19th Century Diseases

Abscess; An abscess was a collection of [pus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pus) that has accumulated in a cavity formed by the tissue in which the pus resides on the basis of an [infectious](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infection) process (usually caused by [bacteria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bacterium) or [parasites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parasite)) or other foreign materials (e.g., splinters, bullet wounds, or injecting needles).

Apoplexy: This was used to describe any sudden death that began with a sudden loss of consciousness, especially one in which the victim died within a matter of seconds after losing consciousness. The word "apoplexy" may have been used to describe the symptom of sudden loss of consciousness immediately preceding death and not an actual verified disease process. [Sudden cardiac deaths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudden_cardiac_death), strokes such as ruptured [cerebral aneurysms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerebral_aneurysm), certain ruptured [aortic aneurysms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aortic_aneurysm), and even [heart attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myocardial_infarction) may have been described as apoplexy in the past. It can be used non-medically to mean a state of extreme rage or excitement, especially if it leads to a heart attack or stroke.

Brain Fever: This was a medical condition where a part of the brain becomes inflamed and causes fever-like symptoms. It is usually called meningitis or encephalitis today.

Bright's Disease: The symptoms of this disease were usually severe [back](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Back_pain) pain, phantom [testicular pain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Testicle_pain) in males, elevated blood pressure, [vomiting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vomit) and [fever](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fever) commonly signal an attack. [Edema](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edema), varying in degree from slight puffiness of the face to an accumulation of [fluid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_fluids) sufficient to distend the whole body, and sometimes severely restrict [breathing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breath), was very common. Urine was reduced in quantity, was of dark, smoky or bloody color, and had higher levels of [albumin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albumin). Under the microscope, [blood corpuscles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood_cells) and [urinary casts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urinary_casts) were found in abundance. It was a kidney disease that would be called chronic nephritis, kidney stones or another more specific name today.

Bronchitis: This disease usually came after a person had a cold or influenza. The first symptoms were a cough, which may be dry at first (does not produce [mucus](http://www.webmd.com/hw-popup/mucus)) and after a few days may bring up mucus from the [lungs](http://www.webmd.com/lung/picture-of-the-lungs) (productive cough). The mucus might be clear, yellow, or green. Sometimes, small streaks of [blood](http://www.webmd.com/heart/anatomy-picture-of-blood) were present. A mild fever, usually less than 101° F. A general feeling of tiredness. A sensation of tightness, burning, or dull pain in the chest under the breastbone that usually was worse when breathing deeply or coughing. Whistling noises ([wheezing](http://www.webmd.com/hw-popup/wheezing)) when breathing, especially during physical exertion and hoarseness.

Cholera: This was one of the most dreaded diseases of the era. It was an acute, infectious epidemic. There were different types of cholera, but all were highly contagious, and all had severe symptoms of nausea, vomiting, spasms, chills, and thirst. Cholera was caused by bacillus, often which had contaminated water supplies. In the early 1800s, doctors tried to treat cholera by bleeding, blistering, or cupping, or they suggested that feeding milk to patients would cure the disease. There was a belief that one could catch cholera simply because they were afraid of it. Some people thought that the sun, the moon, comets, or too much oxygen in the atmosphere were the causes of the disease. Others believed that fruits and vegetables caused cholera, and they stopped eating these foods.

However, it was those people who suspected a connection between the arrival of immigrants and cholera epidemics who were actually correct in their thinking. The ships which brought immigrants to America were so filthy and over-crowded that many immigrants suffered from cholera. Because of this, some places required that immigrants pay a "medical tax" before they were allowed to arrive in America, and the tax money received was then used for medical services and cholera treatments. It was not uncommon for local residents to demonstrate when ships carrying immigrants were about to land, for fear that those onboard carried the dreaded disease.

While many infected immigrants were confined to hospitals under quarantine, often quarantines did not prevent the spread of the disease, and in its more malignant forms, such as Asiatic Cholera, the disease was usually fatal. Cholera caused slowing of the blood circulation, and when the skin began to appear bluish and shrunken, death was very near.

Cholera Infantum: Death of a young child from cholera.

Congestion of the Brain: This was a 19th Century term used to describe many conditions including hydrocephalus, stroke, cerebral hemorrhage, meningitis, and sunstroke

Complication of Troubles: This would often be called death by natural causes in an elderly person today.

Diphtheria: A common childhood disease; acute and highly contagious. A thick grey membrane formed in the child's throat, making it difficult for the child to breathe, as well as suffering from fever and severe weakness. Often, the disease weakened the child's heart and he/she died

Dropsy: An old term for the swelling of soft tissues due to the accumulation of excess water.

