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America relearning lessons of 1918 Spanish Influenza

MARCIA HORA

There was lots of advice given to people in 1918 on how to combat the "Spanish Flu." Don't wear tight shoes or tight collars or tight clothes. Force yourself to sneeze night and morning, then breathe deeply. Do not wear a muffler.

Larry Hardesty, retired dean of the library at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, and Stapleton High School graduate, who writes periodically for *The Enterprise*, has been writing about the 102-year old epidemic for the noon Kearney Rotary club.

Hardesty said there was a lot of misinformation regarding Spanish Influenza, that also included "see how high you can hold your hands and how deeply you can breathe whenever you are out-of-doors."

The virtues of various medications, including Vick's VapoRub had druggists conserving stocks of it for use in flu districts. Tanlac, a patent medicine consisting of about 16 to 18 percent alcohol (some account describe it as a 36 proof mixture of wine, glycerin and bitter herbs) was also recommended.

Some authorities tried to pass off the epidemic as nothing more than another seasonal flu, with a headline in the *Kearney Hub* reporting, "Nothing New - Simply The Old Grip, or la Grippe that was Epidemic in 1889-90 - Only then it came from Russia by Way of France and This Time By Way of Spain: No Occasion for Panic."

At the time it was widely reported it had "a very low percentage of fatalities - not over one death out of every 400" or about .25 percent. This is a substantial underestimation of the actual death rate of two to three out of every hundred. Some underestimation is understandable since early on the flu had been relatively non-lethal. Nevertheless, as it mutated, as one writer noted, the second wave "made up for it in spades."

People desperately sought good news and some medical authorities even reported "Spanish Influenza Vaccine Discovered." Again we now know that a virus caused the influenza, and none of the vaccines protected against it. At best, some of the vaccines may have reduced the attack rate of

bacterial infection causing pneumonia after viral influenza infection.

Frequently, the advice given seemed more reasonable, "Nature will throw off the attack if only you keep your strength." Other advice related to diet and exercise, such as "take sharp walks regularly and walk home from work; eat plenty of porridge." Good diet and exercise, of course, may seem like sensible advice, but it probably had little impact on preventing the disease.

The young and the healthy proved most vulnerable because the disease over stimulated the body's immune system and turned the immune system against the body. Having a strong immune system put individuals more at risk. One of the cruel ironies of the disease is that it affected the healthiest, particularly from the age range of 20 to 40 years old.

Flu Invades Nebraska
In 1918, the virus had been spreading for months. Symptoms included high fever, cough, dizziness and heavy perspiration. Bronchial pneumonia developed frequently and death often followed.

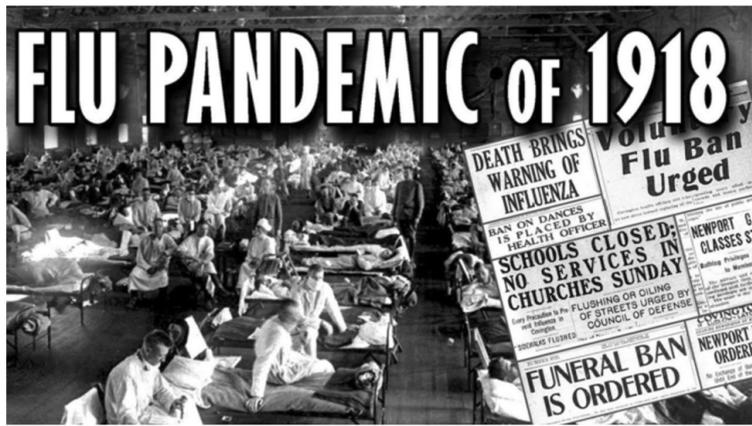
During World War I, the United States and other countries censored bad news to keep it from their enemies. The illness was dubbed the Spanish flu because people assumed it came from Spain. That was later proven wrong, but the name stuck because Spain was neutral in the war and didn't censor press reports of the illness.

In October of 1918, the Spanish flu reached Nebraska.

All schools, churches, places of entertainment or public congregation, pool halls and other places of amusement were ordered closed on October 7. Mail carriers worked, but wore white face masks. All sick people were quarantined.

Flu Becomes More Lethal
As the flu mutated it became more deadly. Nearly one-quarter of all 103 million Americans contracted it, and two or three of every hundred patients died. In one year, the life expectancy in the U.S. tumbled by 12 years.

The University of Nebraska at Lincoln suspended classes in late September 1918 and did not resume normal operations until after Thanksgiving.



The lack of reporting on the situation may have been part of the effort to avoid panic. Some writers believe the government outright lied to citizens regarding the impact of the disease, and lack of access to information prolonged the epidemic.

A statewide quarantine in Nebraska was announced on October 22, 1918, and was to run until Sunday, November 2.

Deaths continued to pour in and bans were again implemented and strict closing orders were given for all places of businesses.

