



The Colony: The Harrowing True Story of the Exiles of Molokai

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In the bestselling tradition of *In the Heart of the Sea*, *The Colony*, “an impressively researched” (*Rocky Mountain News*) account of the history of America’s only leper colony located on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, is “an utterly engrossing look at a heartbreaking chapter” (*Booklist*) in American history and a moving tale of the extraordinary people who endured it.

Beginning in 1866 and continuing for over a century, more than eight thousand people suspected of having leprosy were forcibly exiled to the Hawaiian island of Molokai -- the longest and deadliest instance of medical segregation in American history. Torn from their homes and families, these men, women, and children were loaded into shipboard cattle stalls and abandoned in a lawless place where brutality held sway. Many did not have leprosy, and many who did were not contagious, yet all were ensnared in a shared nightmare.

Here, for the first time, John Tayman reveals the complete history of the Molokai settlement and its unforgettable inhabitants. It's an epic of ruthless manhunts, thrilling escapes, bizarre medical experiments, and tragic, irreversible error. Carefully researched and masterfully told, *The Colony* is a searing tale of individual bravery and extraordinary survival, and stands as a testament to the power of faith, compassion, and the human spirit.

The Colony: The Harrowing True Story of the Exiles of Molokai Details

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Bettie? says

home audio. I wonder if the author is more used to being a down market tabloid hack because this sure reads that way. For such a tragic, heart-wrenching piece of history I would have preferred a sober, levelled approach.

Publisher's Summary

*In the best-selling tradition of *In the Heart of the Sea*, *The Colony* reveals the untold history of the infamous American leprosy colony on Molokai and of the extraordinary people who struggled to survive under the most horrific circumstances.*

In 1866, 12 men and women and one small child were forced aboard a leaky schooner and cast away to a natural prison on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. Two weeks later, a dozen others were exiled, and then 40 more, and then 100 more. Tracked by bounty hunters and torn screaming from their families, the luckless were loaded into shipboard cattle stalls and abandoned in a lawless place where brutality held sway. Many did not have leprosy, and most of those who did were not contagious, yet all were caught in a shared nightmare. The colony had little food, little medicine, and very little hope. Exile continued for more than a century, the longest and deadliest instance of medical segregation in American history. Nearly 9,000 people were banished to the colony, trapped by pounding surf and armed guards and the highest sea cliffs in the world. Twenty-eight live there still.

John Tayman tells the fantastic saga of this horrible and hopeful place, at one time the most famous community in the world, and of the individuals involved. The narrative is peopled by presidents and kings, cruel lawmen and pioneering doctors, and brave souls who literally gave their lives to help. A stunning cast includes the martyred Father Damien, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, Mark Twain, Teddy Roosevelt, John Wayne, and more. The result is a searing tale of survival and bravery, and a testament to the power of faith, compassion, and heroism.

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

A sad chapter in American history that needs to be studied so it is not repeated.

Jeff Jellels says

Unsettling and tragic, Tayman uncovers the history of the exiles of Molokai

John Tayman's *The Colony* recounts the history of the exiles of Molokai -- people castaway to a remote shore in the Hawaiian islands after they became stricken with the staggeringly painful and destructive disease of leprosy. The text is meticulously researched, beginning with the founding of the colony in 1866, and then covering more than 150 years as the book traces the fate of the community and its residents into the early years of the 21st century. Staggering in terms of time and the terrible neglect that sickened individuals suffered generation after generation, *The Colony* is heart-wrenching and tragic -- but it also conveys a sense

of enduring determination by those affected by the disease to stubbornly develop a community despite abandonment and isolation and to live with basic human dignities.

