

Women's work in the other pandemic

The Bethlehem Gadfly Spanish Flu April 21, 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).

Gadfly loves what he finds sometimes in the fine print as he wanders through the *Morning Call* archives from 1918.

Like this on the next-to-last page of the October 26, 1918, issue. The back page was always devoted to the classified advertisements (something interesting there too: an ad for 14-year-old boys and girls to work in the Schneider Shoe Factory, 228 N. Jefferson). So this was the tail end of the issue.

An article on what work women were doing as a result of the pandemic.

Yes, volunteering for the Red Cross, making and delivering food.

Yes, making masks.

Yes, circulating petitions.

Traditional woman's work. Remember 1918 was even before Women's suffrage.

But at the end of the article —

Pearl Moore and Sylvia Porter “pursuing occupations usually given men . . . putting on overalls” and working for the railroad.

Edna Furnival appointed as draughtsman — draughtsman — to replace a man “gone into the army.”

But most of all this one.

Miss Elizabeth Rachel Wylie, of New York, foreseeing many months ago that there would be a clamorous demand for the financial instruction of women on a large scale, has instituted a clearing house to teach women how to manager their own affairs.

Men were dying from the Flu. Probably more than women (think of the enormous number sick and dying in the Army camps) because of working outside the home.

More and more, women now had to take care of “things.”

Gadfly found that little paragraph quite striking, quite revelatory — quite poignant.