

# TYPHOID FEVER

Dirty Food, Dirty Water!



by William Caper

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by **William Caper**

Consultant: Andi L. Shane, M.D., M.P.H., M.Sc.

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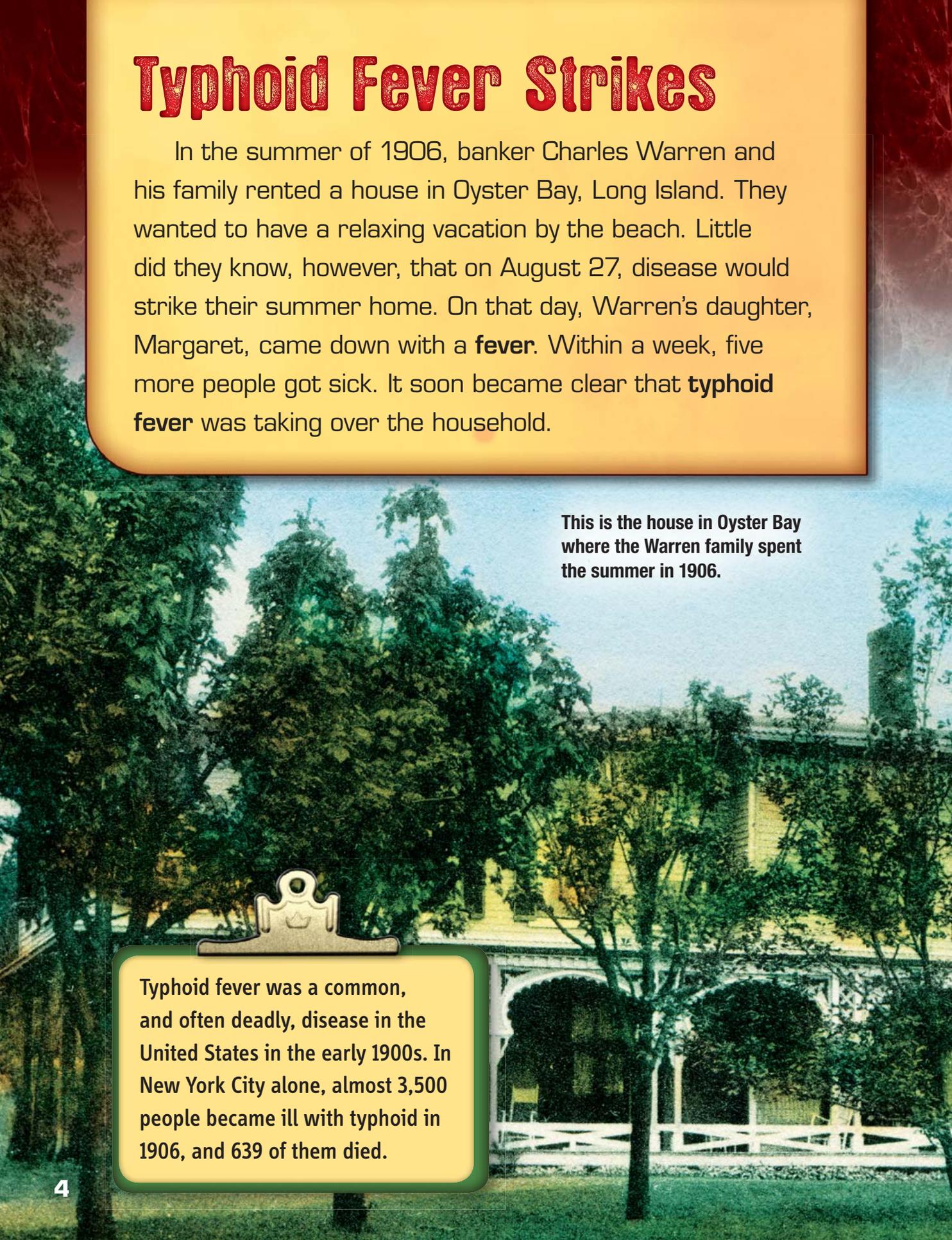
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# Typhoid Fever Strikes

In the summer of 1906, banker Charles Warren and his family rented a house in Oyster Bay, Long Island. They wanted to have a relaxing vacation by the beach. Little did they know, however, that on August 27, disease would strike their summer home. On that day, Warren's daughter, Margaret, came down with a **fever**. Within a week, five more people got sick. It soon became clear that **typhoid fever** was taking over the household.

