

Going Viral: Spreading Disease

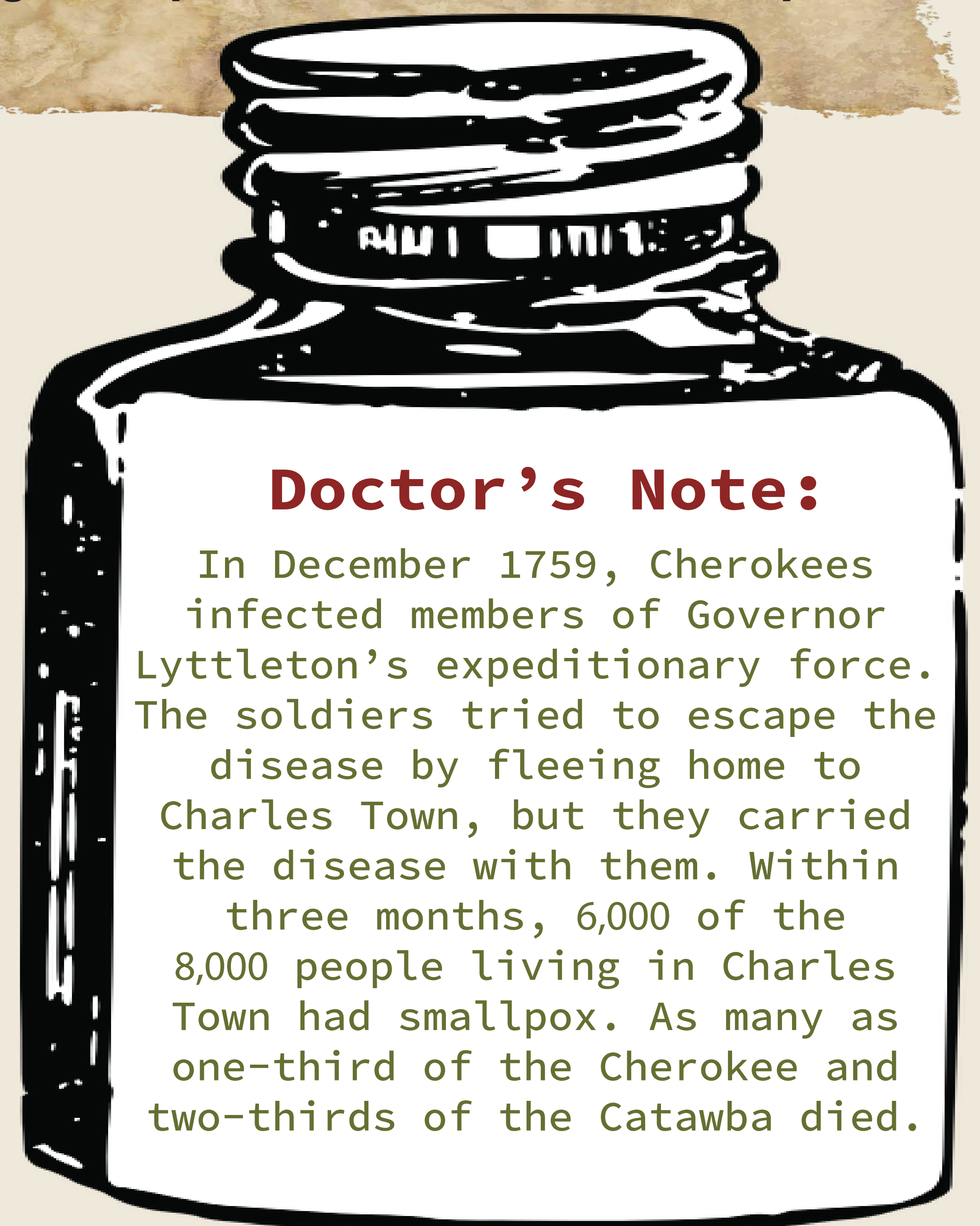
European settlers experienced smallpox as children in Europe, and therefore, many had immunity.

Europeans infected Native Americans with diseases through trade and war.

Europeans introduced yellow fever and malaria to the colonies when they imported enslaved labor and settlers from Barbados.

Native Americans infected the next generation of colonists who did not grow up in disease-ridden Europe.

Native Americans had zero immunity to European diseases. They lived away from swamps, so malaria and yellow fever did not decimate them like smallpox.



