



BROOKLYN  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY



## TAKING CARE OF BROOKLYN STORIES OF SICKNESS AND HEALTH

### How have past Brooklynites cared for their health – and the health of others?

Everyone gets sick. Visiting the doctor, tending to ill loved ones, struggling to afford care, or advocating for equitable services are part of the everyday fabric of our lives. In this groundbreaking project, Brooklyn Historical Society explores how centuries of Brooklynites have experienced and understood sickness and health. Through the experiences of everyday Brooklynites giving, receiving, demanding, and being denied health care, *Taking Care of Brooklyn* shows us that sickness is as much a social experience as a biological one.

The project will culminate in an exhibition opening in May 2019 and will feature an ongoing series of public, educational, and podcast programming.

*Taking Care of Brooklyn* tells stories about changing beliefs, stereotypes and practices; about families and caregivers, activists and experts; about the building of city infrastructure; and about the complicated role of government in people's private lives. It is a project about public health and understandings of disease – but so much more. Visitors will leave BHS with an expanded understanding of the meaning of “sickness” and “health,” both in the past and in their lives today.

***Taking Care of Brooklyn* tells the stories of ordinary people, communities, industries, and institutions who have played an important role in promoting the health of Brooklynites, including:**

- Physicians, nurses, & medical professionals – including Susan McKinney Steward, the first African-American woman to earn a medical degree in New York
- Families, friends, & neighbors – including Gabriel Furman, an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Brooklynite who assiduously tracked the spread of Yellow Fever and Cholera in early Brooklyn
- Activists & community groups – including the Brooklyn Congress of Racial Equality, an influential civil-rights era organization
- Industries like Pfizer, who established Brooklyn as a global center of pharmaceutical production and innovation
- Charities, hospitals, & other institutions – including the Brooklyn Italian Settlement, who arranged summer camps for tubercular children outside of the city



AIDS medicine bottles, circa 1990s; Brooklyn Historical Society.



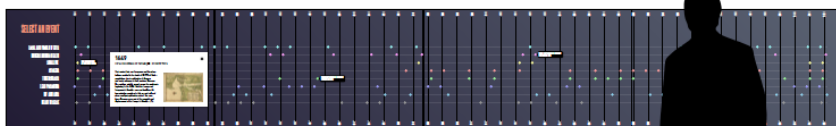
Infant Mortality Spot Map 1929-31 Borough of Brooklyn.



Dr. Susan Smith McKinney Steward, (seen here in 1921) was the first black woman doctor in New York State. From T.G. Steward, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry*.

## Project Highlights

- An **introductory touchscreen timeline wall** uses images, dates, and text to introduce audiences to rich and untold stories of sickness and wellness in Brooklyn.
- An **installation reveals to visitors that the anti-vaccination movement originated in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Brooklyn**. Featuring historical vaccine paraphernalia and an interactive telling the stories of Brooklynites who resisted vaccination.
- A **digital interactive brings to life an 1832 diary** written by Brooklynite and amateur epidemiologist Gabriel Furman. Visitors can read about Furman's day-by-day tracking of the spread of Cholera in Brooklyn, and learn how Furman sought to prevent contracting the disease by taking opium – prompting an addiction that eventually ended his life.
- **Public health posters in many languages** reveal the changing nature of health education in Brooklyn. Reproductions of 1980s HIV/AIDS coloring and comic books, demonstrating HIV/AIDS outreach attempts reaching different age groups within the diverse neighborhoods of Brooklyn.
- At an **oral history listening station**, visitors can hear the voices of a diverse group of Brooklynites who struggled with, succumbed to, survived, and agitated against HIV/AIDS.
- An ongoing **roster of public programs and podcast episodes** from BHS's award-winning Flatbush + Main podcast dedicated to the history of public health and epidemics in Brooklyn's past, present, and future.



Mock-up of exhibition interactive timeline.



Women packing Squibb Mineral Oil, circa 1960, V1973.5.784; Brooklyn Historical Society.

## Project Support & Contacts

*This project is made possible, in part, by*



**BROOKLYN BOROUGH  
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## Curriculum and Educational Outreach

In conjunction with *Taking Care of Brooklyn*, BHS is developing a web-based curriculum on the history of public health in Brooklyn. BHS has developed a roster of acclaimed and extensively-used curricula in dialogue with STEM themes. *Taking Care of Brooklyn* offers new opportunities to delve into the history of science and public health, with a special focus on grades 4–12, and to collaborate with health education programs at the elementary, middle, and high school level.