Tayman is adept not just at conveying facts, but personalities, paying particular attention to persons who loom large over the colony's history, such as caregivers Father Damien de Veuster and Mother Marianne Cope. And, while I am partial to the more historical elements of the book, as the narrative enters modern times, Tayman is able to shift from secondary sources to first person interviews with a handful of the surviving members of the Molokai colony. It is here that the emotional impact of this practiced ostracism punches the reader as heavy as a fist. Leprosy, for example, not only disfigures and maims, but it also causes blindness, the drugs used to treat the disease may lead to deafness, and the skin becomes insensitive and unfeeling. Tayman describes the last days of Stanley Stein, once a smart and influential newspaper publisher:

"A visit to see Stanley during the last months of his life was nearly unbearable," Dr. Brand wrote. "Unable to see, unable to hear, unable to feel, he would wake up disorientated. He would stretch out his hand and not know what he was touching, and speak without knowing whether anyone heard or answered. Once I found him sitting in a chair muttering to himself in monotone, 'I don't know where I am. Is someone in the room with me? I don't know who you are, and my thoughts go round and round. I cannot think new thoughts.'"

Just as poignant, but in a very different way, is the remarks of Olivia Breitha, exiled to the Molokai colony as a young girl, and forcibly isolated from touching her "healthy" family and friends. Olivia eventually receives treatments for her disease, which goes into remission, and she is able to travel. Visiting the great redwoods of California she reaches out her hand to stroke one of the majestic tree's dark, wrinkled, ageless skin. Taymon recounts, *"She spoke to the tree softly. 'Remember.' Olivia whispered, 'I've touched you.'"*

I've added this book to my *disaster bookshelf*, and it's worth a look by anyone in the emergency management or public health fields. While leprosy may now be treatable, it offers a potentially unsettling precedent for future epidemics. Fear and lack of understanding are powerful policy agents, and it is not inconceivable that the outbreak of a new contagion would provoke a similar reaction even in today's (supposedly) more enlightened world.

Taymon's chapter (entitled Civic Duty) on John Early is worth reading. Diagnosed with leprosy (and at one point walled into his home by authorities to ostensibly prevent the spread of the disease), Early was confined to a poorly funded and maintained leper colony in Louisiana ... from which he promptly escaped ... many times. Early toured the country, rode subways in New York City, took in Broadway shows, and crashed Congressional committee meetings in Washington, DC to draw attention to the plight of lepers and the poorly funded institution in Louisiana. As he told the story of his travels to reporters and legislators, he also promptly created a bit of a public panic as he (at least in the public's mind) spread the leprosy bacterium willy-nilly across the country. Of course, in this case, the reality was that leprosy is far from easily transmitted ... but the implication for emergency managers is quite troubling. Might not a single person, contaminated with a similarly suspect pathogen, employ a similar methodology and cause if not a public health emergency, a national panic? And if that were to happen, would we react any better (and more humanely) than the public health officials of a century-and-a-half ago?

Charlotte says

An incredible book. I wish I could have read the book before we visited Kalawao in 1999. I would like to revisit again, now with a different and deeper understanding of the loneliness, pain and suffering that these people went through most of their lives. Children torn from their families, husbands and wife sent away, banished to this remote place, not knowing if they would ever see their loved ones again. Not knowing what

was happening to them.

John Tayman has really done a fantastic job putting together this book from letters, notes and historical facts. It is indeed a must read.

Nicholas says

This is the story of the leper colony (to use the phrasing of the time) at Moloka'i: a narrow peninsula on the northern coast of a pretty tiny Hawaiian island, separated from the rest of its population by a sheer cliff designed to protect everyone else from what was presumed to be a deadly, infectious disease. The colony was founded in the 1860s and while the state of Hawai'i ceased exiling people infected with Hansen's disease in the mid-twentieth century, some of those who were originally sent there continue to live in the tiny town of Kalaupapa. It's a tale of fear, prejudice, resilience, and public health gone wrong, as well as a number of people who devoted their lives to helping the afflicted (two of whom have now been canonized as saints). At times it was riveting, especially when Tayman has detailed evidence about the lives of the exiles both before and after they were banished to Moloka'i. Occasionally Tayman does dwell a little too lengthily on the evidence, like he just couldn't bear to part with any fact at all, but on the whole he's judicious about which stories to tell and when one tale can stand in for the whole.

Chris Demer says

This history of the leper colony on Molokai is truly a fascinating read!

