

## Mary Mallon: First Asymptomatic Carrier of Typhoid Fever

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Mary Mallon (1869–1938), dubbed by the tabloids of the day as “Typhoid Mary,” was an Irish cook who immigrated to New York from Northern Ireland as a teenager, and was the first person in the United States identified as an asymptomatic carrier of the disease.



Mary Mallon, photographed in Riverside Hospital, North Brother Island, New York, where she was forcibly quarantined as a carrier of typhoid fever in 1907 for three years, and then again from 1915 until her death in 1938.

[WIKIMEDIA, CREATIVE COMMONS]

By reading various newspaper reports of the day, she decried this label, and claimed she felt she was being treated “like a leper,” forced into quarantine on North Brother Island in the East River without due process. Lab tests showed the presence of the pathogen in samples; however, she exhibited no symptoms of the disease.

A young Irish lawyer, E.F. O’Neill, took up her case, only to lose in the New York State Supreme Court, when the judges weighed individual liberties versus the safety of the public.

However, she was released after three years on the island when she agreed to never work as a cook again and report to

the state health department every three months. She promptly disappeared, resuming her job as cook in various capacities, and infecting more people. When she was found by happenstance, as a result of an infectious outbreak of typhoid fever at a hospital for women, she was forced back into quarantine on North Brother Island. Here she lived out the remainder of her days. Eventually, Mallon was employed as a helper in the island’s hospital laboratory, but was not allowed to cook or share meals with anyone.

For most of her quarantine, Mallon lived in a cottage on the island with a dog, a fox terrier, as her only companion. One could speculate that the canine was the first therapy dog.

The late **Dr. Stanley M. Aronson’s** article, “The Civil Rights of Mary Mallon,” published in 1995 in the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* on the following pages, relates in great detail the story of Mallon and the sanitary engineer who was instrumental



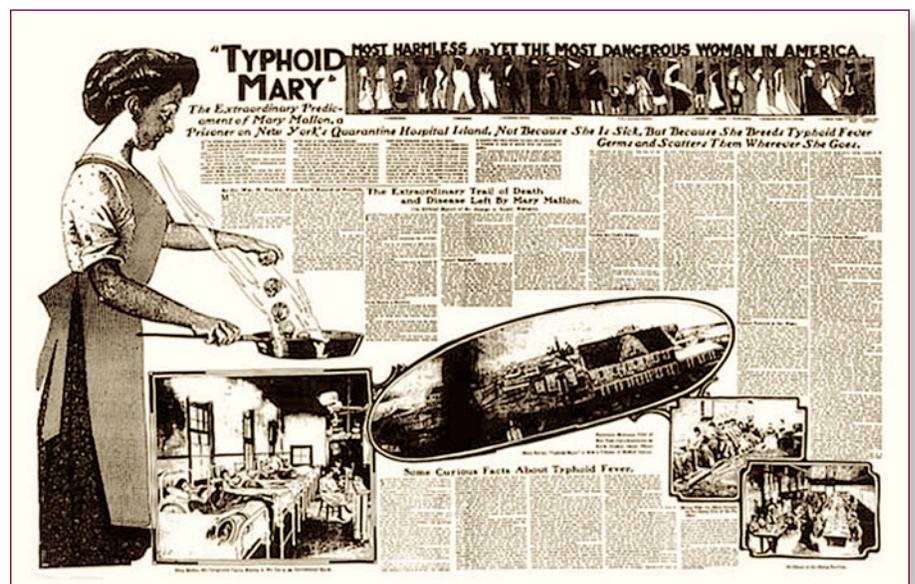
Photograph of the hospital facility on North Brother Island in 1937. [THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS]



For most of her quarantine, Mary Mallon lived in this cottage on North Brother Island.

[NEW YORK CITY MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES]

in tracking down the source of the outbreaks, **Dr. George A. Soper.** ❖



Cover of the June 20, 1909 issue of The New York American. [WIKIMEDIA, CREATIVE COMMONS]