Dropsy of the Brain: Sometimes called Dropsy in the Brain. This disease could have been Meningitis which is [inflammation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inflammation) of the protective membranes covering the [brain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brain) and [spinal cord](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spinal_cord), known collectively as the [meninges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meninges). It more likely was chronic hyclrocephalus which is an accumulation of enormous quantities of water within the brain, sometimes within its ventricles, at other times upon its surface

Dropsy of the Heart:

Inflammation of the Bowels: The symptoms of this disease were abdominal pain, [vomiting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vomiting), [diarrhea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diarrhea), [rectal bleeding](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rectal_bleeding), [weight loss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weight_loss) and various associated complaints or diseases like [arthritis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthritis), [pyoderma gangrenosum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyoderma_gangrenosum), and [primary sclerosing cholangitis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primary_sclerosing_cholangitis). Today it is often called [Crohn's disease](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crohn%27s_disease) and [ulcerative colitis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulcerative_colitis).

Membrane Croup: this was an inflammatory affection of the larynx or trachea, accompanied by a hoarse, ringing cough and stridulous, difficult breathing; especially when associated with the development of a false membrane in the air passages

Pneumonia: The symptoms of this disease were [Cough](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/tc/coughs-topic-overview), often producing [mucus](http://www.webmd.com/hw-popup/mucus) (sputum) from the [lungs](http://www.webmd.com/lung/picture-of-the-lungs). Mucus may be rusty or green or tinged with blood, f[ever](http://children.webmd.com/tc/fever-age-4-and-older-topic-overview), which may be less common in older adults, shaking, "[teeth](http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/picture-of-the-teeth)-chattering" chills (one time only or many times), fast, often shallow, breathing and the feeling of being short of breath, chest wall pain that is often made worse by coughing or breathing in, fast heartbeat, feeling very tired ([fatigue](http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/weakness-and-fatigue-topic-overview)) or feeling very weak (malaise), n[ausea](http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/digestive-diseases-nausea-vomiting) and vomiting and d[iarrhea](http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/digestive-diseases-diarrhea).

Poliomyelitis: The name for this disease was usually shortened to polio and was A horrible disease that attacked the spinal cord and brain, often leaving any or all of a child's limbs paralyzed. Sadly, a child could simply awaken one morning and discover that he/she had polio. It seemed that only bed rest could offer any help in lessening the effects of the disease.

Quick Consumption: This is called phthisis pulmonalis today. It is a disease which rapidly runs through its course to a fatal termination. Also see consumption.

Summer Complaint: See Cholera Infantum.

TUBERCULOSIS: The disease frequently referred to as "consumption" or shortened to T.B. was one of the most common causes of death throughout the 19th century. "Consumption" meant that the body tissue was wasting away, and entire families sometimes succumbed to the disease after unknowingly passing the disease among each other. Tuberculosis was a highly contagious disease. The tubercle bacteria could be carried in milk and other foods, or in the saliva of a person who had tuberculosis. The bacteria also lived in the air. Therefore, when a tuberculosis victim coughed, the air carried the bacteria. If the victim spat, the ground carried the bacteria. Spitting became a crime punishable by a severe penalty, because the tuberculosis bacteria lived for a long time in the dirt. Only direct sunlight killed the bacteria.

Typhoid Fever: Sometimes called gastric fever, abdominal typhus, infantile remittant fever, slow fever, nervous fever, pythogenic fever is a common worldwide illness caused by the ingestion of food or water contaminated with the feces of an infected person.

Typhoid Pneumonia: These are a combination of the symptoms of pneumonia and of typhoid fever. The disease begins with great weariness, lassitude, dizziness, pain in the head, back, and limbs. Soon there is much difficulty of [breathing](http://householdphysician.com/chapter7.php?page=22), tightness across the chest, with a dry, short, hacking [cough](http://householdphysician.com/chapter7.php?page=22).
As the disease advances, the active [symptoms](http://householdphysician.com/chapter7.php?page=22) pass away; there is a dull pain across the chest; drowsiness is very apt to come on, with the various symptoms of sinking peculiar to typhoid fever. The skin is harsh and Oxy, the temperature uneven, the tip and edge of the tongue red, and the middle covered with a yellow or brown fur. The bowels are tender, swollen, and drum head like; while there is often a diarrhea, the discharges having a dirty yellow color.

The records also show causes of death such as childbirth, premature childbirth,