

# Eerie similarities to our situation abound

The Bethlehem Gadfly Spanish Flu April 9, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the Spanish Flu 

*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).*

Allentown and Bethlehem shut down during the weekend of October 4-6, 1918, at the direction of the state health authorities.

As cases of Spanish Flu rose, readers of the *Morning Call* would learn of school closings on October 9 and churches — the last hold-out — closing on October 12.

Social distancing was slow but eventually took hold.

The reluctance to give up on these sites is familiar to us. The arguments the same.

But the eerie similarities to our current situation doesn't end there.

In paging through the October 1918 issues of the *Call*, we could be reading our own newspapers, listening to our own television news.

For we find a call for volunteer medical staff, enlistment of medical students, a re-enlistment of retired medical personnel, visitors banned from hospitals, and — of course, of course — an inability to fill the “urgent demand” for masks.



**GAUZE MASKS TO CHECK INFLUENZA**—The Red Cross and other war organizations are bending every effort to provide for the urgent demand for gauze masks to help check the spread of the influenza epidemic. The mask as shown consists of a simple piece of cotton gauze which is adjusted over the victim, thus preventing the spread of the germs from the contaminated.

And ghoulishly analogous to our image of the refrigerator trucks clustering at hospital backdoors to handle the backup of corpses, in Easton “it was necessary for the prison inspectors to call for volunteers among the prisoners in the county jail to dig graves in the cemeteries.”