

# The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom.  
Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Fifty-Three

## Stopping Yellow Fever

### LESSON IDEA

To continue our study of the construction of the Panama Canal, showing that courage and determination were essential to success.

### PREPARATION

Prepare a list of examples, showing where today's bureaucrats have slowed down progress on important projects — just as the Canal Commission did on the Canal's construction.

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**J**OHAN F. WALLACE and his wife arrived in Panama in June, 1904, bringing with them several trunks and suitcases, and two shiny metal caskets. Wallace had been appointed Chief of Engineers for the construction of the Panama Canal. He knew that the biggest dangers he would face were malaria and yellow fever, which had claimed the lives of some 20,000 laborers during the twenty years that the French spent working in Panama. So he decided that if the project did cost him and his wife their lives, at least they would have the coffins handy.

Little did Wallace realize that his biggest obstacle would not be the jungles or swamps of Panama, or the diseases that were bred there, but rather the bungling and nit-picking of bureaucrats in Washington, who thought they could direct the construction of the Panama Canal from the security of their offices over 2,000 miles away.

Soon after the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty had been signed between the United States and the new Republic of Panama, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed an Isthmian Canal Commission to oversee construction of the canal. The commissioners promptly left for Panama on a "fact-finding" tour.

But after a quick trip across the Isthmus, just to see what they thought needed to be done, they immediately returned to Washington. The real work would be left to Wallace, as Chief of Engineers, and to Colonel William Gorgas, who was placed in charge of sanitation.

When Wallace arrived in Panama, the first task that faced him was providing accommodations for the thousands of laborers who would be working on the canal, and for the hundreds of clerks who would be needed to keep track of the supplies, requisitions, and paperwork for the mammoth project. There was no lack of buildings to house the men, for the French had left literally hundreds of empty offices, homes, warehouses, and hospitals stretching from one coast to the other. However, years of neglect, combined with the ravages of a hot, wet climate, had taken their toll. Even after they were cleaned and repaired, living quarters were far from luxurious.

**T**YPICAL OF THE facilities was the Ancon Hospital at the Pacific port of La Boca, which was converted into a barracks for office workers. There were thirty iron beds, left by the French, ranged along the walls; one straight-backed chair; one kerosene lamp; two washstands; and no mirrors. Combined with these primitive conditions were some primitive dangers, as one young clerk described in these words:

*We lived in constant dread of the scorpion, who seems to have a penchant for buildings*

