

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Presents *The Forgotten Plague* *The Deadly Story of Tuberculosis in America and the Hunt for a Cure*

Premieres in Saranac Lake, New York on Tuesday, February 3, 2015



Historic Saranac Lake will present a preview screening of *The Forgotten Plague*, a new PBS American Experience Film featuring Saranac Lake's unique history as a tuberculosis health resort. The hour-long film will be shown on February 3 at Saranac Village at Will Rogers, 78 Will Rogers Drive. The screening begins at 7:30 pm. The event is free and open to the public. Written, produced, and directed by Chana Gazit, *The Forgotten Plague* will be shown nationwide on AMERICAN EXPERIENCE on Tuesday, February 10, 2015, at 9:00 p.m. on Mountain Lake PBS.

The new documentary features interviews with Dr. Andrea Cooper, who studies tuberculosis at the Trudeau Institute, and Mary Hotaling, architectural historian for Historic Saranac Lake. Ms. Hotaling is at work on a biography of Dr. Edward Trudeau, titled, "*A Rare Romance in Medicine.*" The book is scheduled to be released in the fall of this year, on the one hundred year anniversary of the death of Dr. Trudeau.

The film screening will open with a short video produced by Mountain Lake PBS to complement the main feature. Producer Josh Clement of Mountain Lake PBS has teamed with writer Ed Kanze to celebrate the architectural and cultural stamp the tuberculosis cure era has left on the village of Saranac Lake more than a half-century after the advent of antibiotics. In 2014, Mountain Lake PBS was awarded a grant from national PBS to produce their acclaimed series of short online videos called "Curiously Adirondack." This video, having its debut the same night as the premiere "American Experience" screening, will represent the ninth in the "Curiously Adirondack" series.

About *The Forgotten Plague*

By the dawn of the nineteenth century, the most deadly killer in human history, tuberculosis, had killed one in seven of all the people who had ever lived. The disease struck America with a vengeance, ravaging communities and touching the lives of almost every family. The battle against the deadly bacteria had a profound and lasting impact on the country. It shaped medical and scientific pursuits, social habits, economic development, western expansion, and government policy. Yet both the disease and its impact are poorly understood: in the words of one writer, tuberculosis is our "forgotten plague."

During most of the nineteenth century, consumption, as tuberculosis was then called, was believed to be hereditary. Rich, poor, young, or old, the disease struck indiscriminately and death could be sudden or painfully prolonged. Still, it was thought that a person's environment could have an impact on the course of the illness and consumptives were advised to seek out fresh air and exercise in remote pristine environments. Jumping on this growing interest in the "climate cure," developers launched a massive advertising campaign aimed at luring health

seekers to the newly opened territories of the West. Thousands of people with tuberculosis picked up and moved, bound for newly created towns such as Albuquerque, Colorado Springs, and Pasadena, where they formed the backbone of many new communities.

The realization that the disease was contagious came in 1882, when the tuberculosis bacillus was discovered. It would take another decade before the medical community was convinced that a simple bacterium caused tuberculosis. As Americans came to better understand the disease, attitudes toward tuberculosis sufferers changed dramatically. No longer welcomed among the healthy, they were isolated in sanatoriums for their own health and to prevent the spread of the contagion. Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau, whose daughter had died from TB and was a sufferer himself, established the country's first sanatorium at Saranac Lake, New York in 1885. Trudeau insisted on a strict regimen of fresh air—patients sat out in the cold for hours on porches in newly designed “cure chairs” that were soon adopted by sanatoriums across the country. Although many patients benefitted from the isolation, others faced powerful loneliness and felt they had been banished against their will.

As Americans struggled to combat the contagion, social customs reflected the new fear of germs. Women's hemlines rose to avoid contact with dangerous particles and men shaved their beards. And while improved hygiene started bringing the overall rate of tuberculosis down, in poor, crowded neighborhoods the numbers continued to rise. By the early decades of the twentieth century, immigrants were twice as likely to die of the disease and the death rate for African Americans was three to four times higher.

Public health officials launched an unprecedented campaign to improve the lives of the poor: better housing and working conditions, reduced working hours, and child labor laws. Yet the anti-TB campaign also gave government officials unprecedented power to police the sick. Health inspectors were free to monitor people's movements, inspect their homes, and even commit people to public institutions against their will. The war against tuberculosis raised a profound question: how should Americans balance the need to protect their communities from a highly contagious disease with the need to protect the rights of the sick to be treated with dignity and compassion?

In 1943, Albert Schatz, a young microbiologist at Rutgers University working under a pioneering scientist named Selman Waksman, discovered streptomycin, an antibiotic that seemed to be a miracle cure for tuberculosis. Within two years of its first use, streptomycin proved to be a breakthrough treatment and liberated many patients from the sanatorium. But the tuberculosis bacterium was a powerful adversary, mutating into strains resistant to the drug. Eventually, combining streptomycin with other antibiotics proved more effective.

For decades, deaths from tuberculosis in the U.S. declined to the point where it seemed the disease would be eradicated. In the 1980s, it suddenly reappeared alongside the AIDS epidemic. The disease that had stalked the nation for centuries—and continues to kill millions worldwide each year—stubbornly refuses to die.

