The Influenza Pandemic of 1918

The influenza pandemic in 1918 killed an estimated 50 million people globally. In the United States nearly 675,000 died from influenza. Thousands more were orphaned and widowed. The flu attacked in two phases. The first phase known as the “three day fever” appeared in the late spring of 1918 without warning. Few deaths were reported and most victims recovered in a few days. When the disease resurfaced in the fall, it was far more severe. At first the flu could not be identified because it struck quickly and eluded treatment. Some victims died within hours of their first symptoms. Others died within days, after their lungs filled with fluid and they suffocated.

The flu struck across the United States in both rural and urban areas. In Delaware 389 deaths from influenza were reported between October 4 and October 14. State officials were so overwhelmed that they tried to send cases to Philadelphia hospitals. These cases were refused as Philadelphia too was overwhelmed. Temporary hospitals were established to handle the influenza cases. The University of Delaware even offered its buildings as a temporary infirmary. At the height of the pandemic, schools were closed, curfews were put in place, and all public gatherings were forbidden for most of October. This ban was lifted on October 27 as fewer cases were reported in Delaware.

This packet contains a sampling of articles about the pandemic from *The Sunday Star* (Wilmington).
Examples from The Sunday Star - Wilmington, Delaware

9/29/1918  “Hospital to Refuse Patients”
10/6/1918  “Philadelphia, too in Disease Grip”
           “Dies of Influenza Without Physician”
           “Woman’s Conference Postponed”
           “Harter Hall Now Used as Hospital”
10/20/1918 “Influenza Crisis Over, Government Doctors Go Home”
           “Many Wilmington Families Mourning for Victims of Influenza
            Epidemic, Death List Here Swollen by Most Fatal Plague this
            City has Ever Seen” (pgs. 30-31)
10/27/1918 “Back to Schools and Movies Tomorrow Morning”
HOSPITAL HAS TO REFUSE PATIENTS

Doctors Too, so Busy They Can’t Attend to All Sick.

Unable to get accommodations at Delaware Hospital because there is no room, and fifteen nurses are either ill or off duty, while all the medical staff is worn out by incessant labor due to the influenza epidemic at least two sufferers had to go without medical attention although seriously ill late last night.

They were Stephen Sopinous, of No. 611 Lancaster avenue, and a man whose name was not given of No. 610 Washington street. The first was gravely ill with asthma. A policeman who had tried in vain to get a physician for him called Delaware Hospital but the hospital not only was filled but had neither nurses nor physicians. The physician in charge, however, called twelve other doctors by telephone but was unable to get one, so busy are they with influenza cases.

Soon after came a call from the Washington street address saying that a man there was in a serious condition from hernia, but no surgeon could be gotten to afford relief.

The physicians are so overworked throughout the city that it is difficult to get one at all at night.
PHILADELPHIA, TOO IN DISEASE GRIP

706 Deaths in Week and 1480 New Cases of Influenza Reported

Philadelphia, Oct. 5.—Grip stricken Philadelphia is tonight struggling in the throes of the worst epidemic in the history of the city. Seven hundred and six persons died in this district during the week ending today.

During the past 24 hours 1480 cases were reported. Six hundred and ninety-two were the total on Friday night, bringing the total number of cases reported since Sept. 25, to 5544. The lid was clamped on the city yesterday when saloons, theaters and all public places were ordered closed to help combat the disease. Protests from liquor dealers swamped officials. Saloon keepers voiced their protests by claiming liquor was recommended as antidote for the disease.

Druggists were forced to call for volunteer assistance as long lines of prescription holders besieged the pharmacies. Many drafted druggists have received furloughs from camps.

So heavy has the death rate been that many undertakers assert they are unable to secure coffins for the burial of influenza victims.

DIES OF INFLUENZA WITHOUT PHYSICIAN

Perry Brinkley, Negro, who boarded with his sister at No. 605 Christiana street, fell a victim to the influenza yesterday afternoon after an illness of six days, without the attention of a physician. His sister told the police that she tried to get a doctor but was unable to obtain one. Deputy Coroner McCrery removed the body to the morgue.

