

“Typhoid Mary”

Personal Liberty vs. The Public's Health in the Early Twentieth Century

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Third Floor, Levis Faculty Center

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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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As early as 1904, Mary Mallon, an unmarried, working-class Irish immigrant woman, was identified as the source of typhoid outbreaks in wealthy families where she worked as a cook. Eventually three deaths and more than fifty original cases of typhoid would be attributed to her. An otherwise healthy carrier, “Typhoid Mary” was held in quarantine for more than twenty years by the State of New York. Professor Leavitt's focus on civil liberties and public health is a crucial and timely one when we regularly hear calls to quarantine individuals with HIV, AIDS, or tuberculosis.