Spanish Influenza In Rural Nebraska

Hardesty said Spanish flu hit rural Nebraska very hard. A doctoral dissertation completed in 2015 at the University of Nebraska Medical Center by Kristin Watkins entitled, "It Came Across the Plains: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Rural Nebraska," looks at several small cities and towns, including Anselmo

and Valentine. The flu reached even the isolated ranches in Cherry County. She concluded, "the most over-arching conclusion based on the evidence from this study is that nothing can completely protect you from influenza, and some rural communities may have a false sense of security if they think influenza cannot reach them. This study shows that influenza can and will spread anywhere geographically, even to the most remote locations. Few things can stop pathogens in pursuit of infection."

Hardesty has researched deaths in rural counties and believes there were about four or five deaths in Logan County; nine or ten in Thomas County; and maybe one or two in McPherson County.

The Enterprise Reports October 31, 1918: There were more American fatalities from the new epidemic here than from German guns in France.

"Within three short weeks Spanish Influenza has developed and spread so widely and rapidly that America's death toll here at home is greater than that of all of her huge armies in Europe. Moreover, the number of prostrations from this disease from day to day in America is probably greater than the combined casualty lists of all of the fighting forces engaged in this great World War. The number of cases in New York City alone has increased from a total of 47 cases and no deaths, to 4,293 new cases and 393 deaths in a single day."

In the interest of national efficiency and safety the Federal Government has recently extended its ownership and control has gone in a manner scarcely dreamed of by even the most radical.

A commission of Omaha

See *Influenza*
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Clean-up day will focus on families working together

The annual community clean-up day sponsored by Stapleton Public Schools, the Village of Stapleton, and Stapleton Area Chamber of Commerce won't be stopped by COVID-19.

The school has cancelled all extra-curricular activities due to restrictions set by the state and will not be able to help with this year's organized day.

The Stapleton Area Chamber of Commerce and Village of Stapleton will be promoting and calling for an all out "It's A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" week and inviting everyone to join in to help make our Village an even better place to live, work and play. Each day from May 10-16 will be specifically designated. These are not "set in stone" guidelines. You can do one or all, and even more if you choose to do so.

It's a great time to work together as a family to spruce up, clean up, and help others. Here's what is scheduled for the week:

Sunday, May 10: Mother's Day. Plant flowers with your mother. Adopt a mother if you don't have one nearby, and plant or give her flowers.

Monday, May 11: Trash Pick-Up Day. Grab a bag and pick up trash around town. There's plenty of places that need picked up. Look at the road ditches, around the ball diamond, the Stapleton Park, and more.

Tuesday, May 12: Yard Clean-Up Day. Look around your yard. Get rid of old appliances, paint, and items you don't use anymore. If it's junk and it's unsightly, it's got to go!

Wednesday, May 13: Spruce-Up Day. Look for areas outside that need your attention. Is there something that needs painted? Would lawn ornaments or decorations spruce things up a bit? Look around and get to it.

Thursday, May 14: Lend A Helping Hand Day. Look for problem areas in the Village and lend a helping hand. Ask permission and then pitch in and help improve properties.

Friday, May 15: Invest In Our Future. Plant a tree or shrub for future generations.

See *Clean-Up*
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The 1918 Spanish flu outbreak was Nebraska's last great pandemic. In today's Throwback Thursday Photo, a group of men wearing protective masks in front of the Fred J. Stain Furniture and Undertaking Store in Shelby, Nebraska on December 8, 1918.

-- News Briefs --

Baker Rural/Stapleton H.S. Alumni Reunion Cancelled

The Baker Rural/Stapleton High School alumni reunion planned for Saturday, June 6, has been cancelled due to COVID-19.

A special section in *The Enterprise* will be published with honor classes of 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020 being featured.

Be watching for information as to whether or not a reunion will be held in 2021 or scheduled for 2025.

Virtual Walk for Life

COVID-19 has disrupted many things for us this spring, but the Women's Resource Center is not letting it get the best of them. They will conduct their Walk for Life anyway.

Go to friendsofwrcc.com and click on donate or sign up for the Walk for Life.

You can sponsor a walker or register to walk. More information will be forthcoming.

McPherson Co. News



• Over The Hills
• Graphic Files
• Special Feature Page On 1921 MCHS Graduates

Notices

- Logan County Ag Society Taking Bids For Grass
- Village Of Stapleton Board Proceedings
- McPherson County School District #90 Board Proceedings
- Logan County Board of Commissioners Board Proceedings
- Logan County First Half 2019 Real & Personal Property Taxes Due
- McPherson County Personal Property Tax Return & Schedule Due

Read The Legal Notices & Stay Informed!

Weather



DATE	HI	LOW	MT
13	29	9	.19
14	34	9	0
15	45	12	0
16	55	21	0
17	32	14	.33
18	50	14	0
19	71	29	0
20	61	31	.11

.9" of snow was recorded on April 13, but wind affected the accuracy of this measurement; 2.8" of snow fell on April 17 and thunder was recorded on April 19.

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