



← White Oak was used in remedies for dysentery.

→ North Carolina Moravians used peach blossoms to fight smallpox.



← Sassafras leaves were used to “purify” the blood.

WARNING: Please do NOT eat these plants! Information provided is not intended for modern medicinal use.

Herbs and spices were also used in 18th century medicine, both by women and trained physicians. These included sage, rosemary, mint, mustard, nutmeg, and countless others. Many of these herbs and spices are staples in today’s kitchen.

A Guilford County Physician

Dr. David Caldwell was an influential Presbyterian minister, teacher, and physician in 18th century Guilford County.

He gained most of his knowledge as a physician from studying medical books, observing traveling doctors, and corresponding with Dr. Benjamin Rush, a prominent Pennsylvania physician.

This knowledge was used to treat his Buffalo and Alamance congregations and other members of the community.

He also played an important role in the aftermath of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse by treating wounded Continental soldiers and militiamen.

He remains a well-known and beloved figure of Greensboro’s history.

Look for the Caldwell monument, located here in the park, that commemorates Dr. Caldwell’s valuable services!

Guilford Courthouse National Military Park



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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Guilford Courthouse
National Military Park

Life in the 1700s: Coping with Disease



No Such Thing as Germs

American colonists in the 1700s did not understand disease as we do today. They were not aware of the underlying causes of sickness, such as viruses or bacteria. They only saw the symptoms, such as fever, coughing, or soreness. In the minds of the American colonists, the symptoms of a disease were the disease.

Common Diseases

Common diseases during the colonial period included the following:

- Malaria : “intermittent fever”
- Typhus : “ship fever” or “camp fever”
- Influenza : “winter fever”
- Smallpox : “the bloody pox”
- Whooping cough
- Tuberculosis : “consumption”
- Dysentery : “bloody flux”
- Scurvy (Vitamin C deficiency)
- Arthritis : “rheumatism”
- Worms

Treatments

Medical treatments and remedies were meant to correct the imbalance of a patient’s four bodily humors — blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. This imbalance was seen as the root cause of illness. The American colonists, like people throughout the world, thought that correcting the imbalance of a patient’s four bodily humors would cure him or her of disease.

Eighteenth century treatments of a disease often sound as unpleasant as the disease itself. Doctors relied heavily on five basic treatments:

- 1) Bleeding
- 2) Blistering
- 3) Vomiting
- 4) Purging
- 5) Sweating

Although these treatments were mainly used to treat sick patients, they were sometimes used to prevent illness.

Look for our medicinal artifacts in the main exhibit of the Visitor’s Center such as fleams, magnifying glass and an amputation knife.

Medicine from the Earth

In the home, women were the primary caregivers for the sick. They relied on simple recipes passed down from their mother and grandmothers to treat common illnesses. These “receipts” for treatment often included ingredients that were readily available, usually in one’s backyard or the surrounding area.

Look for these plants here in the park!



← Tulip Poplar was used to treat intermittent fevers, arthritis, and gout.

→ Dogwood was used to treat fevers.



← Milkweed was used to heal a sore throat.