	30,000
Deaths / Cases	3.61 %	22.98 %
Deaths / Population	0.11 %	3.83 %
Cases / Population	3.08 %	16.67 %

### Medical Profession and Public Health Status

In 1856 at Jackson, the Mississippi State Medical Association (MSMA), was founded. It next met in April 1869 at Jackson, after a call by physicians of the Vicksburg Medical Society. (**Dr. E. T. Henry** of Vicksburg was elected its second President.) Delegates were elected to an upcoming meeting of the American Medical Association in New Orleans, including **Dr. Henry and Dr. P. F. Whitehead** of Vicksburg.

In 1878, urged by the MSMA, the Mississippi Legislature established a Board of Health of Mississippi. This board had little power but was determined to demonstrate its promise through action. **Dr. Whitehead** was selected one of first members.

By their 1879 meeting, 20 members of the MSMA (10% of total) had been claimed by the 1878 epidemic. Also in 1879, the U.S. established the National Board of Health.

**Public Water Supply:** Vicksburg did not have its first public water supply system until March 1889. Prior to that, wells, cisterns, rain barrels, etc., were relied upon for fresh water. (Imagine how this factor contributed to mosquito breeding and complicated access to a reliable supply of clean water to combat an epidemic.)

### What Did They Know / Think About Yellow Fever in 1878?

Deadly! Shhhh! From swamp gases? Sick could give to others? Some developed immunity? Afflicted coastal areas, ports, river cities; came with summer, left with frost; fleeing might work. [ 1793, Philadelphia; 1820, Savannah; 1853, New Orleans; 1855, Norfolk; 1873, Memphis ] [ **Dr. Carlos Finlay, a Cuban, first theorized in 1881 that a mosquito was the carrier.** ]

## 1878 at Vicksburg

**22 Jul** the tugboat *John Porter* arrived at Vicksburg and dropped two crew members sick with yellow fever; another crew member died onboard that night.

**10 Aug** an official public announcement was made, by Dr. Whitehead, that a case had occurred in the city, meaning that a local had contracted it by some means. [About half of the local population fled the city on learning of this announcement, knowing that quarantine lines would be quick to follow.]

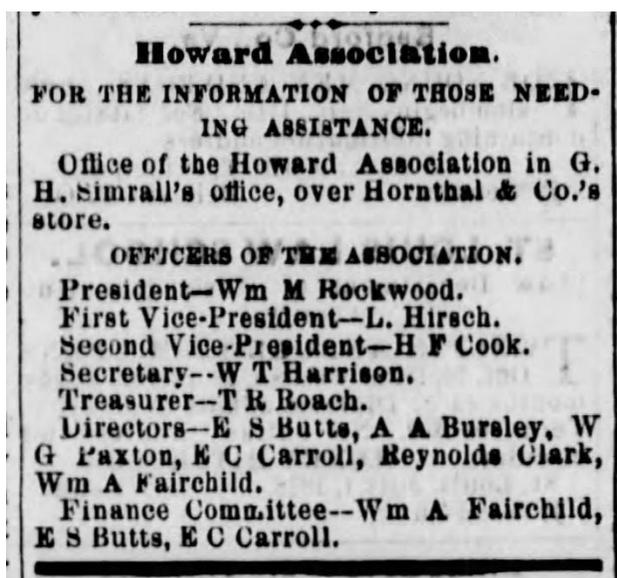
The Sisters of Mercy sprang into action, taking over operation of the City Hospital and nursing up to 300 patients per day.

## 22 Aug

Telegram to New Orleans: “To Sam’l Choppin, President Board of Health: The epidemic is violent and malignant—much more than in New Orleans. There is great want of nurses and physicians. Five of the regular corps of doctors are absent from their post. Twenty-five deaths yesterday from yellow fever. **Can you help us?** [signed] Ed. G. Banks, M.D.”

Telegram from New Orleans: “To Dr. E. G. Banks, Vicksburg: Sorry to hear of your distress. An epidemic is the battlefield of the true physician. **Will see the Howard Association for you.** [signed] Sam. Choppin, President Board of Health.”

**23 Aug**, page 3, *The Vicksburg Daily Herald*:



**Howard Association.**  
FOR THE INFORMATION OF THOSE NEED-  
ING ASSISTANCE.  
Office of the Howard Association in G.  
H. Simrall's office, over Hornthal & Co.'s  
store.  
OFFICERS OF THE ASSOCIATION.  
President—Wm M Rockwood.  
First Vice-President—L. Hirsch.  
Second Vice-President—H F Cook.  
Secretary--W T Harrison.  
Treasurer--T R Roach.  
Directors—E S Butts, A A Bursley, W  
G Paxton, E C Carroll, Reynolds Clark,  
Wm A Fairchild.  
Finance Committee--Wm A Fairchild,  
E S Butts, E C Carroll.

