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# Plague Hits San Francisco

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# PLAGUE HITS SAN FRANCISCO

POLITICS,  
ECONOMICS,  
RACISM

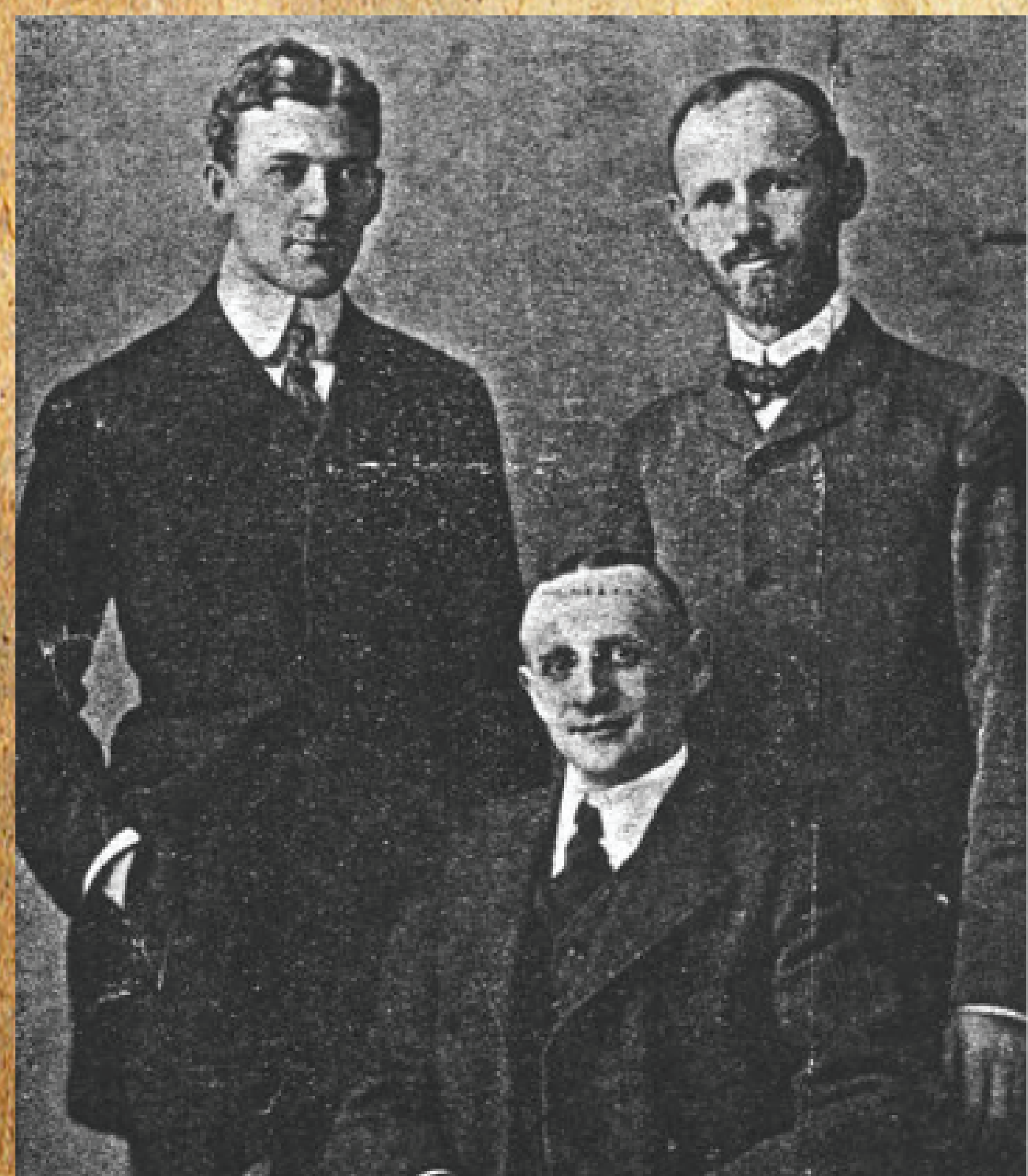
Merle Rosenzweig, Anna Cupito, Elise Wescom, Chase Masters



