

Weather & Seasons: 18th Century South Carolina

Much of Colonial America faced outbreaks of disease. Carolina's environment played a direct role in the frequency and severity of the outbreaks they faced.

Found largely in tropical and subtropical climates, yellow fever appeared in port cities like Charles Town, Port Royal, and Georgetown.

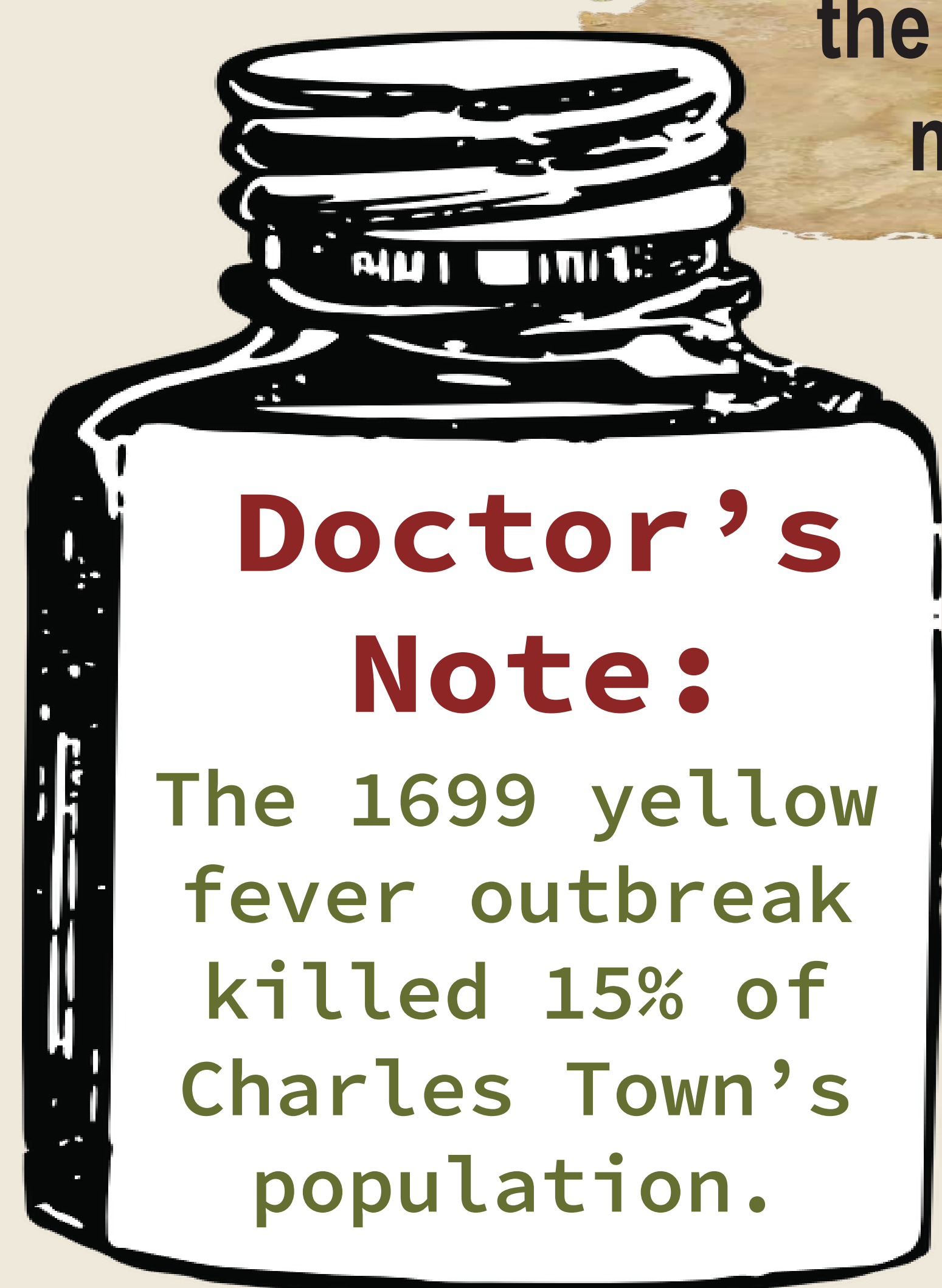
"The air of this Country is healthy."

*-John Oldmixon
historian, 1708*

Northern colonial cities, like Philadelphia, saw an end to epidemics sooner because cold weather kills mosquitoes.