The Howard Association was a national benevolent organization founded in Norfolk, VA, in 1855 during an earlier yellow fever epidemic (1 in 3 resident of Norfolk died in that epidemic). It contacted and paid for doctors and nurses willing to travel to afflicted communities and provided food, ice, local transportation, medicine, supplies, etc.

**OUR CHEAP COLUMN.**

**FOR RENT.**

**FOR RENT**—Country Retreat—Four miles from the city; containing six rooms; wood and water convenient. For terms apply to me, or W. H. Andrews & Bros.  
aug13 W. D. COOK.

**WANTS.**

**WANTED**—Experienced nurses, men and women, by the Howard Association. Apply once at Office over Hornthal & Co's Store.  
aug21

**WANTED**—Two copies of the DAILY HERALD of January 1st, 1878. Any person having these papers will confer a great favor by sending them to this office.  
aug21

**FOR SALE.**

**FOR SALE**—My house on East Avenue.  
ju24-tf. W. R. SPEARS.

**DAILY HERALD.**

Thursday Morning, Sept. 5.

**LOCAL MATTERS.**

**BREVITIES.**

GLOOMY weather with prospects of rain.

THE Grand Tower will pass down this morning for Natchez.

THOMAS KENDALL, an attache of the Vicksburg HERALD, died last night

MR. J. J. BOWEN, of Ruhman's clothing establishment, died yesterday evening.

DR. WHITEHEAD, and Mr Jno. Roach were in a critical condition at 9 o'clock last night.

THE Rev. C. B. Galloway, is still very ill but on the whole his condition is favorable.

THE Rev. Mr. Planck, pastor of the Presbyterian Church, of Port Gibson, is not dead as reported but recovering.

ONE HUNDRED dollars have been received by the Vicksburg Caledonian Society from St. Andrew's Society, of Cincinnati.

ONCE more! Long communications will NOT be published in this department of the HERALD in this season of universal sorrow.

A MEETING of the (Municipal) Board this morning. The newly elected officers were to have qualified yesterday before Judge Arthur or one of our magistrates.

ANY persons having buggy or saddle horses for sale or hire, will call on, or address J. H. Stack at Miles & McRae's drug store. The need of these animals is imperative.

DEATH was busy in Vicksburg yesterday. The plague seems to be assuming a more virulent form, and in many instances defies the efforts of our devoted and skillful physicians.

ONLY two members of the Typographical Union, of this city, have died since the inception of the epidemic, the Evening Commercial to the contrary notwithstanding. Four members of the Union men are sick however.

**Yellow Fever Interments.**

The following is a correct list of interments for the past twenty-four hours as furnished by Mr. J. Q. Arnold, City Sexton:

- Sept. 5—Frank Hardwick.
- Mrs Ida S Huner
- W M Rice, colored.
- A H Middleton, colored.
- Margaret Middleton, colored.
- Mrs White.
- Annie Davis, colored.
- C Sally, colored.
- George Moore, colored.
- R F Smith.
- Phillip Roe.
- Wm Scott, colored.
- Wm Jackson colored.
- Bettie Robinson, colored.
- Miss Eliza Thrift.
- Louise Voelinkle.
- J J Bowen.

Interments in past 24 hours..... 17  
Total interments to date..... 284

**Howard Association.**

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THOSE NEEDING ASSISTANCE.

Office of the Howard Association in G. H. Simrall's office, over Hornthal & Co's store.

**OFFICERS OF THE ASSOCIATION.**

- President—Wm M Rockwood.
- First Vice-President—J. J. Fitzpatrick.
- Second Vice-President—H F Cook.
- Secretary—W S Harrison.
- Treasurer—T K Roach.
- Directors—E S Butts, G G Pegram, W G Paxton, E C Carroll, W H Andrews, Wm A Fairchild.
- Finance Committee—Wm A Fairchild, E S Butts, E C Carroll.

**Notice.**

In future, orders from the Howard Association FOR ICE will be filled during the day at the Howard's supply depot, corner Mulberry and Crawford streets, and at night by Mr. Aus. Edwards on Washington street. 30

**Notice.**

Owing to impositions practiced upon the Association in issuing orders for, and drawing of rations, it has been determined to issue no more rations at present. The sick will be supplied with medicines and nourishment as heretofore.

By order of the Board of Directors.  
W. M. ROCKWOOD, Pres't.