This is the house in Oyster Bay where the Warren family spent the summer in 1906.

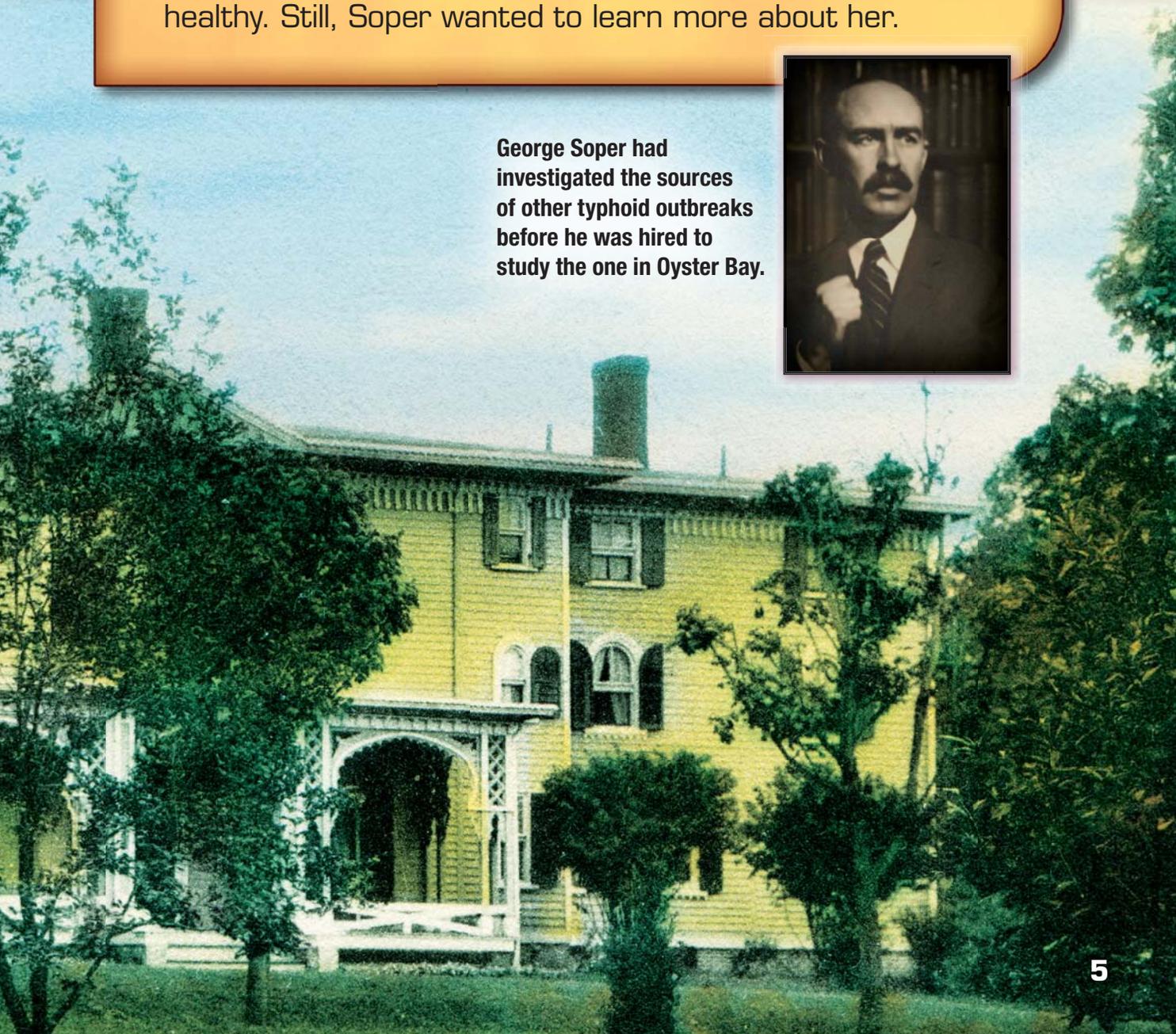
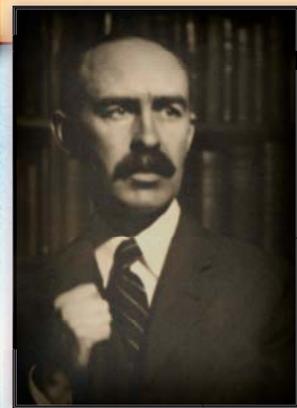


