were upset that the ship was being detained until the president could decide what to do.

A very embarrassed George Washington finally had to confess to Lee, "I brought no public papers of any sort (not even the rules which have been established in these cases,) along with me; consequently am not prepared at this place to decide points which may require a reference to papers not within my reach."

To make matters worse for Washington, the question about whether he could legally call Congress into session outside Philadelphia was still very much up in the air. He had sought advice on the issue from a number of cabinet members and government officials, but no agreement had been reached.

Alexander Hamilton felt the president could indeed move Congress. After all, Hamilton reasoned, the government would not automatically cease functioning if an enemy army captured the capital. Why wouldn't the same principle apply in the case of a devastating natural disaster, such as a plague?

But Thomas Jefferson and James Madison disagreed and could not be budged from their position. During the formation of the federal government, they argued, individual states had been extremely wary about giving away too much of their governing power to any future president. Their nervousness was the result of British history.

English kings had allowed their subjects to participate in making laws through representatives in Parliament. This system of government worked as long as the king was not challenged on important matters. Whenever the Parliament clashed with their monarch, the king would get his way by suddenly convening Parliament in a remote, unreachable part of the country. Without a proper quorum of members, the king could then decide law as he pleased.

As a result, representatives in the United States had drawn up the Constitution with particular attention to the issue of where they would

hospital blamed it and its Irish patients for "breeding pestilence" and spreading it throughout the island. As darkness fell on September 1, 1858, angry citizens took matters into their own hands. "About nine o'clock on Wednesday," *Harper's Weekly* reported, "a large party, disguised and armed, assailed the Hospital on two sides at the same time; one squad forced the gate, and the other scaled the wall."

Alarms were sounded, but "before any effective resistance could be offered, the rioters had removed the patients out of the buildings, carrying them bodily up in their mattresses, and depositing them upon the ground some hundred yards from the wards."

Once this was accomplished, the building was set on fire and "burned like a pile of shavings." Next, the resident doctor's house was set afire, followed by a small hospital on a nearby hill. The harbor police and firefighters arrived and managed to put out the latter two fires before the buildings were completely destroyed. The very next day the determined crowd came back and finished burning down the remaining structures.

While *Harper's Weekly* described the efforts of the firefighters and police as "a stirring scene," the magazine's editors were clearly opposed to the presence of the hospital, calling it a "grave injury" to both Staten Island and Manhattan. Some arrests were made, but no one was ever prosecuted for rioting or arson. The specter of yellow fever had incited a normally peaceful group of individuals to violence, and Staten Island officials did not want that mob to turn its fury on them.

Yellow fever terrorized many major cities throughout the 1800s—not only Philadelphia and Manhattan, but Boston, Baltimore, Mobile, Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia, Savannah, Charleston, and Jacksonville, to name a few. Nine thousand died in New Orleans in 1853, while Memphis saw 2,000 buried in its 1873 epidemic and another 5,000 in 1878. As late as 1897, letters from the South often arrived with the words "All mail fumigated with formaldehyde" written on them.