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NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF GROSSE ISLE Taken From The Book FOUR CENTURIES OF MEDICAL HISTORY IN CANADA By John J. Haagerty.

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CHRONOLOGY

Establishment of the Quarantine Station	1832
The First Cholera Epidemic	1832
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The Great Typhus Epidemic	1847
The Third Cholera Epidemic	1854

Source 1928

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE QUARANTINE STATION

In the spring of 1832 the Imperial authorities took possession of Grosse Isle for the purpose of quarantine. A military force consisting of two companies of infantry, a detachment of Royal Artillery, and several surgeons took up their occupation of the island under the command of Captain Reid of the 32nd Regiment who assumed the title, Commandant of the Island. One of the first acts of the military authorities was to create a battery of two 12 and one 18 pound guns in the center of the island facing the river to stop all incoming vessels and compel them to undergo quarantine if it were found necessary. A flag staff was run up beside the guns and from this point the surgeons were rowed out to the ships.

THE FIRST CHOLERA EPIDEMIC

In the majority of the published accounts of the cholera epidemic of 1832, the arrival of the brig Carrick at Grosse Isle upon the third day of June has been taken as the date of the original arrival of epidemic cholera upon this continent. Carrick had a passenger list of 145 and had suffered 45 deaths during its trip over. Cholera entered Quebec June eighth. In one week in Quebec 259 cases were sent to the hospital and 161 died, 62 per cent of the total. We may judge the excitement that prevailed at Grosse Isle in those strenuous days when we read that in disembarking a ship two men, two women, and six children were drowned by a boat capsizing. Disease rapidly spread through the province and south to Philadelphia, Washington, and westward to the Upper Mississippi.

THE SECOND CHOLERA EPIDEMIC

In 1834 some 264 people died of cholera on Grosse Isle.

THE GREAT TYPHUS EPIDEMIC

On the fourteenth day of May 1847 the first of the fever fleet, the Syria from Liverpool, reached Grosse Isle. On the twentieth of May 30 vessels were anchored at Grosse Isle. They had left port with 12,519 passengers of whom 777 had died at sea and 459 more while the ships lay at anchor off the island.

The conditions on board these ships was described as follows. The food is generally unselected and seldom sufficiently well cooked. The supply of water, hardly enough for cooking and drinking does not allow for washing. In many ships the filthy beds teeming with abominations are never required to be brought on deck and aired. The narrow space between the sloping berths and piles of boxes is never washed or scraped but breeds a damp and fetid stench until the day before arriving in quarantine when all hands are required to scrub up and put a fair face for the doctor and government inspector.

The dead who are not buried at sea were taken from the pest ships and corded like firewood on the beach to await burial. In many instances the corpses were carried out of the foul-smelling holds or they were dragged with boat hooks out of them by sailors and others who had to be paid a sovereign each. On deck a rope was placed around the emaciated forms of the Irish peasant father, mother, wife and husband, sister and brother. The rope was hoisted and with their heads and naked limbs dangling for a moment in mid-air, with the wealth of hair of the Irish maiden or young matron, or the silvered locks of the old Irish grandmother floating in the breeze they were finally lowered over the ships side into the boat, rowed to the Island and left on the rock until such time as they were coffined. The dead were buried in trenches.

The only addition made to the quarantine establishment that year were through the purchase of 50 bedsteads and double the amount of straw used in former years and the erection of a new shed to serve as hospital and to contain 60 more beds. In this way provisions including the old hospital and sheds dating from 1832 were made for only 200 sick. Temporary shelter was formed by means of spars and sails barrowed from the ships and the putting up of shanties for the accomodation of the healthy. Both Catholic and Protestant churches were used for hospitals. All the eyewitnesses and writers say that the scenes at Grosse Isle have never been surpassed in pathos as well as in hediousness and ghastliness.

The fever sheds were miserable affairs. Most of the patients were attacked with dysentery and the smell was dreadful. It was impossible to separate the sick from the well or disenfect or clean the bedding. The very straw upon which they had lain was often allowed to become the bed for their successors. I have known many poor families prefer to burrow under heaps of loose stones near the shore than to accept the shelter of the infected sheds.

At first the sick were separated from the well, but as the number increased this became impossible. Oftentimes there were two or three in a bed without any distinction of age, sex, or nature of illness. Nurses were obliged to occupy a bed in the midst of the sick and had no private apartment where they could change their clothes. Their food was the same as that given the immigrant and had to be taken in haste around the effuse of the sheds and in this way they were frequently infected with fever.