Meticulously researched, the historical aspects are backed by mountains of documentation. However, the book reads more like a novel. Tayman includes life stories of several key players, including Father Damien, Mother Marianne, numerous directors and physicians who served the colony, (both good-hearted and greedy) several politicians and Board of Health members and several patients who spent years in exile. He draws information from interviews with elderly survivors as well as memoirs, articles, letters, minutes of meetings, etc. The story is tragic. The conception of leprosy as being extremely contagious, the horrendous results of untreated leprosy, ignorance and fear converged in the plan to exile those diagnosed to an isolated shelf of land on the Hawaiian Island of Molokai. The "Settlement" began in the 1860s as old and young, men and women, parents and children and husbands and wives were diagnosed (not infrequently in error) and torn from their families to live the remainder of their lives in exile from all they held dear. In the early years, there was minimal funding, and unbelievably, the exiled lepers were expected to grow their own food and become a self-sustaining colony!

They lived in crowded, poorly constructed cabins, in the damp and cold and many were severely malnourished. Medical care was minimal or absent and in any case, there was no real treatment. Eventually, through the works of Father Damien, a Belgian priest who was sent (willingly) to the island to care for their souls, and Mother Marianne and her small group of sisters, as well as some well-meaning managers and the efforts and pleadings of the "inmates" themselves, the situation gradually improved.

Eventually as treatments became available a small hospital was constructed. Improved availability of nourishing food the care improved the situation. But the fact remained that they were virtual prisoners for life, unable to return to their families ever!

Through the years, the members of the colony did create an alternative universe to some degree. Forming social groups, forming families (although their children were taken from them!) and caring for each other. When curative treatment finally became available in the form of Sulfone drugs in the early 1950s, many

chose not to leave Molokai, having been abandoned by their families and made a new home of sorts.

In total, over 8000 people were exiled to Molokai over the century it was in operation. Most died there. Some when permitted, moved back to Honolulu where there was a hospital to care for them.

The narrative is sad, tragic and depressing- but also uplifting, a story of unbelievable bravery and survival.

Highly recommended!!

leslie hamod says

DEATH OF THE KING OF THE LEPERS

More than eight thousands people were taken into exile at Molokai. For over one hundred and fifty years, people with symptoms were simply taken from families, brought to the leper colony to live entire lives here. This is the true history. What we did to our own people out of ignorance and fear.

The penal colony was unofficially run by one Father Damian. He did officially begin an orphanage for those children sent unaccompanied and afraid. He did not have the disease, but did die of it after many years of self sacrifice and care for this tender and needy population. William Ragsdale became his helper. This research has been written in such a way as to become a most fascinating read. This forced segregation finally ended in 1966, when the U.S.government realized the worth of the land and created the now existing leprosy hospital in Atlanta Georgia. No person was compensated. Many never had the disease. Most never saw it heard from family again. A true account that reads like a novel. Long read, make time! Do not miss this!

Preeti says

I'd been wanting to read this book ever since I first heard about it after reading Moloka'i by Alan Brennert a few years ago. In preparation for a trip to Hawaii, I figured this was a good time to check it out.

It tells the story of Hansen's disease (or leprosy, as it used to be called, and still is in many parts of the world) and its emergence in Hawaii, and the subsequent exile of sufferers to a remote peninsula on the island of Moloka'i. There is a large focus on the history, and particularly on the administration and management of the settlement throughout time. Of course, the residents of Kalaupapa (the town on Moloka'i) are also described throughout the book, but it didn't seem as if the main focus was on them.

The history is completely infuriating and certainly depressing, as we learn what people are capable of and do to other people. I guess I can say I'm not surprised by it, though I did have to put the book down a couple times and back away for a bit. The strength of the residents throughout the indignities they suffer is something to look up to. I don't know if I could be that strong.