**Notice.**

The Howard Association proposes to the best of its ability to relieve every case of distress and sickness that may come to its knowledge so long as a dollar remains in its Treasury. But it is not their purpose to open a free "commissary depot" or to furnish "medicines" or "nurses" to those who are able to pay for them out of their own means.

W. M. ROCKWOOD.  
President Howard Association.

**Notice.**

The horses of our physicians are entirely broken down, and remounts cannot be had in this city. We call upon our friends who have "harness horses" or "mules" to hire to report them at this office at once. The best of care will be taken. As matters now stand, the physicians are unable to respond to calls for want of transportation.

W. M. ROCKWOOD.  
President Howard Association.

**Notice.**

## **Local Physicians Respond to Complaints After the 1878 Yellow Fever Epidemic: An Earlier Crisis That Greatly Affected Vicksburg and Holy Trinity Church**

From: *The Vicksburg Daily Herald*, Saturday, 25 Jan 1879, page 3, under “Brevities.” [footnote and emphasis added]

The Evening Commercial of Wednesday [22 Jan 1879] complains that some of our physicians are presenting bills for services performed during the epidemic, and intimates that they have no right to present any such bills, because they were paid by the Howard Association.<sup>1</sup> One of our leading physicians asks us to correct this statement. He says the *visiting physicians* put themselves directly in the services of the Howards, who paid their board, furnished them with horses and buggies, and paid them besides. The *resident physicians* paid their own board, furnished their own conveyance, and attended their own patients as usual, doing, of course a large amount of charity practice as they always do without ever thinking of making any charge for it because knowing the parties were unable to pay. After the epidemic the Howards made a donation of \$100, each to the resident physicians, but never regularly employed them.

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From: *The Vicksburg Daily Herald*, Sunday, 26 Jan 1879, page 8 [footnotes added]

### **The Undersigned Resident Physicians of Vicksburg Publish This Address.**

On the 10th of August, 1878, the announcement<sup>2</sup> was made that a case of yellow fever had occurred in our city. For several days transportation from town was taxed to its utmost capacity. It had been so long since any of us had witnessed a severe epidemic, the terror was not half so great as it should have been. Hundreds of families able to leave staid, and the few of them yet remaining know what it is to feel utter desolation.

Within a week we knew that the Angel of Death with his army had camped among us. Then it was the Howard Association of Vicksburg went to work, being composed of some of the choicest spirits that ever labored in the cause of humanity. They sacrificed to the great cause such noble specimens of Christian manhood as Bursley and Harrison, Fairchild<sup>3</sup> and Rockwood. But for this grand institution and the full-handed response to their call for charity which came from every portion of our beloved land, showing us in very deed to be one people, with one interest from sea to sea, from lakes to gulf, we would have heard the cry for bread added to those scenes of misery and distress with which we were made but too familiar.

This great Association made yet a more extraordinary call, when it asked physicians and nurses to come and help us. That charitable persons with money are willing to give it in the cause of suffering humanity, is not astonishing; but that men and women can be found bold enough voluntarily to encounter the storm of death, that for two long months raged in every part of our city, is wonderful, it staggers belief. And we doubt if any other country on the wide earth can produce its parallel.

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<sup>1</sup> A national benevolent organization founded in Norfolk, VA, in 1855 during an earlier yellow fever epidemic.

<sup>2</sup> Made by Dr. **Peter Flanagan Whitehead**; founder and member of the first vestry of Holy Trinity; physician, civic and public health leader; died in Vicksburg 5 Sep 1878 from yellow fever contracted while caring for victims.

<sup>3</sup> **William Anner Fairchild**; founder and first junior warden of Holy Trinity, insurance broker, and humanitarian; died in Vicksburg 20 Sep 1878 from yellow fever contracted while working tirelessly to relieve the suffering of his fellow citizens, under the auspices of the Howard Association and local Masonic relief committee.

In obedience to this call came about thirty doctors,<sup>4</sup> and numerous nurses, many of them never having had yellow fever. Of these Drs. Sappington, Barber, Norris, Blickfeldt, Roach, Happoldt, Blackman, Potts, and Glass died. In our county, Drs. Leatch, Nesmith, Birdsong, and Monette, were taken off.

Dr. A. R. Green, a colored man, did good work for many days, and was then numbered with the dead.

Note.—Dr. Barber located here so short a time before the epidemic, that we felt toward him as we did toward those visiting physicians, and therefore name him with them.

‘Twas not a spirit of recklessness that prompted them to come, nor was it the hope of gain, or the interest of science, that moved them to the task which they must have known was one of extreme danger. But it was that same lofty sentiment, that determination to do all in their power to ameliorate the suffering of their fellow men which has immortalized Florence Nightingale. They came, they worked like men, struggling for the right. Seven visiting Physicians and a large number of nurses died, away from friends, home, and loved ones. They died, were buried, and are forgotten. No poet laureate sang their praises, no monumental marble tells their story.

