

# The hammer drops on a “badly infected” Bethlehem

The Bethlehem Gadfly coronavirus, Spanish Flu April 4, 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).*

On October 2, 1918, as we reported last post, in tall, all-bold letters in a commanding top-right position of the page, the readers of the *Morning Call* learned that Allentown “**MAY TAKE DRASTIC ACTION TO COMBAT SPANISH INFLUENZA.**”

Two days later the “MAY” disappeared, and the story moved to top-left, the most commanding position on the page. Not conditional now. No potentiality now. Drastic action was taken.



Every place of public amusement and every saloon was ordered closed by the Pennsylvania state Commissioner of Health (churches and schools were left to local discretion), who said, “Bethlehem, a big industrial center . . . is badly infected.”

The above article includes Associated Press news releases from several other locations. Philadelphia, for instance, was being hit bad (the grandfather Gadfly wrote about earlier died there in this early Flu surge).

There were 636 new cases of influenza reported today and the health department expects a big jump in figures tomorrow as orders were sent out to physicians to report all cases. It is estimated that there are more than twenty thousand cases of influenza in this city. The number of deaths reported today was 139.

There is a shortage of doctors, due in part to the fact that 26 per cent. of the city's physicians are in war service and appeals have been sent out for medical assistance. All the students in two pharmaceutical colleges here have been assigned to assist overworked druggists. The city council of defense and the Red Cross have united in sending out calls for nurses.

Some of the hospitals are so crowded that they are declining to take other medical cases. In nearly every hospital a certain proportion of the staffs of doctors and nurses have fallen victims to the disease.

We're familiar now with medical students being pressed into service and medical staff on the front lines falling "victims to the disease," but strikingly new is the shortage of doctors because of the war. One thing, at least, that we can be thankful for.