Awareness of the Spanish Flu arrives in the Lehigh Valley, September 13, 1918

The Bethlehem Gadfly Spanish Flu March 30, 2020



Latest in a series of posts on the coronavirus



For perspective on our current 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).

We can mark the exact day.

On Friday the 13th, 1918, readers, if they read carefully, found this on p. 17 of the *Morning Call* rubbing shoulders on both sides with stories about the war.

- Note that our "officials" are aware of the flu's "ravage" in Europe (as we were in China) but are slow to be sure it's here.
- Social distancing is recognized as the prime defense, but our "officials" hesitate to initiate such "drastic" action.
- The government "possibly may" have a 15 Days to Slow the **Spread** plan to combat the disease.

(By Associated Press.) Washington, Sept. 11.-Spanish influenza, the strange prostrating malady which recently ravaged the German army and later spread into France and England with such discomforting effects on the civil population, has been brought to some of the American Atlantic coast cities, officials here say, but they are awaiting further investigation and developments before forming definite opinions.

In the opinion of officials the strange infection has been brought over by persons on returning American transports. There is little means of combatting the disease except by absolute quarantine and that obviously is impossible at this time because it would require interruption of intercourse drastic as between communities as was resorted to in the dreaded days of yellow fever in the south.

Precautionary measures sidered the best weapons to combat the malady and as the disease is a new one to American physicians the government possibly may take the menace in hand by issuing countrywide warnings and general instructions of how to avoid the infection if possible and how best to meet it if it

Spanish influenza, although short lived and of virtually no permanent serious results is a most distresing ailment which prostrates the sufferer for a few days during which he suffers the acme of discomfort.

• Though the European experience is as plain as day, the disease is characterized as, though acutely uncomfortable, short-lived and not serious — how often have we heard that 80% who have the virus will self-treat without consequence — but no mention is made of death, though 675,000 Americans will eventually suffer it.

Readers of their Friday the 13th newspaper would, if they noted the story at all, feel no imminent fear.

Readers of this Monday the 30th blog, however, might well feel distressed at lessons not well learned.