1. On the wharves, San Francisco, 1900.



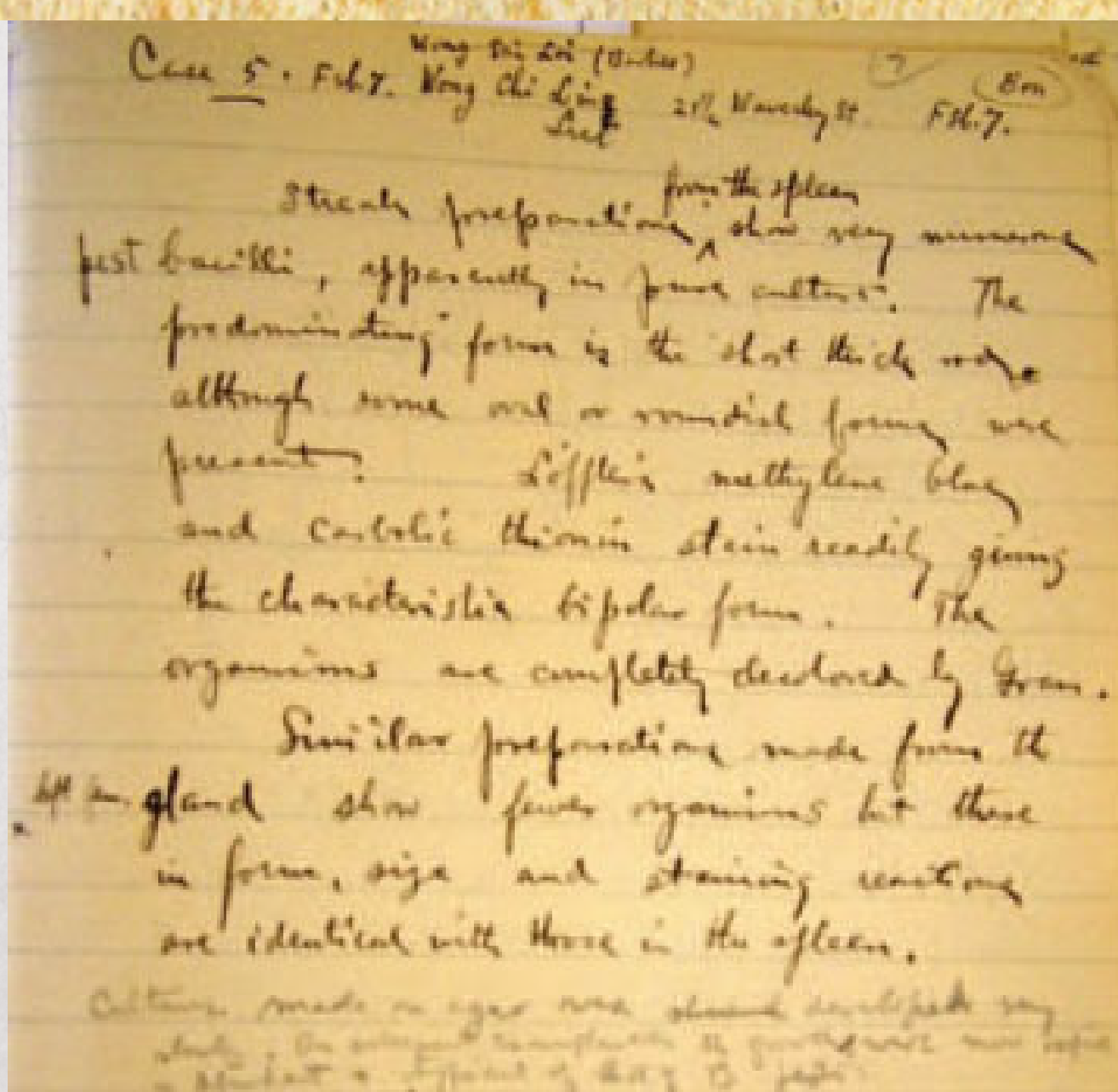
2. Joseph James Kinyoun MD: Central to the discovery of the San Francisco plague of 1900-1904



3. Plague Commissioners. Photograph taken during commissioner "bureau" meeting on February 4th, 1901. From left: Lewellys Barker, Simon Flexner, Frederick Novy.



4. Frederick Novy: Showed plague was present by performing fluid aspirated from the spleen of the deceased patient, Wong Chi Lin.