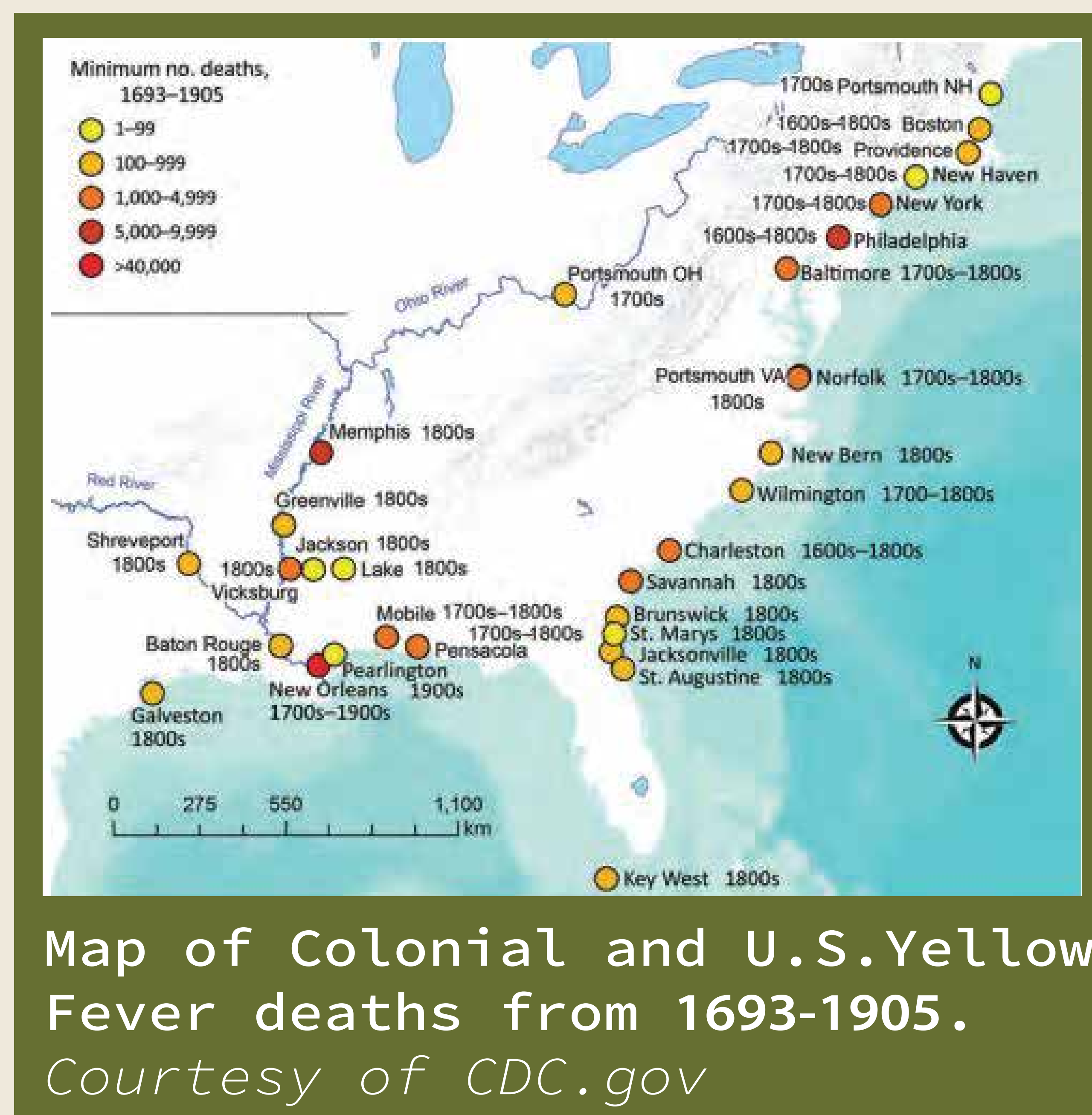
Charles Town did not have a winter break from disease.

Massachusetts Reverend Cotton Mather called Yellow Fever the "horrible plague of Barbados" that killed "all the ministers of Charlestown," including his uncle.



Sickly Season: Escaping Disease

In the summer and early fall of 18th century Charles Town, yellow fever and malaria ran rampant as mosquitoes thrived in the standing water of the rice plantations. The colonists called these months the "sickly season." During this time, the wealthy planters left their plantation homes in the country in favor of the beach, the mountains, or their homes in downtown Charles Town where the wind and salt water kept the mosquitoes away. Some Carolinians escaped north to towns like Newport, Rhode Island in such large droves that the locals nicknamed it "The Carolina Hospital."



The visitation of this epidemic, extends from July to November, but is most ripe in August and September. *

* The following table is given by Dr. Shecut, and proves the truth of this important part of our subject.

Seasons.	Winds favorable to health.				Winds unfavorable to health.			
Spring,	N.	N. W.	W.	S. W.	N. E.	E.	S. E.	S.
Sum. and Aut.	N. E.	E.	S. E.	S.	S. W.	W.	W. I pt.	N.
Winter.	N.	N. W.	W.	S. W.	E. N.	E.	E.	S. E.

* The detailed particulars of the yellow fever in Charleston in the year 1802, may serve as a sample of it in other seasons. The whole number of deaths from that disease in that year was 96. Of these, two took place in August, sixty-four in September, and thirty in October. In the whole number there was not a single native of Charleston, though five of them were born in South, and one in North Carolina; twenty-one were born in England, twenty in the northern states, nineteen in Ireland, eight in Germany, seven in Scotland, five in France, one in Spain, one in Prussia, and one in Madeira. The South Carolinians kept track of the weather to escape the "sickly season." *Atlas of the State of South Carolina, 1825 by Robert Mills*

Not everyone could escape the threats of the "sickly season." The poor and the enslaved remained in the dangerous areas, harvesting rice and indigo at the peak of the malaria and yellow fever seasons. Many planters believed that enslaved Africans had immunity to these diseases because they did not appear as susceptible. Science partially supports this belief as many West Africans were exposed to these viruses as children and therefore, may have immunity. Africans also have a higher percentage of the sickle-cell trait and malaria does not bind to sickle-cells.



If given the opportunity to escape, would you?