I think this is an important book to read if you are interested in this disease or even the history of reactions to medical issues. But it should be noted that there has been controversy in reaction to its publication. The last part of the book focuses on a few residents of Kalaupapa who are (or were?) still alive when Tayman was writing it. He interviewed a few of them extensively and even included quotes from some of their own books and writings within this book. However, apparently they objected to how they were portrayed and have accused the author of plagiarism as well. In addition, some Hawaiian historians have said that there are

several inaccuracies and liberties taken with many of the facts (dates, spellings, etc.) and stories (sensationalism) presented in the book. Because of these reasons, the book is not sold at Kalaupapa National Historical Park.

Maui News has an extensive article on this that is worth reading. This NYT article also covers the issue.

I'm not sure how to react to those things. In my reading, I felt that the author was certainly sensitive to the residents' plight and suffering. I don't feel as if he patronized or condescended to them. Then again, I don't have the disease and I haven't lived through what they have.

It seems that there are a lot more critiques these days of these kinds of sweeping historical books. History is a tough thing to write about - there are always many sides of the story, even when certain things are fact. And of course, you can only base it on what records survive, in addition to fallible human memory. Not to mention the adage, history is written by the winners.

The other thing that was part of the controversy was the residents objecting to being called lepers, because of the negative connotations associated with the term. However, I was recently reading something (which I'll have to try and dig up and update this review for the source) in which someone who had suffered from the disease said that they wanted to, in effect, take back the word and not distance themselves from it, *because* of its history and the need to own it. So even that's difficult, as, of course, different people will have different reactions.

I should also note here that Hansen's disease, leprosy, is completely curable now. However, there are still many people suffering in places like South and Southeast Asia, and parts of Africa, because of lack of infrastructure and - I would guess - money to help eradicate it. And the stigma still exists which means leper colonies do as well, sadly. All of this for a disease that is very noncontagious, is curable, and to which 95% of the world's population is immune.

We humans are a fantastic bunch, aren't we?

Edward Rathke says

I think the issue with this book has to do with focus. The information is all good and interesting, and it tells a fascinating and depressing story about a century of ineffective medical treatment and brutal callousness for those suffering.

So the book gives a lot of information, which is great. But it's a bit dry and boring after a while, and this has to do with the structure of the book. It's difficult to capture something like this, since there are few consistent characters, and absolutely no consistent characters from beginning to end, given that humans don't live over 100 years. Especially when they have leprosy. But in telling the story of the colony, I think Tayman gets overwhelmed by the amount of information. He mentions in the foreword how this book comes out of 8,000 pages of primary sources. It gives this a somewhat scattershot feeling.

I think the book would work better, too, if he dug more into why Hawaiian leadership was so casually cruel. These are some of the characters that we'd like to know more about, because they shaped this 100 year tragedy. And while many of them are named, they slip out of the narrative rather quickly.

And then there are the inhabitants of the colony. This is a harder criticism to give because how do you tell the story of thousands when most of them died very quickly? So a lot of the conditions get summarized and

captured in a general way, which lessens the impact of hearing about the sex slave issue that developed there, for example.

But, yeah, it's an admirable effort, but the book itself just isn't super great to read. Interesting, though.

David says

I would have liked to read this book in connection with a visit to Molokai. Instead, I started it while on the island of Maui, from where you can look across the open seas to Molokai. Perhaps that "distant view" was more symbolic of this isolation of the leper colony which was located on the island's isolated northern peninsula from 1866 to 1969.

The author presents a sweeping history both of "Hansen's disease" (the modern designation) and its physical impacts, the creation and evolution of the colony in Hawaii, and the lives of those who suffered in exile. Drawing from a wide array of public and personal records, he tracks the changes in the settlement and the challenges of those consigned to live out their bleak existence there.

Tayman points out the great irony of leprosy: it's not a particularly contagious disease, and only a small percentage of the total population is even genetically susceptible to it. But fear and misunderstanding (including misinterpretation of related Old Testament injunctions) resulted in a terrible toll on those who were sent to Kalaupapa.

