

# Local officials enter the fray against the Flu

The Bethlehem Gadfly [coronavirus](#), [Spanish Flu](#) April 2, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the coronavirus 

*For perspective on our current coronavirus situation, we are following the entrance of the 1918 Spanish Influenza, that paragon of pandemics, into the minds and bodies of Lehigh Valley residents who got their news through the Morning Call (the files of the Bethlehem Globe are closed to us at the moment).*

Two or three days ago Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious-diseases expert, and the face and fount of faithful factual information on our current pandemic crisis, reminded us that "The virus itself determines [the] timetable."

Gadfly is reminded of that stark fact looking at the front page of the *Morning Call* September 28, 1918.

Running the full width of the page in just about the largest bold print possible we find:

**PRESIDENT WILSON'S SPEECH ON PRICE OF PEACE:**

Not the best time for the Flu to hit.

The Spanish Flu made its move with utter disregard to the fact that we were four years in to a world war and that day — on which we were literally drafting 2,600,000 men between the ages of 19 and 37 — our President was outlining his historic plan for a League of Nations in a major speech.

Our current president doesn't have anything anywhere so heavy to divert his attention from our current health crisis.

But, on September 28, 1918, President Wilson had other fish to fry than this incipient national crisis from Spanish Flu.

And so response was left to local officials.

And so Lehigh Valley officials, convened by Bethlehem's first Mayor Archibald Johnson, met in Bethlehem to work together to make the Spanish Flu "reportable," which enabled the municipalities to take legal action against it.

And Bethlehem increased its hospital space, no doubt at the Washington School we talked about earlier. (Gadfly was hoping someone would know where Washington school was located.)

## KEEPING INFLUENZA FROM LEHIGH VALLEY

Health Authorities Confer in  
Bethlehem and Take Pre-  
cautionary Steps.

In an effort to prevent a possible epidemic of Spanish influenza in this section, a meeting of state, county and city health officials was held last evening at Bethlehem, with Mayor Archibald Johnston presiding. Ways and means for the prevention of an epidemic of this kind were discussed at length and the co-operation of local physicians and citizens was urged. As yet the disease has not been classed as reportable, but it will be if there is evidence of its having reached this vicinity. It is contagious and is a mixed infection, which brings on pneumonia. An emergency hospital has been erected at Bethlehem to care for any cases which may arise.

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Among those in attendance at the meeting last evening were Mayor Archibald Johnson, Dr. L. Shoudy, City Manager W. Miller and Dr. Butler, health officer, all of Bethlehem; Dr. E. M. Green and Dr. Condrón, health officer, Easton; Dr. H. L. Hull, assistant chief medical inspector of the state, Harrisburg; Dr. J. Treichler Butz, health officer, Allentown.

One result of the meeting, as the *Morning Call* reported two days later, was that Allentown gained “the distinction of being the first city in Pennsylvania” to be able to “placard and quarantine” cases if necessary to do so.

Bethlehem, only 9 months a city at this point, did not yet have a health bureau.

But within two weeks of the arrival of the Flu, local authorities were mobilizing to fight it.