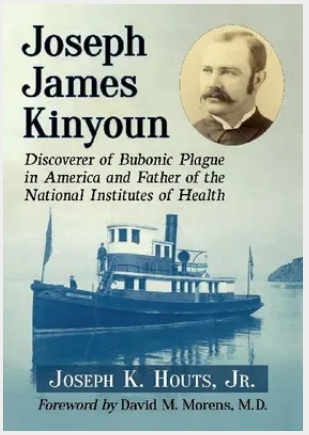
McFarland

Joseph James Kinyoun

Discoverer of Bubonic Plague in America and Father of the National Institutes of Health



In March 1900, Dr. Joseph James Kinyoun, a Surgeon with the Marine Hospital Service and student of Louis Pasteur and Dr. Robert Koch, detected bubonic plague in San Francisco, while stationed on Angel Island as a federal quarantine officer. His discovery of the plague led to an immediate outcry from California's governor, local and state politicians, and the city's commercial interests. The hyper-sensationalized journalism of San Francisco's newspapers leapt at the opportunity. Kinyoun would be ridiculed in the press for over a year, leading to death threats and a $50,000 bounty on his head. Eventually, California's quarantine caused an enormous uproar. In time, a special plague commission was installed by the U. S. Treasury Department. After the commissioners completed their report, Supervisory Surgeon-General Walter Wyman withheld it from the public leading to charges of a coverup. In the end, Wyman released the report, which totally vindicated Kinyoun, but a deal had been brokered behind the scenes wherein Kinyoun was removed from his post. This book tells a timely story about yellow journalism, coverup, corruption, the struggle between science and politics, and the consequences of blind denial of the truth.

In March 1900, Dr. Joseph James Kinyoun, a surgeon with the Marine Hospital Service and the founder of the Hygienic Laboratory, which became the National Institutes of Health, discovered bubonic plague in San Francisco. His finding led to an immediate outcry from the governor, local and state politicians, and the city's commercial interests. In the hyper-sensationalized journalism of San Francisco's newspapers, Kinyoun was ridiculed, leading to death threats and a $50,000 bounty on his head. Eventually, California's quarantine caused an enormous uproar. By the time a special federal commission produced a report (initially withheld from the public, leading to charges of a coverup) that vindicated Kinyoun, a deal had been brokered wherein the pioneering doctor was removed from his post. This book tells a timely story about yellow journalism, coverup, corruption, the struggle between science and politics, and the consequences of blind denial of the truth.

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