

Quarantine Station at Fort Johnson

By Susan Hoffius

Since it was established in 1670, Charleston has labored to prevent the arrival of disease aboard ships sailing into her ports. Working to balance commerce with public health was no easy feat, and city leaders relied on local physicians to inform their decisions about if-and-when to institute quarantine. At various times, often in response to a particular outbreak, quarantine stations were established on Sullivan's Island and James Island.

In 1872 an act was passed establishing Fort Johnson as a quarantine station to be operated by the city of Charleston and the state of South Carolina. By the late 19th century, the quarantine station consisted of quarters for resident officers, offices, a fever hospital, a pest-house, a storage building, a boathouse and barracks for officers, crew and female passengers of vessels undergoing fumigation. In 1906 Fort Johnson was transferred by the state to the U.S. Public Health Department, which then operated the quarantine station until 1945. When it closed, the station had 14 buildings and a 40-bed

hospital.

In 2013 the Waring Historical Library received by donation seven photographs of the exterior and interior of the quarantine station. These items, cataloged as the Fort Johnson Quarantine Station Photographs, show the exterior of the station with water tower and cannon, as well as interior views of the sterilization plant. Inside the "Maritime Sanitation Building" was constructed a large sterilization cylinder, which was used to disinfect

clothing, bedding and other materials. Details about the cylinder, its construction and use in fumigation are described in a companion booklet, "Official regulations for the government of quarantine at the port of Charleston, S.C."

To learn more about the quarantine in Charleston, visit the Waring Historical Library on the campus of the Medical University of South Carolina. Please visit waring.library.musc.edu for upcoming events and digital collections.

The Waring Library Society is a "friends of the library" organization that supports the mission of MUSC's Waring Historical Library. Named for Joseph I. Waring, Jr., its first director, the Waring Historical Library preserves rare books, manuscripts and museum artifacts documenting the history of the health sciences in South Carolina and the Southeast. To learn more about the Waring's programs and events or inquire about membership in the Society, please visit waring.library.musc.edu.



Maritime sanitation building at Fort Johnson.

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