This makes eight bodies in the morgue at the present time, all of them being victims of influenza. All of the bodies have been identified but in most cases the victims do not belong in this city, they being workingmen who had come here from other cities. Their bodies are being kept until claimed by relatives.
“Harter Hall Now Used as Hospital,” The Sunday Star, 8.

Newark Influenza Victims Who Cannot Get Treatment at Home Taken There

Newark, Oct. 5.—While there is no evidence as to new cases, Newark is better off in this respect than at any time since the outbreak. This is due to the fact that the college authorities yesterday took over Harter Hall to the town to be used as a temporary hospital. Patients who cannot get proper treatment at their homes are being moved to Harter Hall and already a number of cases have been removed to the temporary hospital.

The patients are being removed from their homes to Harter Hall in the college ambulance, and some of the students who remained over after college closed the first week to assist in caring for the sick are doing splendid work in this respect. A large number of patients can be accommodated in the temporary hospital but if the new cases continue to increase as they have the past few days, the building will soon be full. There are a number of students in Harter Hall but most of them are on the road to recovery.

Students Brothers and Counter submitted their services to assist in nursing ill fellow students who are quartered in the Sigma Nu Fraternity instead of civilians who are removed to the “frat” house. Wayne Brewer, a student, operated the ambulance in Wilmington practically all night Thursday night carrying patients to the various hospitals and he is also doing some work here to help fight the disease. Robert J. Barkley, Marion P. Boudien, L. L. Gob, Thomas W. Mulrooney and J. Fried Kohlman, are among other students who are assisting in every way possible.

What is especially gratifying to the over-worked local physicians who have been doing a wonderful work in fighting the epidemic for two weeks is the fact that a number of Newark women have volunteered to assist in nursing the influenza patients. Most of their work will be among the patients in Harter Hall.

There are a large number of pneumonia cases remaining and in some instances the physicians are handicapped by the fact that the families where the persons are ill are unable to get nurses.

Most of the students who have the influenza are improving. There are about 20 cases now among the conscript soldiers in the Industrial Training Camp but in most instances these are slight cases. All the soldiers are practically quarantined and only guards are allowed on Main street and they do all the necessary buying for the other men in the stores.

Several students, will be able to get up today and the one pneumonia case among the students is much improved.
“Influenza Crisis Over; Government Doctors Go Home,”

*The Sunday Star*, October 20, 1918, 1.
GRIMM—Mrs. Elizabeth Grimm, wife of Frank M. Grimm, died last Monday at her residence, No. 411 West Third street, to the sorrow of her host of friends in this city and vicinity. She was a talented young woman who was always among the liveliest of her associates in social life and she was just as popular among the employees of the DuPont and Hercules Powder Companies when she formerly worked in the DuPont Building as a stenographer. Her last position was in the purchasing department of the Hercules Co. Born and reared in this city, a daughter of Mrs. Ann Blakely Donovan and the late Thomas Blakely, she was among the most widely known of Wilmington’s young women. It is pathetic that her one little child, Amy duPont Grimm, is deprived of a mother’s care, attention and love so early in life, at the age of one year. Her health had not been good in recent months and because of this and because of her devotion to her family, she had been unable to take an active part in war relief or social duties. Besides her mother, husband and the baby, she leaves a brother, Thomas F. Grimm, who is in the aviation service of the U. S. Army, and at the present time is ill in a hospital at Kelly Field. The funeral was held on Friday afternoon at 4 o’clock from the late residence of the deceased. Requiem mass was said on Friday morning at St. Peter’s Cathedral. The services at the graves in Cathedral cemetery were conducted by Rev. John J. Dougherty. The pallbearers were James Russell, William Hamin- gan, William Hanley, Joseph McGlinchey and Thomas Morris. Mrs. Grimm’s husband and her step-father, George Donovan, are in a critical condition with influenza.

