

“Tito” the Mosquito

Malaria is caused by a parasite. Europeans encountered the earliest successful treatment for malaria in the 1600s. It was made from the bark of the cinchona tree in Peru. (See bottle of Cinchona). Two hundred years later, quinine was recognized to be the critical ingredient and quinine as a pharmaceutical was produced. It is still used today.

Yellow fever is caused by a virus. The classical treatment for yellow fever was a form of mercury called "calomel." (See bottle of Calomel). It developed in the 16th-century and was widely used into the early 1900s. Mercury is a poison. When people sought refuge from yellow fever in Charleston, they were not only escaping the mosquitoes - they were also getting away from the doctors and their calomel. There is no cure for yellow fever today. (No cure is an improvement over mercury poisoning.)