

In the Time of Smallpox

Physicians, Surgeons and Apothecaries in New France

Montréal, November 15, 2011 - The Château Ramezay – Historic Site and Museum of Montréal invites you to take the pulse of various aspects of 17th and 18th century health in its brand new exhibition *In the Time of Smallpox*, presented from November 16, 2011 to November 11, 2012. Physicians, surgeons and apothecaries, along with midwives, hospital nuns, healers and bonesetters are on duty for a very enriching consultation!



The opening of the exhibit will take place tonight at the Château Ramezay starting at 5:30 p.m. We will have the pleasure to welcome, as a special guest, Doctor Horacio Arruda, Director of Public Health Protection.

Epidemics regularly threatened the colony of New France. Smallpox was the most common and deadliest infectious disease. At the time, public health problems were rife and personal hygiene was basic at best.

Several treatment options were available to the population during epidemics or for various illnesses. To learn more, take a number! You will be paired up with a historical figure, like Governor de Ramezay, whose health woes you will assess as you move through the exhibition.

- ❖ You be the doctor! Make a diagnosis based on the symptoms of your historical figure and prescribe the appropriate treatment... according to the theory of humours. Can you tell the difference between an imbalance in phlegm, blood, black bile or yellow bile?
- ❖ Now walk in the shoes of a surgeon. A general practitioner at the time, he healed wounds, amputated limbs and performed bloodletting. Which instrument will you choose if your historical figure has a broken arm or tooth?
- ❖ Get out your jars and become an apothecary! The precursor to pharmacies, apothecary shops supplied medicines to hospitals, surgeons and physicians. Ginseng, ipecacuanha, dragon's blood... Which plant will heal your historical figure's ailment?
- ❖ Beyond official channels, patients had recourse to various alternative therapies, depending on their beliefs and financial means. Best to keep one's options open! Why not try a bonesetter, a healer, a homemade remedy, a pilgrimage or advice from the priest? Who will your historical figure turn to for help?

In addition to these practitioners, there were midwives—chosen for their moral qualities and good reputation—as well as nuns who treated the body and soul of their patients.

The exhibition also takes a brief look at the 19th and 20th centuries, when various professions were organized into “colleges” and professional associations, which did not prevent the proliferation of “miracle cures” on the market. With time, major discoveries, such as anaesthesia and X-rays, led to great advances in the medical field.

A turning point in history, the 1885 smallpox epidemic hit Montréal hard, and led to the creation of a hygiene council for the entire province and the establishment of public baths.

Anecdote: Did you know that in 1878 Université Laval à Montréal's faculty of medicine was housed in the Château Ramezay?

In the Time of Smallpox brings together 250 objects from various museums, including from the Stewart Museum collections. Thanks to a special collaboration with the Ville de Montréal and the Department of Anthropology of Université de Montréal, the public will get a rare glimpse of bones from the cemetery of the first Notre-Dame church. These relics open a window onto the lives of the first Montrealers and their ailments as well as the treatments and surgical procedures of the period.

Here's to your health!

The Château Ramezay – Historic Site and Museum of Montréal, a non-profit organization, safeguards and makes accessible a collection that reflects and attests to the history of Montréal and Québec. It was the first building in Québec to be classified an historic monument and is the province's oldest private historical museum. Visit our website: www.chateauramezay.qc.ca

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Source :

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