Told through the remembrances of those who lived—and were cured—at the sanatoriums, along with historians and scientists, *The Forgotten Plague* is a powerful reminder of the centuries when American families lived under the constant shadow of a terrible death. “The film also offers powerful lessons for us now, as we face deadly new contagions in our midst,” says AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Executive Producer Mark Samels. “Once again, a fearful populace and our public health authorities are grappling with how to respect the rights and dignity of the sick while doing everything possible to prevent the spread of illness and keep us safe.”

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About the Participants, in order of appearance

Sherwood Davies, along with his mother and grandmother, was a patient at the Stony Wold Sanatorium in Franklin, NY.

Mary Hotaling is an architectural historian for Historic Saranac Lake, and currently at work on a biography of Dr. Edward Trudeau.

Nancy Tomes is a professor and chair of the Department of History at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Sheila Rothman is Professor of Public Health in the Division of Sociomedical Sciences at the Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. Her books include *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History*.

Andrea Cooper is an immunologist who studies tuberculosis at the Trudeau Institute in Saranac Lake, NY.

Andrea Barrett is the author of *The Air We Breathe*, a historical novel about tubercular patients living in a sanatorium on the eve of World War I.

Whitney Seymour, Jr. is a former patient of the Trudeau Sanatorium.

John Stoeckle is a former patient of the Trudeau Sanatorium.

Joanne Curtis is a former patient of the Trudeau Sanatorium.

Peter Pringle is the author of *Experiment Eleven: Dark Secrets Behind the Discovery of a Wonder Drug*.

Vivian Schatz is the widow of Albert Schatz, who in 1943 discovered streptomycin, the first effective treatment for tuberculosis.

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About the Filmmakers

Written, Produced and Directed by	Chana Gazit
Co-Produced by	Kristina Cafarella Kathryn Lord
Edited by	Adam Zucker
Director of Photography	Stephen McCarthy
Music by	Mark Suozzo
Narrated by	Michael Murphy
Based in Part on the Book	<i>Living in the Shadow of Death</i> by Sheila Rothman

A Steward/Gazit Productions, Inc. film for AMERICAN EXPERIENCE.

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Chana Gazit (Written/Produced/Directed) is an award-winning producer, director, and writer. She was the senior producer of two acclaimed public television series: a four-part biography of Franklin Roosevelt and a four-part biography of Lyndon Johnson. Other historical programs include: *Chicago '68*, *Surviving the Dust Bowl*, *Meltdown at Three Mile Island*, *Fatal Flood*, *The Pill*, and *Test Tube Babies*. Additionally, her films have been featured in major stand-alone series including: *Healing and the Mind with Bill Moyers*, *Slavery & the Making of America*, *Destination America*, *This Emotional Life*, and *Angle of Attack*. She also served as story producer for “*Broadway or Bust*,” a multi-part reality series. Last year, she wrote for two major television documentaries: *All the President's Men Revisited* and *Lincoln@Gettysburg*. Chana’s work has been honored with multiple Emmy nominations and five Emmy Awards. As well as by the Columbia Journalism Awards, the Peabody Awards, the Writers Guild Awards, and the Sundance Film Festival.

Mark Samels (Executive Producer) was named executive producer of AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, PBS’ flagship history series, in 2003. Under Samels’ leadership, the series has been honored with nearly every industry award, including the Peabody, Primetime Emmys, the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award, Writers Guild Awards, Oscar nominations, and Sundance Film Festival Audience and Grand Jury Awards. Prior to joining WGBH, Samels worked as an independent documentary filmmaker, an executive producer for several U.S. public television stations, and as a producer for the first co-production between Japanese and American television. A native of Wisconsin, he is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

About AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Television’s most-watched history series, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2013. The series has been hailed as “peerless” (*The Wall Street Journal*), “the most consistently enriching program on television” (*Chicago Tribune*), and “a beacon of intelligence and purpose” (*Houston Chronicle*). On air and online, the series brings to life the incredible characters and epic stories that have shaped America’s past and present. Acclaimed by viewers and critics alike, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE documentaries have been honored with every major broadcast award, including thirty Emmy Awards, four duPont- Columbia Awards, and sixteen George Foster Peabody Awards, one most recently for the series represented by *Freedom Riders*, *Triangle Fire*, and *Stonewall Uprising*.

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About Historic Saranac Lake

Founded in 1980, Historic Saranac Lake is a not-for-profit architectural preservation organization that captures and presents local history from their center at the Saranac Laboratory Museum.

About Mountain Lake PBS

Mountain Lake PBS produces high quality programs for local and worldwide audiences, reaching over 3.9 million viewers in New York, Vermont, Quebec and Ontario. The station also provides a host of education and outreach services for learners of all ages and devotes at least eight hours a day to programming for children.

Mountain Lake PBS' mission is to celebrate and strengthen the civic and cultural life of the Mountain Lake region by providing distinctive telecommunications programs and services that inform, educate, involve and entertain.

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