Enslaved labor advertisement promising no sign of smallpox Charleston, SC 1780s
Courtesy Library of Congress

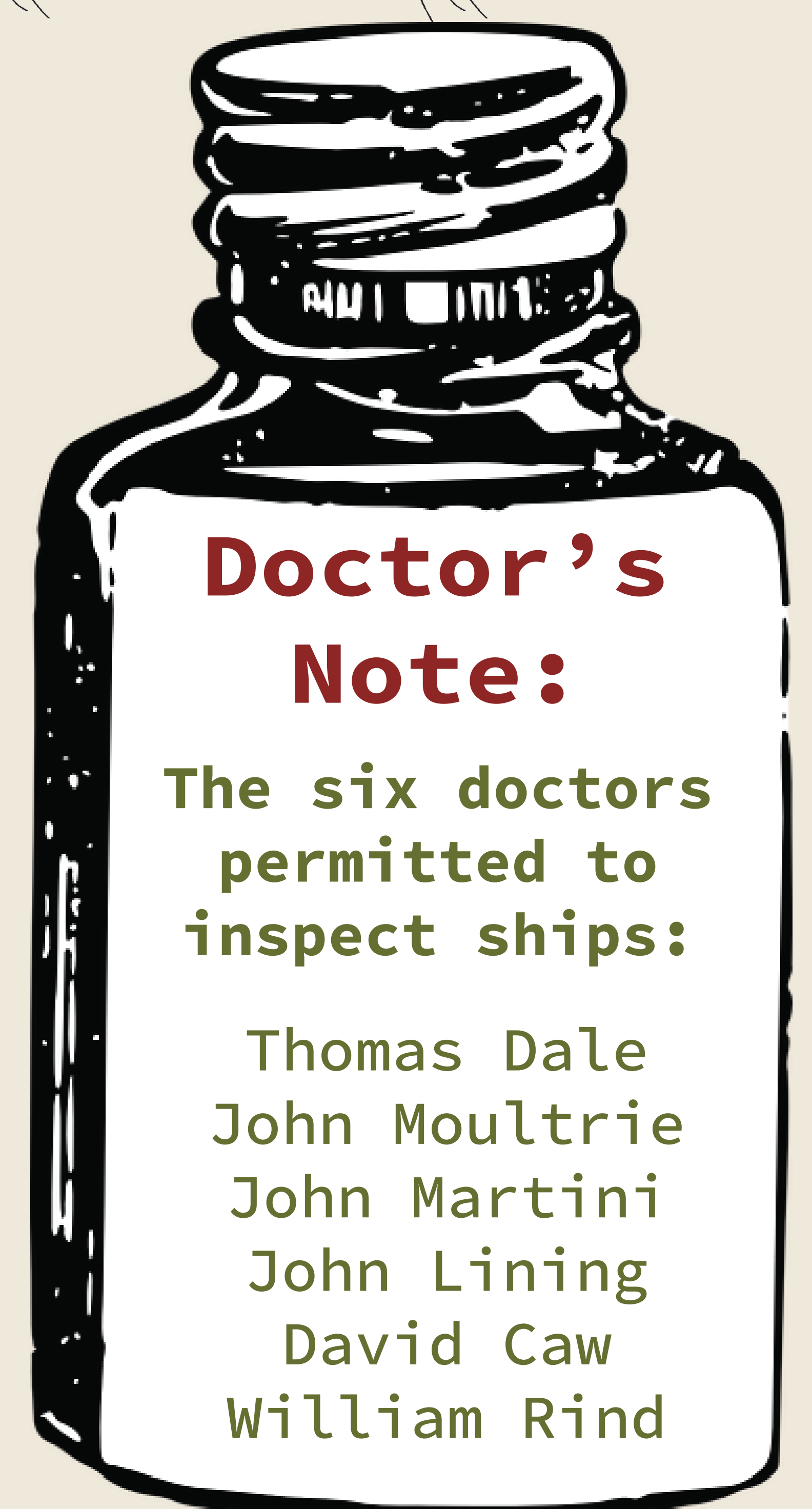
Many of the enslaved arrived from Africa with immunity or at least prior exposure to yellow fever and malaria. Planters viewed these individuals as ideal workers for the region.



Stopping the Spread: Laws & Quarantine

Colonists may not have fully understood germs but they made early connections between health and cleanliness. The Acts of the 1600s show their attempt to clean up the city. However, these actions did not prevent the arrival of viruses by ship.

After the yellow fever outbreak of 1706, the legislature cracked down on ships entering the harbor without a certificate of health. Six doctors checked ship passengers for illness and the pest house quarantined the sick for 10-20 days. The effort proved successful when an outbreak of smallpox in 1771 did not get past the pest house into the city.



Acts of the 1600s

These Acts prevented major diseases like Cholera.

- 1685: Keep streets clean
- 1692: No pigs in streets
- 1698: Remove livestock and slaughterhouses from the city.

Acts of the 1700s

Quarantine Acts for ships prevented outbreaks

- 1707: Build pesthouse on Sullivan's Island
- 1712: Doctors inspect ships
- 1741: No pigs in street
- 1744: Keep street clean
- 1747: Inspection by doctors
- 1764: Health certificate required for travel
Travel forbidden if showing symptoms



Would you rather quarantine on a ship or in the pest house?