



# AGS Ezine

Newsletter of the Arkansas Genealogical Society Vol. 15 No. 4 April 2020

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editors

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## Coming Events

### March 21, 2020

**Special Workshop: Cancelled Due to the current COVID-19 (Coronavirus)**

More information coming soon!  
CALs, Darragh Center, 100 Rock Street,  
Little Rock. In coordination with  
the [Ulster Historical Foundation](#)

### May 2, 2020

**2020 AGS Spring Workshop: Cancelled Due to the current COVID-19 (Coronavirus)**

More information coming soon!  
Old Washington State Park  
In coordination with the [Arkansas State Archives](#)

### October 16-17, 2020

**2020 AGS Fall Seminar**

Benton Event Center, Benton Arkansas. For more information go to  
<https://www.agsgenealogy.org/>  
<https://www.agsgenealogy.org/>

## 1918 Spanish Flu

We have all spent the last several weeks attempting to make sense of our new normal, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. For many, that means looking to the past for similar events, to identify what worked and how previous generations handled similar circumstances. Frequently over the past month the event most have turned to is the so-called Spanish Influenza outbreak in 1918. In 1918, Arkansans were facing an unknown disease, navigating closing orders and being cautioned against crowds in public spaces. A closer look at Arkansas's experience during the Spanish Flu reveals this is where the similarities end.

Spanish Influenza was not the last pandemic to sweep the world, although it was the deadliest, with estimates claiming the flu caused anywhere from 50-100 million deaths worldwide. It's likely the true number will never be known since there were many areas where the deaths went unrecorded. In the United States alone, the flu killed between 550,000 – 700,000 people. While Spanish flu is widely recognized as arriving on the heels of World War I, the disease arrived in three waves. It appeared briefly in the Spring of 1918 as a rather mysterious, but brief, disease then seemed to disappear, only to reappear in its most deadly form in the Fall of 1918. It appeared again in the Spring of 1919 and lingered in a much milder form through 1920. While there is still some debate about where exactly the disease began, one certainty is that "Spanish" influenza did not begin in Spain. The 1918 influenza earned its name when Spain, a neutral party during the War, with no need to censor their newspapers, provided the first detailed reports of the new disease.

The second wave of influenza began in August and September of 1918 and continued through the end of the year. This is the deadliest time period for the disease worldwide, beginning with almost simultaneous outbreaks in Massachusetts, France, Sierra Leone. The disease spread quickly and tended to kill quickly too, with frequent reports of flu patients dying within hours

of falling ill. Most of the deaths were caused by the quick onset of secondary infections, specifically pneumonia. Aside from the speed at which it killed this flu was an anomaly in another way. Traditional flu is usually only deadly for the elderly and for the very young. The main victims in 1918 however, were young adults in their twenties and thirties, who should have been able to easily fight off the disease. The fact that the young and healthy members of society were the ones dying added a new level of fear to this outbreak.

In the fall of 1918, the war effort in Arkansas was going strong. The Great War was entering its final stages and news from the front dominated the headlines. Citizens were focused on liberty loan parades and the push for war bonds, as well as the work of the Red Cross. The barracks at Camp Pike were packed, with more men on the way and the Student Army Training Corps prepared

## "Cover Up Each Cough and Sneeze If You Don't You'll Spread Disease"

The above couplet is not new but it is aptly quoted by Dr. Geiger, U. S. health officer, in urging that people do not spit or openly cough or sneeze in street cars, public places and on the streets. If compelled to cough or sneeze hold a handkerchief to nose and mouth. The particles of matter exuded spread the infection. There is a city ordinance against spitting in street cars. It has not been rigidly enforced. If you never observed it before, observe it now when every effort must be made to keep influenza from spreading.

Little Rock Railway &  
Electric Co.

still more soldiers ready to do their duty for their country. Influenza did not rate high on the list of concerns for most people. News of Spanish influenza began trickling into Arkansas newspapers around the middle of August, with brief mentions in cartoons or a sentence or two about infection somewhere else mentioned in passing, but there was no consistent coverage to warn of the impending danger. This changed on September 17 when the local papers ran articles detailing outbreaks in Boston, New York and New Orleans. In Boston alone there were 16 deaths in 6 hours. The next day Little Rock announced its first case.

The official response to influenza in the state was led by two men, Dr. James Geiger, the United States Public Health Service Officer for the state and Dr. Charles Garrison, the State Physician. Together these men would attempt to control the spread of the flu and keep the public safe. The initial response will sound eerily familiar. After the first case was reported in Little Rock on September 18, Dr. Geiger took to the newspapers to attempt to prepare the public. He warned that the disease was “highly contagious” and that there was no immunity. Geiger recommended isolating the sick since flu spreads by contact and warned against actions that could spread the disease, including everything from the use of roller towels and handkerchiefs to shared water glasses and kissing. The next day physicians were asked to begin keeping track of the cases and reporting the numbers to the health service. Until this point, influenza was such a common disease that no one was really concerned about reporting the number of cases, but now it was vital to understand just how quickly it was spreading and where.

Things didn't stay quiet for long after the first appearance of flu in the state. On September 24 the city of Carlisle was quarantined with 125 cases. The outbreak could be traced directly to Boston with several young men having recently returned home from the city. Within days newspapers carried reports of entire families who were sick and unable to care for themselves and relying mostly on help from their neighbors.