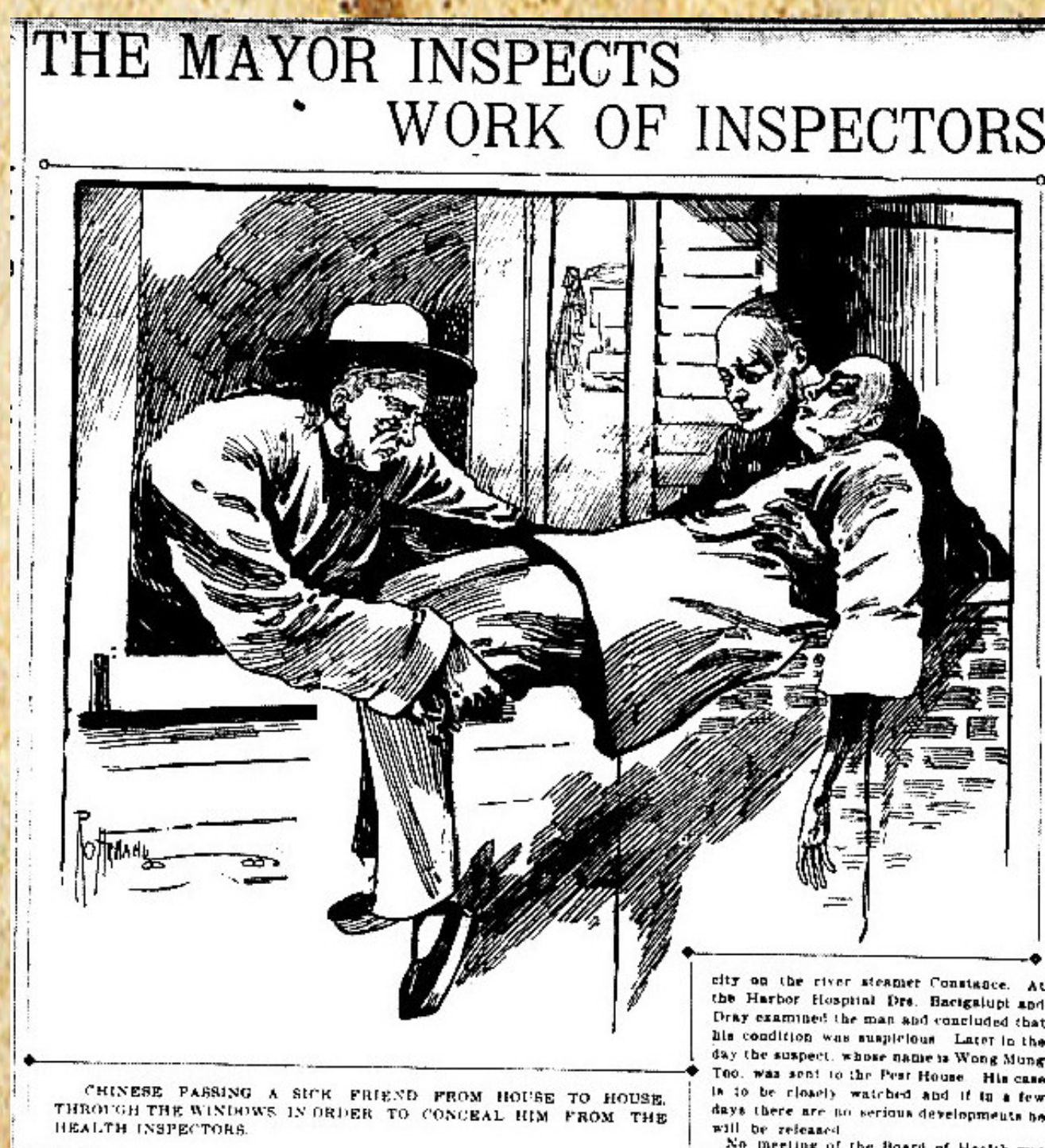


5. Page from Novy's laboratory notebook.



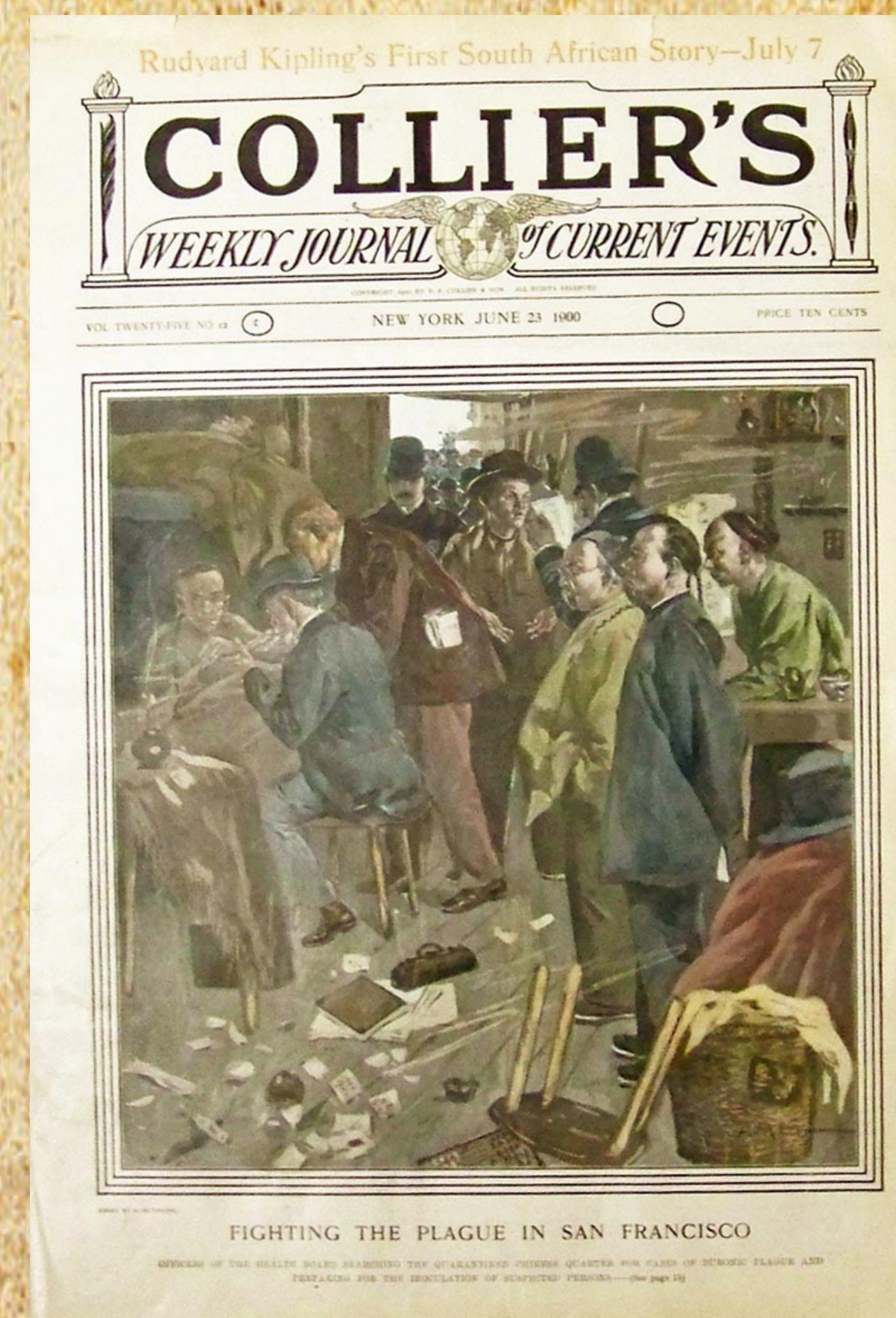
6. Receiving Station set up as part of the War on Rats led by the U.S. Public Health Service.

7. Rat Dissection.



8. Hiding the Sick.

9. Fighting the Plague in San Francisco.



11. San Francisco's Chinatown with barbed wire fences circa 1900.

## SAN FRANCISCO QUARANTINE.

### Policemen Keep Cordon Around Chinese District Against Plague.

SAN FRANCISCO, May 30.—The quarantine of Chinatown is being rigorously enforced, fifty policemen being detailed to maintain a cordon around the district. Ropes are stretched across the streets and the Chinese are closely hemmed in, even the secret exits through some blocks being closed against them. The Asiatics take the quarantine stoically. They had warnings of what was coming, and many left the district before the arrival of the police. The proportion of those who fled was small, however, and there are thousands behind the lines.

All whites in Chinatown were allowed to pass out, but persons outside the lines are not let inside.

10. San Francisco Quarantine. May 30, 1900.

## OFFICIAL REPORT UPON THE PLAGUE IN SAN FRANCISCO

WASHINGTON, April 9.—An explicit statement giving the exact conditions regarding bubonic plague in San Francisco has been prepared for the Official Public Health Bulletin. A table is given showing that there were ten deaths from bubonic plague in San Francisco between January 1 and March 15.

Continuing, the statement says: "Of the cases, those reported in February, six cases and deaths between February 1 and 12 were reported by a special commission appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury to examine into the plague situation in San Francisco. This commission consisted of Prof. Simon Flexner, of the University of Pennsylvania, chairman; Prof. F. G. Novy, of the University of Michigan, and Prof. L. S. Barker, of the University of Chicago, recorder."