As it became impossible to obtain sufficient nurses the jails in Quebec were thrown open and its loathsome inmates sent to Grosse Isle to nurse the pure, helpless Irish youth.

Mr. A. C. Buchanan, Chief Immigrant Agent reported 26 May 1847. "I returned from Grosse Isle late last night and I regret to say there is a vast amount of disease and sickness among the emigrant vessels now there. All the hospital accommodations is now filled and a large number of sick are still on board the vessels which they are unable to land for want of room. Immediate steps have been taken to erect additional hospital sheds but with all despatch that can be used some days must elapse before they will be ready for the occupation of the sick. Upwards of 30 vessels were at anchor at Grosse Isle last evening having nearly 10,000 persons on board; upwards of 400 deaths have occurred among these people previous to arrival and 660 admissions have been received, 43 of whom have died. Over 3,000 passengers have arrived in this port (Quebec) since Sunday, many of whom are in destitute circumstances. Dr. Douglas has made application for a detachment of troops to be stationed at the island to preserve order as it will be necessary to land the whole of the passengers now on board the vessels in order that they may be properly cleaned and purified previous to their being allowed to proceed to Quebec.

The number of sick in the hospital on Grosse Isle on the 21st of June was 1,935 and the number of sick still on board the ships was 260, making a total sick as of June 21 of 2,195 souls. During the week there were 199 deaths. Two nurses died during the week.

Captain McGrath of the ship Aberdeen reported that passengers boarded the ships with Typhus fever inspite of protests of the captain.

Upto August twenty-seventh the number of passengers that had arrived at Grosse Isle was 81,440. The deaths during passage and in the quarantine hospital totaled 7,150 of which 4,647 had died during the voyage and 2,503 in the the quarantine sheds.

Quarantine closed on the twenty-fifth of October. The last vessel arrived November seventh. Dr. Parent of Quebec says that when he visited the vessel he noted three children, the youngest about two years of age setting on the deck ~~altogether~~ ^{entirely} naked--huddled together, shivering and shaking with the cold, with a small piece of blanket thrown over them, while their widowed mother sat by without a copper in her possession. In another place he noticed a young woman whose only piece of clothing was made out of the canvas of a biscuit bag.

Personnel at Grosse Isle 1847			
26 doctors	22 sickened	and	4 died
21 stewards	21 sickened	and	3 died
10 police	8 sickened	and	3 died
186 nurses and orderlies			
	76 sickened	and	22 died
			6 priests died
			2 clergy of the Church of England died.

THE THIRD CHOLERA EPIDEMIC

In 1854 cholera struck again. The ship Glenmannia with cholera and John Howel with measles arrived the same day at Grosse Isle. Both ships were inspected on the seventeenth of June. Pasengers were allowed to mingle and on the nineteenth given practise. One of the Glänmanna died of cholera while on Grosse Isle (45 had died before) yet the people from both were discharged and permitted to proceed to thàir desination. Within five days of landing, the first case of asiatic cholera broke out in Quebec. In Quebec City there were 724 deaths that year.

A REPORT OF DR. MONTIZAMBERT

Under the old regulations every vessel that stopped at quarantine and reported the occurence off board of infectious disease, however slight, had to land all steerage passengers at the quarantine station and itself undergo disinfecation there. The penalty for controvention of the regulation was \$400. The steamship companies would much rather pay a fine of \$400

than lose time at Grosse Isle while being disinfected, therefore the company instructed the masters of their vessels to proceed direct to Quebec without stopping at the station, whether they had infectious disease on board or not. Report 1881.

DR. MONTIZAMBERT.

Frederick Montizambert C.M.G., I.S.O., M.D. (Edin) F.R.C.S. (Edin), D.C.L., was the first quarantine officer after Confederation. He was for many years director of quarantine both maritime and inland and bore the title of Director General of Public Health. He was the leading health official of his day in Canada and was internationally recognized as an outstanding authority on all matters appertaining to public health. He was at one time president of the American Public Health Association. In recognition of his services to Canada he was awarded the C.M.G. His kindly disposition endeared him to all those with whom he was associated in his work.

C.M.G. Companion (of the order) of St. Michael and St. George.
 F.R.C.S. Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.
 D.C.L. Doctor of Civil Law.