But in the midst of the suffering, we're given insight into great humanity and dignity. The colony lifted itself from chaos and disorder into a mutually-supportive society. There were men like Mormon Jonathan Napela (not a leper, but a "kekua" (non-leper)) who exiled himself to the colony when his wife was diagnosed and sentenced, eventually contracting the disease and dying a few weeks before his wife. Or Father Damien, the Belgian Catholic priest who dedicated his life to relief and service in the colony and also died of leprosy.

This was a fascinating, terrifying, and heart-warming book. It will give you a great appreciation for the blessings of health, family, unselfishness, and modern science.

Sam says

This is seriously a fantastic book. I consider myself a pretty educated person, not brilliant or anything, but when it comes to American history, there's not a lot that I haven't at least *heard* about. Until I started doing research on Hawaii (I'm writing a book of my own that takes place there) did I discover this hidden piece of history: the leper colony of Molokai.

John Tayman tells this story vividly and with more detail than any historian could ever ask for. The book itself is filled with dates and names, so much so it can be overwhelming. He tells not just the story of one person experiencing leprosy in one of the most horrible prisons ever constructed. Tayman tells the story of the prison itself, covering its entire hundred year history.

And yet, the book is extremely read-able and entertaining. It's also uplifting and endearing, because the people sent to Molokai experienced one of the worst events to happen in modern history and yet, for the most part, pull through it, finding ways to cope and even find love. Not everyone is so lucky, but most of the people sent to the colony ended up staying there for life, even if their disease was eventually cured. The

prison became their home, a home where no one would judge them for their condition and no one thought less of them.

Though this book is about an experience so horrible I cannot even begin to do it justice, some of the experiences Tayman has uncovered are truly breathtakingly beautiful. There's a line in the book about how no one can really say they have found joy in life unless they have suffered, and that the exiles of Molokai understand joy better than anyone in human history. For every story of someone gone mad on the island and driven to their death by having their flesh ravaged by the disease, there is a story of amazing compassion (such as Father Damian, the priest who brought them hope) or a story of two people finding love in one another.

This book should also be required reading for anyone in the medical field, as one of its biggest themes is the ethical treatment of unknown and possibly dangerous disease. The doctors who invented the colony of Molokai were acting in the best interest of people as a whole (or their own political careers), but not for the patients they sent there. Anyone interested in history, in medicine, or just wanting a lesser-known story should pick up this book at once. Truly enthralling, emotionally moving, and downright heartbreaking.

Jennifer says

On the surface, this book is about some people, who happened to contract Hansen's disease (leprosy) and how they were taken forcibly from their families and exiled. The deeper story is our human response to physical illness. Leprosy, prior to the 1950's was a terrible, disfiguring and painful disease. Although it is not highly contagious in most forms, the fear surrounding it is both literally and figuratively Biblical. It is both fascinating and disturbing to read about the level of fear and disgust that continues regarding this disease even today when the disease is curable. The chapter that deals with WWII and Japanese internment was interesting. The compassion that the exiles had for the Japanese was very clear in quotes and histories of the time.

I was inspired by the good and brave men and women who gave their lives, including risking contracting Hansen's disease, to serving and helping the exiles of Molokai. I was inspired by the exiles themselves, by their ability to create a new life and by their courage in truly terrible circumstances. I cheered for the few who were brave enough to stand up for what was right, even to the point of losing their jobs. The book is well researched with exhaustive notes and the narrative never lags.

"The more we suffer, the more strength we have. The more suffering, the closer we are to one another. Life is that way. If you haven't suffered, then you don't know what joy is. The others may know something about joy, but those who have gone through hell and high water, I think they feel the joy deeper." resident of Kalaupapa, Molokai

Lisa Vegan says

I read this because I recently read and adored the novel Moloka'i by Alan Brennert and wanted to learn more about Moloka'i by reading a non-fiction account. I nearly gave this book 5 stars (it's a definite 4 ½ star book) because it does what it does so impressively. but the fact is I felt as though I got a better feeling of what leprosy was like and how people with the disease were treated from the novel, even though this book covers so much more ground. I was definitely fascinated by some of the historical events.

