

Alexandria Times

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Alexandria
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New exhibit at Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum unveils its new exhibit, "Disease and the Apothecary," on Sept. 29. The exhibit spotlights three epidemics in Alexandria during the 141 years the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary operated.

The story of public health in Alexandria includes the response from both government officials and medical professionals. "Disease and the Apothecary" introduces the history of three techniques: inoculation, variolation and vaccination as the medical and public health fields evolved.

"Disease and the Apothecary" narrows its lens on yellow fever, smallpox and influenza, and explains Alexandria's response to each threat. Through the use of artifacts and letters from prominent Alexandrians, such as Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick and Edward Stabler, the exhibit sheds light on the effects of the outbreaks on the letter writers and their neighbors.

Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum Curator Callie Stapp explained the purpose behind the exhibit.

"Through items from the museum's collection and archive, visitors can explore how treatments for disease have changed over time and how Alexandrians responded to outbreaks," Stapp said.

Dick's charge in 1793 was



PHOTO/STABLER-LEADBEATER APOTHECARY MUSEUM

Bromo Quinine Pill Box used to alleviate influenza symptoms.

to protect the city from an outbreak of yellow fever, which had reached Philadelphia. The physician famous as George Washington's personal doctor instituted a ship quarantine south of Alexandria, forcing ships to anchor until he was convinced their crews were free of disease. While this kept Alexandria mostly free of the disease this time, the city suffered other yellow fever outbreaks in 1798, 1803 and 1821.

As early as the American Revolution, Alexandria participated in the fight against smallpox. In 1777, George Washington issued an order

mandating the smallpox inoculation of his troops. Alexandria served as an inoculation center, where both Continental soldiers and Alexandria residents were inoculated, a process that implanted a disease agent or antigen to stimulate resistance to the disease.

After the Revolution, Alexandria inoculated as many residents as possible to manage outbreaks. Smallpox vaccination was invented in 1796 and came into widespread use in 1801. Early 1800s newspapers regularly advertised doctors offering to vaccinate all residents. During the Civil War, the

city designated three hospitals for smallpox care to handle the influx of soldiers, newly freed African Americans and other civilians fleeing the war.

The Influenza Epidemic of 1919 to 1920 is the last pandemic featured in "Disease and the Apothecary." Also known as the Spanish Flu, due to its publicity in Spanish newspapers during World War I, this epidemic killed approximately 675,000 Americans.

This particular strain was especially deadly for otherwise healthy young adults. Public places, such as movie theaters, churches and schools, were closed to avoid crowded gatherings, and public health officials encouraged the wearing of cotton masks.

"Disease and the Apothecary" allows visitors a glimpse into the long history of Alexandria and epidemics. The exhibit documents how much medicine has changed over time, and in some cases, how similar it is to current techniques.

For more information on the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum, please visit alexandria.va.gov/Apothecary. The museum is open every day of the week, except for Tuesdays, and admission is free to Alexandria residents.

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