KELLY—Five days after the birth of her baby daughter, Mrs. Marguerite Kelly, who had contracted pneumonia, died last Tuesday. She was the daughter of the late Edward and Catherine Hughes and wife of John Kelly. She was born in this city 21 years ago. A graduate of the Ursuline Academy in the class of 1893 with four others. She was well known not only to the faculty and students of that institution, but among the DuPont employees as she had been employed before her marriage in the filing department of the Atlas Powder Company, and in many other circles. She was a talented pianist and had studied music under Miss Agnes Clune Quinn. Devoted to her home and to her family, of a sweet, lovable disposition, faithful to her church and considered for all with whom she was acquainted, her death proved a sad blow to those who knew her. The funeral was held yesterday morning from the residence at No. 1803 Market street, and requiem mass was said at St. Patrick’s R. C. Church. Interment was at the Cathedral cemetery. Besides her husband and the baby she leaves two sisters, Miss Regina Hughes. Her father, the late Edward Hughes, will abandoned, as having conducted a great business in Second street market-house for many years.

DASHER—Charles Biddle Dasher, 37 years of age, who had tended bar at Barratt’s Hotel for nine months and formerly a conductor for the Wilmington and Philadelphia Traction Company, employed for 11 years as well by the old Peoples Railway Company, died last Monday at his home, No. 521 Union street, of influenza. He was a son of the late Alexander and Mary Dasher. Having lived in this city many years and possessing a sunny, kindly disposition, he had hosts of friends here. The deceased was a member of Wilmington Lodge, No. 174, B. P. O. Moose. He was not married. One sister, Mrs. James McCloud and four brothers, H. L., W. W. P. and H. S. Dasher survive him. The funeral was held on Friday morning from the residence of his brother, No. 521 Union street. No services were held here but the body was taken to Ridgely, Md., on the 8:10 train and services were conducted there by Rev. L. R. Brumbaugh, pastor of the Brothere, United Brethren denomination. Interment was at Ridgely cemetery.

GRADWohl—Mrs. J. Louise Gradwohl, widow of Frederick Gradwohl, and mother of Frank A. Gradwohl, great junior sagamore of the Great Council of Delaware Imp’d O. R. M., who is chief engineer for the Stoeckle Brewing Company, died at the home of the son, No. 1210 West Fifth street, on Tuesday. She had been seriously ill only a short time and her death was unexpected. She was 76 years of age. Mrs. Gradwohl had lived in this city since about 1867, coming here from her birthplace in Saxony, Germany. She was a charter member of the Ladies’ Aid Society of Zion Lutheran Church. Her husband died in 1890. She leaves the one son and a brother, F. C. Kolek. The funeral was held Thursday afternoon at 3 p.m. Services were conducted by Revs. Paul Isenachnd and S. G. von Bosse. Interment was at Riverview cemetery.

Selections from “Many Wilmington Families Mourning for Victims of Influenza, Death List Here Swollen by Most Fatal Plague this City has Ever Seen,” The Sunday Star, October 20, 1918, 30-31.
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BACK TO SCHOOLS AND THE MOVIES TOMORROW MORNING

Influenza About Gone, Public Assemblage is Again Permitted By Health Board.

The total number of deaths in Wilmington from the influenza epidemic is expected to reach 1,000, according to reports received by the Board of Health. During the past week, 160 deaths were attributed to pneumonia and influenza. The total for the week previous was 239. Total number of deaths during the past six weeks is 741, exclusive of the 135 cases reported at the emergency hospital of the County Club, which is outside the city. This makes a total of 888 deaths, including 12 recorded yesterday. There are still hundreds of persons seriously ill with pneumonia, however.

School will begin tomorrow, both public and parochial. The Ursuline Academy and the Salesianum Catholic High School will re-open on Monday. Friends School will not resume its sessions until Wednesday.

The business schools of the city will also resume their regular schedule tomorrow.

Many of the theatres, dance halls, saloons, and other public gathering places have completed their cleaning and fumigation under the direction of the Board of Health, while the remainder are strenuously at work today getting into shape for the reopening tomorrow.

Dr. A. E. Frantz, secretary of the State Board of Health, continues to receive favorable reports from all parts of the State. Most of the schools down the State, including Delaware College, and the Wesleyan Collegiate Institute at Dover, will re-open tomorrow.

It is hoped that another week will find all patients discharged from the Wilmington Country Club, and its use as an Emergency Hospital discontinued.

The Emergency Hospital at the New Castle County Hospital has been closed.