But if one soldier dies, / Doing Charity  
‘Tis lauded in the skies / For its rarity.

The Physicians of Vicksburg should ever hold the visiting Physicians in the kindest recollection, and never forget that they came to us in the darkest hour of the blackest season ever witnessed in our city. They came like Good Samaritans, dividing our work and cheering us in our despair.

As the dark cloud of pestilence advanced upon us, what a time it was for self-inspection, cogitation and determination with the Resident Physicians. We knew that the great labor of an epidemic falls upon the Doctors; we knew, too, how weak our weapons are against this fell destroyer. We knew, moreover, the meager compensation we would receive for such heavy work, day and night, until tired nature could endure no more. And yet, we all, whose health and business would permit, determined to stay and fight this invisible enemy to the last.

This boldness of the Physicians is not appreciated. The people think it our duty to battle with disease, whether it comes as the sneaking chill, or the army of an epidemic. The people are mistaken; we have no contract with them, our engagements are with our patients only. Nor does any moral obligation rest more heavily upon us, than on any other educated class of society.

We will particularly notice the deaths of Drs. Z. T. Woodruff,<sup>5</sup> D. W. Booth,<sup>6</sup> P. F. Whitehead, and J. R. Hicks.<sup>7</sup> Reverently and tenderly we record their names. Ours to love and regret, but for a commonwealth to mourn. Drs. Woodruff and Hicks died from home. They were advised

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<sup>4</sup> Among these was Dr. Osborn S. Iglehart who came from Mobile, became a resident, and married Mollie A. Bang.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Zachary Taylor Woodruff; Vicksburg Health Officer and brother of Eliza Belle Woodruff Booth; he died 19 Jul 1878 at Tuscaloosa, his childhood home. Belle Booth, wife of Dr. D. W. Booth, was a Holy Trinity founder.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. David Winfield Booth; founder of Holy Trinity; physician associated with the Vicksburg city hospital; died in Vicksburg 27 Aug 1878 of yellow fever contracted while in charge of the Marine Hospital service.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. John Robert Hicks; member of a founding family of Holy Trinity (his brother Benjamin Iverson Hicks was a founder as was his beloved aunt, Irene Cowan Whitehead, widow of Dr. Whitehead); died of yellow fever 7 Oct 1878 in Chattanooga, where he had been taken from Hanna Springs resort in DeKalb Co., AL. He had sought refuge at the resort on advice of his fellow Vicksburg physicians.

by us to leave this malarious country, and seek for health in a mountainous region, little dreaming that we would never see them alive again. Had that thought occurred to us, we would not have urged their leaving so hurriedly, and would have shaken the parting hand more warmly, and “God bless you” would have borne a tear upon its crest.

Drs. Booth and Whitehead were in magnificent health, two as fine specimens, mental and physical, of the genus homo as could be found. Unlike the Knights of old, they wore no linked armor to ward off the arrows of this twin brother of Death. They were armed alone with undaunted courage and faith in the power of medicine, which has proven so short, so weak so often. They fell with their harness on trying to relieve their suffering race, and to establish that the science of Physic is mighty, and must prevail over disease.

How often, when the storm raged most furiously, and our patrons were dying in spite of our best efforts, we would involuntarily exclaim, “Would that Booth, or Whitehead were here: He would give us words of comfort; he would tell us what to do; he would cheer our sinking patient; he would make him hope again.”

To all our friends who have gone before us—let us hope to a better land—we would say most sincerely, we have missed you on the street, we have missed you at the bed side, we have missed you everywhere.

And when the festive board is again spread,  
We will miss our loved dead,  
And will quaff in deepest silence,  
The fullest draft to their remembrance.

C. J. Mitchell, M.D.  
E. T. Henry,<sup>8</sup> M.D.  
J. R. Barnett,<sup>9</sup> M.D.  
E. G. Banks, M.D.  
J. M. Hunt, M.D.  
T. G. Birchett,<sup>10</sup> M.D.  
S. D. Robbins, M.D.  
W. T. Balfour, M.D.  
R. O’Leary, M.D.