In this book, I was particularly interested in the years that corresponded to the years covered in Moloka'i. This is a chronological account of Hansen's Disease and the Molokai colony but also covers Hansen's Disease as it was treated at Carville medical facility and other locations too.

Reading this was heartbreaking and infuriating regarding what happened in this time and place, and so much of it was tragic and unnecessary. This non-fiction account was exceedingly well written in an interesting manner; at times it read like fiction; the real people and events are fascinating. There were so many people and incidents covered, so much history, and I enjoyed that, though I can see others wanting less or wanting it organized differently. But, it worked for me as it is.

I enjoyed the included photographs of different scenes of the colony settlement in different years and some of the mentioned people.

As I read I thought of AIDS, because it's another disease people were so scared of that its sufferers were ostracized for a time. It turns out the account in this book actually goes up to the AIDS era and it is mentioned.

At the end of the book there is a lengthy bibliography. There are also extensive notes (I did read most though the book can be enjoyed and understood without them) and there is also a useful index. The book is divided into four parts, each with their own chapters that show the colony's population at the time, and they tell a lot of what happened from 1789??? to about 2003 in chronological order.

Anyone interested in the history of Hansen's Disease, the history of medicine, quarantining the ill, Hawaiian and U.S. history, and ill or isolated or ostracized people, are likely to find this book interesting. I have more "leprosy" books on my to-read shelf because I have been interested in this disease since I was nine years old. But, for readers who have time to read only one book and who can enjoy historical fiction novels, I'd recommend Moloka'i by Alan Brennert. If readers really want to read non-fiction history about the subject, this book seems to me to be a good choice.

Amy says

The story of leprosy or Hansen's Disease in the Hawaiian islands is emotional and intense. The story unfolds violently between the natives of the islands and the "white man" who think that leprosy poses a huge threat to the population. Little is known about the disease at the beginning and ignorance plays a great part in the forced exile, separation of families and insufficient healthcare that follows these people to a barren strip of land on the north shore of the Molokai. The victims' perseverance and a few doctors' devotion pave the way to cures and a better way of life but not before death, hardship and isolation take their toll on thousands. An emotional read that made me question authority's good intentions and the validity of a few people ruling over many. On of the best non-fiction books I've read recently.

Nikki says

As a child living in Hawaii (Oahu) in 1969, I remember my parents flying to the Leper Colony on the island of Molokai to attend the wedding of a physician working there. I have been interested in the disease and the segregation of their population to such a remote area. I found the book extraordinarily enlightening. And, in retrospect, heartbreaking to know what these people lived through and with, having a disease that is so easily treatable now.

J.S. says

Leprosy isn't something we think about anymore unless we're reading the Bible, and although the word in scripture is used rather broadly, a stigma has attached to those suffering from Hansen's Disease. John Tayman explains that the skin disease usually affects the colder parts of the body – particularly the hands, feet, ears, and nose – destroying the underlying tissue. Those afflicted suffer a loss of feeling and sometimes a curling in of the fingers or collapse of the nose often resulting in horrific disfigurement. Because the tissue of the eyes is cooler it can destroy eyesight, so it's understandable why people were so fearful of the disease. But not knowing what caused it (bacteria) or how it was spread (it is contagious only for those who are genetically susceptible) led to policies of exile, and Kalaupapa on Molokai is one of the most famous colonies.

A rocky and windswept peninsula on the north coast of Molokai was chosen because escape was difficult. The seas were rough and cliffs thousands of feet tall separated it from the rest of the island. The land was purchased cheap and the earliest exiles were often dropped in the surf and told to swim for shore. A lawlessness pervaded the settlement and given the appearance of some of the exiles, it seemed a hellish place to those sent there and any who saw it. Tayman describes the history of the colony from the early days until the early 2000s. He tells the stories of many who were sent there over the years as well as the efforts of some to alleviate the suffering such as Father Damien, the Catholic priest who eventually shared his flock's fate, and Joseph Dutton, a Civil War soldier who just wanted to do good. A cure for leprosy was found in the late 1940s which can halt or prevent the disease, but cannot reverse the damage already caused, and Tayman sounds a much more hopeful note in his account toward the end.