Typhoid fever was a common, and often deadly, disease in the United States in the early 1900s. In New York City alone, almost 3,500 people became ill with typhoid in 1906, and 639 of them died.

Luckily, nobody died from the disease. However, the owners of the home wanted to find out how the **outbreak** had started. So they hired typhoid expert George Soper. He checked the food, water, and milk in the house for typhoid **germs**. He didn't find any.

Then Soper learned that the Warrens had hired a new cook about three weeks before the illness struck. Could she be the cause? The cook, named Mary Mallon, had quit before Soper arrived. The family said she was perfectly healthy. Still, Soper wanted to learn more about her.

**George Soper had investigated the sources of other typhoid outbreaks before he was hired to study the one in Oyster Bay.**



# Searching for Mary

Soper looked into Mary Mallon's past. He discovered that since 1900, she had worked as a cook for seven families. Twenty-two people in those households had caught typhoid after Mary had prepared food for them. One girl had died.

Soper knew he had to track Mary down. In March 1907, he found her working as a cook for a family in New York City. Soper asked Mary for samples of her **stool**, blood, and **urine**. He told her they would be tested for typhoid germs.



Mary Mallon was born in Ireland, in 1869, and came to the United States as a teenager.

## TYPHOID FEVER.

This Notice is Posted in Compliance with Law

"Every person who shall wilfully tear down, remove or deface any notice posted in compliance with law, shall be fined not more than seven dollars."---GENERAL STATUTES OF CONNECTICUT, REVISION OF 1902, SECTION 1173.

Town Health Officer.

Town Health Officer.

Town Health Officer.

Town Health Officer.

In the early 1900s, health officials posted signs like this one on buildings to warn people about the presence of typhoid fever.

Most typhoid sufferers have **symptoms**—they look and feel very sick. However, some people who have typhoid germs in their bodies never show symptoms and are healthy. These people are called **carriers**. Mary Mallon was a carrier.

Mary didn't believe she was spreading the disease. After all, she had never been sick with typhoid. She was also **offended** by Soper's request. Mary picked up a large carving fork and threatened to stab Soper if he didn't leave. Terrified, he dashed out of the house. Soper realized he needed help.



This illustration shows Mary threatening George Soper after he told her that she might have typhoid.

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## About the Author

William Caper has written books about history, science, film, and many other topics. He lives in San Francisco, with his wife, Erin, and their dog, Face.

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# TYPHOID FEVER

## Dirty Food, Dirty Water!

In the summer of 1906, banker Charles Warren and his family rented a house near the beach in Oyster Bay, Long Island. A few weeks later, six members of the household came down with typhoid fever—a disease that struck about 200,000 Americans every year at the time, and killed about 35,000. A health expert who had been hired to find out what had happened learned that the Warrens had recently hired a cook named Mary Mallon. Could she be the cause of this latest outbreak?

Look inside to find out more about Mary Mallon and how she came to be known as “Typhoid Mary.” You’ll also discover what causes typhoid, how it affects the body, the places in the world where the disease is still a problem, and—most important—how to protect yourself from getting it in the first place.

**Bubonic Plague**  
The Black Death!

**The Flu of 1918**  
Millions Dead Worldwide!

**Malaria**  
Super Killer!

**Smallpox**  
Is It Over?

**Tuberculosis**  
The White Plague!

**Typhoid Fever**  
Dirty Food, Dirty Water!

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