"Plague has been reported in San Francisco officially in the public health reports since March 6, 1900, thirty-two cases (all fatal) having been reported and published in previous numbers of the public health reports, and the facts were reported in the annual report of the Secretary of the Treasury, dated December 4, 1900."

"While the correctness of the diagnosis has never been doubted by the Bureau of the Department it was deemed advisable to summon an independent board of experts, composed as above mentioned. On the completion of their labors, the results of their investigations, as outlined above, were immediately communicated by them to the Governor of California and the Mayor and representatives of the business interests of San Francisco, and full copies of the report subsequently furnished. Coincident with the receipt of the report of the commission at the Bureau, a committee representing the business interests of San Francisco and the Mayor and the Governor of California arrived in Washington, and a conference was held between this committee and the Secretary of the Treasury and Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service, in which conference all the facts were discussed and a written agreement made for harmonious action in suppressing the disease under the advice of Surgeon J. H. White, who is on the ground."

"On the return of this committee to San Francisco, Surgeon White wired, on March 22, that they had agreed to raise funds for immediate work as follows: Disinfect all infected houses, provide hospitals for suspects, detention houses and morgues; the general disinfection of Chinatown, with betterment of light and air space. Subsequent telegrams show that the work is being organized."

"The disease has been confined almost exclusively to the Chinese and an examination of the mortality records of the latter for the past four years shows that there has been no time during that period when it has increased to such an extent as to, in itself, cause alarm."

"The prevailing type, so far as known, is of the bubonic form, which, according to M. de Brun, is of a mildly contagious character, but it is understood, however soon these cases may give rise to cases of a graver and more contagious form of the disease, which emphasizes the necessity of prompt and thorough measures to eradicate every form of the disease."

"The steady onward march of bubonic plague into ports of the world where it never existed before and where experts believed it could not thrive has been noted in nearly every weekly issue of the Public Health Bulletin for the last two years. News has come within the last day or two that the plague has at last invaded Australia. It was introduced there from South Africa, according to an official report to the German Government. One fatal case of the disease appeared at Sydney, New South Wales, on a ship that went there to embark fresh Australian troops for the British army in South Africa. Two cases also occurred near Brisbane. The plague continues to spread in Cape Colony, South Africa."

The San Francisco Call. BOARD OF HEALTH CONFESSES TO A FAMOUS EXPERT THAT THERE IS NO BUBONIC PLAGUE IN THIS CITY

13. The San Francisco Call. May 29th, 1900.

1. On the wharves, San Francisco, 1900. Henry Peabody Collection. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. 2. Mores DM, Fauo AS. The Forgotten Forefather: Joseph James Kinyoun and the Founding of the National Institutes of Health. mBio. 2012;3(4):e00139-12. doi:10.1128/mBio.00139-12. 3. Plague Commissioners, photograph taken during commissioner "bureau" meeting on February 4, 1901. Standing from left: Lewellys Barker, Frederick Novy; sitting Simon Flexner. [From Frederick G. Novy Papers, Box 4. Located at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Faculty History Project. <http://um2017.org/faculty-history/faculty/frederick-g-novy>.] 4. University of Michigan Faculty History Project. <http://um2017.org/faculty-history/faculty/frederick-g-novy>. 5. Page from Novy's laboratory notebook. The methylene blue stain performed on the fluid aspirated from the spleen of the deceased patient, Wong Chi Lin, on February 7, shows characteristic bipolar staining bacteria. He incubated the fluid in agar media on February 7, and on February 9, cultures yielded colonies of Bacillus pestis. On February 9, he inoculated a test animal (guinea pig) with the bacteria isolated from pure culture, as well as fluid from the spleen. The guinea pig died on February 13. An aspirate of the guinea pig spleen yielded B. pestis on stain, and an agar streak yielded a pure culture, thereby satisfying Koch's postulates. [From Frederick G. Novy Papers, Box 4. Located at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.] 6A. Rat Dissection: National Library of Medicine, History of Medicine Images Collection. 6B. Hiding the Sick. From the San Francisco Chronicle Archive circa 1900. 8A. San Francisco Quarantine. May 30 from San Francisco Chronicle Archive. 8B. San Francisco's Chinatown with barbed wire fences circa 1900. The Library of Congress American Memory Image Archive. 9. "Board of Health Confesses to Favorite Expert That There Is No Bubonic Plague in This City." The San Francisco Call. (San Francisco [Calif.]). 29 May 1900. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1900-05-29/ed-1/seq-1/>. 10. The Pacific commercial advertiser. (Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands), 17 April 1901. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047084/1901-04-17/ed-1/seq-1/>.