"The more we suffer, the more strength we have. The more suffering, the closer we are to one another. Life is that way. If you haven't suffered, then you don't know what joy is. The others may know something about joy, but those who have gone through hell and high water, I think they feel the joy deeper."

As much as I enjoy all kinds of histories, I find that those of disease and sickness are often the more human side of history. Toward the end of the book Tayman focuses on four individuals who were exiled in their youth, and he shows them not as 'lepers' but as real people whose ordinary hopes and dreams were interrupted by their disease. I particularly liked the story of Makia who was exiled as a boy and yet earned a college degree after he was cured, in spite of being blind from the disease and not being able to read braille because he didn't have feeling in his fingers. It's a fascinating history told with a very human viewpoint.

Lisa James says

Absolutely STELLAR. Written in sometimes heart crushing details that are hard to read, & hard to believe, this is the comprehensive story of the leper colony that used to be on the island of Molokai, Hawaii, & is now part of the National Park Service. I WISH this book had actually arrived in TIME for me to read it & use it as a reference book for my final research paper on Hansen's Disease/Leprosy in my Microbiology class! That's what I ordered it for. This book is HAUNTING. It's the reminder of what was man's inhumanity to man, the challenges of epidemiology before the advent of modern medicines, the development & establishment of Carville in Louisiana, the first settlement for those with the disease on mainland USA, it's innovations & breakthroughs in the treatment & eradication of the disease, the innovations & advances in surgery to correct the crippling debilitations brought on by the disease.

For anyone that is interested in American history, this is a little known part of it. For anyone that's interested in medicine, this is a fascinating timeline.

Tom says

Pretty interesting book and a somewhat quick read. I came away with a slightly more sympathetic view towards those who created the colony. I by no means think it was appropriate, but after you read that half of Oahu died of small pox, 5000 died of typhoid, 10000 died of various std's, and one year nearly every new born baby died of influenza, it creates more context for the reader. It's not a simple case of people unreasonably thinking a disease could wipe them all out. Actually, that WAS a reasonable thought, as the history of the island showed. It just wasn't reasonable to think THIS disease would wipe them out. Tayman does a good job with that nuance.

My only complaint is that the last 50-100 pages or so focuses on just a few surviving victims and I think I would have preferred a bit of a broader picture, maybe with more of the science behind the newer developments. Tayman did a good job with all the science he chose to tackle so I think he could've delved a little deeper into it.

Katy says

Very interesting. However this book stirred up a lot of emotion in Hawaii because the author apparently was not always historically or factually accurate. Apparently he took a lot of liberties with the story. Very interesting read though.

catzkc says

I had such high hopes for this, as a non-fiction supplement to the excellent historical-fiction book Moloka'i I just read.

Early on the book had promise. John Tayman gives you a lot of details on the establishment and very early years of the colony, which the novel was only able to touch on briefly. I thought I was prepared for the horrors of this place having read the fiction version. I was so wrong. Details of human experimentation (the patients knowledge and/or consent of course not a consideration), and the horrific treatment of those who were dying were just appalling.

Throughout the book there are lots of personal stories - of the colonists, their various caretakers, doctors and overseers. But this is kind of where it ended up bogging down for me. While I like the individual stories, as a whole the book seems to me to be a case of having lots of descriptions of individual trees, but nothing about the forest they're in. I like a closer examination of the social and political culture in my non-fiction.

This book doesn't seem to know what it wants to be. It's not really just a biography of a place - there's too much that takes place elsewhere - like the Leprosy Hospital in Carrville, Louisiana. And though it does cover

the high points, it's not enough to be quite a biography about the Leprosy disease.

In the end, there didn't seem to be any common thread throughout the book that helped pull the story forward and tie all the ends together. Instead it was a boring chronology of the events pertaining to the colony, leprosy treatment and Hawaii. If that's something you like in your non-fiction, then I think you will like this. As for me, it puts me to sleep!