While the flu spread through Carlisle, it also made an appearance at Camp Pike just as suddenly. On September 26, the military camp reported 289 cases of flu; by September 30 the camp reported 1,624 new cases in 24 hours, no doubt a direct result of overcrowding within the barracks. Camp Pike was not the only camp suffering; on September 27 officials in Washington, D.C. canceled the draft call for 142,000 new recruits due to the epidemic conditions in the military camps, which included 9,000 new draftees that were supposed to be sent to Camp Pike.

These are just two examples of conditions within the state. the height of the epidemic in mid-October Little Rock reported over 900 new cases in a single day. Finding doctors or nurses to provide medical attention became quite difficult. A large number of medical personnel within the state had joined the war effort and when the outbreak began they were either overseas or training in another area. As a result, the state was dangerously short of help when it came to the flu. Pocahontas, for example, suffered between 200-300 cases in early October. Their physicians could not answer all the calls for assistance, already overworked and claiming “never before have they witnessed so many people stricken in the same length of time.” In rural areas the situation could be worse, since many families were isolated, with few close neighbors and no easy access to medical care.

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ILLUSTRATED CURRENT NEWS

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Vol. 1 No. 785  
October 16, 1918

## To Prevent Influenza!

- Do not take any person's breath.
- Keep the mouth and teeth clean.
- Avoid those that cough and sneeze.
- Don't visit poorly ventilated places.
- Keep warm, get fresh air and sunshine.
- Don't use common drinking cups, towels, etc.
- Cover your mouth when you cough and sneeze.
- Avoid Worry, Fear and Fatigue.
- Stay at home if you have a cold.
- Walk to your work or office.
- In sick rooms wear a gauze mask like in illustration.

ISSUED BY CONN. STATE COUNCIL OF DEFENSE.

At

flu

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As the flu ravaged the state, medical authorities scrambled to lessen the damage it caused. Almost immediately public service announcements began appearing, warning people of the dangers of spitting on street cars and urging them to cover coughs and sneezes. Geiger warned the public to avoid crowds but was hesitant to invoke a statewide quarantine believing such a drastic measure was unnecessary. Eventually they had no choice. A full quarantine was issued for Camp Pike on October 4 and a statewide quarantine followed 3 days later, on October 7. The quarantine barred all public gatherings in areas where flu was present. Schools and churches were closed, stores and restaurants had to shorten hours, and limits were placed on the number of patrons in establishments, while pool halls and movie theatres closed as well. The order allowed for no public gatherings of any kind.

By the end of October the worst had passed for the majority of the state. Dr. Geiger lifted the state quarantine on November 2, leaving any further such action to local officials. When all was said and done, Camp Pike reported a total 13,493 cases of flu, second only to Camp Funston, KS, and approximately 300 deaths. As for the general population, Dr. Garrison estimated 50,000 cases of flu in the state and at least 5,000 deaths within the span of a few months, however, even as that number was reported Garrison acknowledged that the number of casualties was probably much higher.

If you're interested in learning more about Arkansas's experience with Spanish influenza there are several types of resources available. State and local newspapers offer the best information, especially for understanding what kind of conditions were being reported, local infection rates and for reviewing health advice from medical authorities. The Arkansas State Archives has newspapers from all over the state for 1918-1919, available in our research room and via the Library of Congress website [Chronicling America \(https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/\)](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/). The Archives also houses Funeral Home records from Garland County, as well as death records kept by Sebastian County. Death Certificates can be harder to locate. The state of Arkansas did not require birth or death certificates until 1914 and the system was still in the early stages by 1918, so there was no consistency when it came to filing them. During the epidemic doctors were short-staffed and overworked; because of this there may not have been a physician present at the time of death, especially in rural areas. However, the Archives does have access to a Death Certificate Index that may provide some guidance in requesting such records. While the Archives is closed to the public right now, we look forward to assisting you with this and any other research in the future. In the meantime, please explore our online offerings and keep in touch via social media and email. And don't forget to wash your hands!

Contributed by Lauren Jarvis, former AGS Board Member and Archival Manager at the Arkansas State Archives.

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## Meet the Board



Jane A. Wilkerson is an Archival Assistant at the Arkansas State Archives and has served on the AGS board from 2011 to 2015 and 2018 to present. She has a B.A. in History and an M.A. in Public History from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Wilkerson served at the Arkansas State Archives from 2001 to 2017 as a library technician, archival manager, and interim director. She also worked as an independent researcher before returning to the Arkansas State Archives in 2018.

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# Genealogists Can Encourage 2020 Census Participation

Genealogists and family historians may actually value the 2020 census more than others who don't appreciate yet the fascinating family and community history it yields for future researchers.

We can encourage everyone to fill out the 2020 census, and the deadline for online completion has been extended from July 31 to August 14 (at least) because of coronavirus. The pandemic is expected to interfere with gathering census data that is critical to federal funding of states and representation in Congress.

Census spokespersons worry about undercounts of minorities, immigrants and migrant workers, particularly. Both treasured history /genealogy and health care and other state funding are on the line, they caution.

Most American should have by now received Census Bureau 2020 mail, with "Your Response Is Required By Law" on the envelope. First-time online census completion is available, and participants may also use phone or mail to complete information. If information is completed online, the census database will send an immediate confirmation number. As of the first week of April, the Census Bureau said 37% of Arkansas households have completed census responses so far.

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## Administrative Stuff

**Contributions:** If you have news for the Ezine, send it! To [agscontributions@gmail.com](mailto:agscontributions@gmail.com) —Thanks!

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