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. **Edmund Taylor Henry**; founder and member of the first vestry of Holy Trinity; physician of great repute in Mississippi; served throughout the 1878 epidemic after which his health gradually declined; died 9 Apr 1881 in Marietta, GA, where he had gone for his health.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. **James Robert Barnett**; husband of Susan Smedes Barnett. She appears on the earliest list (1871) of Holy Trinity communicants and was a daughter of William Crosby Smedes and Anna Maria Marshall Smedes. Dr. Barnett died of dysentery 10 May 1879 in Vicksburg, less than five months after signing this physicians address. A tribute published in *The Herald* stated: “With physical powers reduced to the lowest point by continued bad health, he alone, during our dreadful epidemic, was the only medical man who was never off duty, and with zeal and ability contended with the grim monster in the palace of the rich and the hovel of the poor.”

<sup>10</sup> Dr. **Theophilus Gilliam Birchett**; founder of Holy Trinity (and son-in-law of founder John Alexander Klein); longtime beloved physician who served throughout the 1878 epidemic and was twice mayor of Vicksburg; died unexpectedly on 1 Jan 1904 in bed at his Vicksburg home on South street. The flag over city hall was flown at half-staff out of respect to his memory.

## Some Other Responses and Reactions

Bishop's Journal and Address, delivered 9 May 1879 at the Diocesan Convention, Natchez:

My visit to the Vicksburg Churches, on Sunday, the 30<sup>th</sup> [March 1879] was attended by the usual gratifying results. . . . In the evening I officiated at the Church of the Holy Trinity, to an overflowing congregation, and confirmed seven persons. One more received that rite the following day. The beautiful church of this parish is still unfinished; but strong hopes are entertained that it will be completed against my next visitation. **No congregation suffered more seriously from the effects of the late pestilence, but there is no diminution in the zeal or labor of either pastor or people.**

Local Vicksburg leaders (especially **E. S. Butts**) vigorously advocated for reimbursement of expenses of resident physicians for charity patients. They were unsuccessful.

**Private donations for relief** sent to Mississippi from all over America exceeded \$500,000 (\$13,000,000 in 2020 dollars).

**Church construction work was shut down** for 6 months (the building committee's members, D. W. Flowerree, Fairchild, and Whitehead, had died in September). The parish and much of its financial support were exhausted.

**John Alexander Klein** took control of William Fairchild's business interests and ran them on behalf of Fairchild's widow and son. She died 22 Sep 1879, and their son William died childless on 10 Oct 1921 in Chattanooga.

**The women of Holy Trinity resumed their fund raising:** an excursion on the steamer *Natchez* and performances of the comic opera "H.M.S. Pinafore" (both to help purchase an organ).

By the first service in the completed church, Easter Sunday (28 March) 1880, **memorial windows** had been placed above the altar honoring William and Addie Fairchild and Dr. Whitehead.

## Yellow Fever

**Origin, Transmission, and Spread:** Yellow fever originated in East or Central Africa among humans and primates, and it spread from there to West Africa and thence to the Western Hemisphere. It is caused by a virus spread by a particular type of mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*).



These mosquitoes thrive in and near human habitations where they breed in even the cleanest water. When a mosquito bites a human or primate infected with yellow fever, the virus enters the mosquito's bloodstream and circulates before settling in the salivary glands. When the infected mosquito bites another primate or human, the virus then enters the host's bloodstream, where it may cause illness. Both the virus and this mosquito likely arrived in the Americas via slave ships, not long after Columbus' voyages.

**Symptoms:** During the first three to six days after yellow fever is contracted—the incubation period—the person will not experience any signs or symptoms. After this, the infection enters an acute phase and then, in some cases, a toxic phase that can be life-threatening.

**Acute Phase:** Once the infection enters the acute phase, signs and symptoms may include: fever; headache; muscle aches (particularly in the back and knees); sensitivity to light; nausea or vomiting or both; loss of appetite; dizziness; and redness of eyes, face, or tongue. These signs and symptoms usually improve and are gone within several days.

**Toxic Phase:** Although signs and symptoms may disappear for a day or two following the acute phase, some persons with acute yellow fever then enter a toxic phase. During the toxic phase, acute signs and symptoms return and more severe and life-threatening ones also appear. These can include: yellowing of skin and the whites of the eyes (jaundice); abdominal pain and vomiting, sometimes of blood; decreased urination; bleeding from the nose, mouth, and eyes; slow heart rate (bradycardia); liver and kidney failure; and brain dysfunction, including delirium, seizures, and coma. The toxic phase of yellow fever can be fatal, with up to 50% of cases reaching this phase resulting in death.

Today, yellow fever is most common in areas of Africa and South America, affecting travelers to and residents of those areas. There is no specific treatment for yellow fever. But being vaccinated for it before traveling to an area in which the virus is known to exist can protect against contracting the disease. It can be prevented or controlled by vaccination, protective clothing, insect repellent, genetic assaults on the specific mosquito, and eliminating or reducing mosquito breeding conditions.