Bethlehem "blanket quarantine"? Been there, done that

The Bethlehem Gadfly Bethlehem Moments, History, Bethlehem, Spanish Flu March 29, 2020



Latest in a series of posts on the coronavirus



Gadfly is a (literary) historian by trade. The past always beckons him. In this period of coronavirus, he could consult the files of the Bethlehem Globe on the local impact of the 1918 Spanish Influenza pandemic if the Lehigh University library were open. Sigh. Gadfly does have access to Morning Call files from home, however, and he will see what they yield. For now, here's all he finds in perhaps the main modern history of Bethlehem.

> and the losing of a number of members through their entering the service." In September, 1918, an epidemic of Spanish Influenza swept the nation, resulting in a large number of deaths. In Bethlehem St. Luke's Hospital could not handle the influx of patients, so on September 27 to Be Washington school was temporarily con-The f verted into an emergency isolation hospital. elabo By October 4, 1918, two hundred and fifty a gold cases had been reported, and the city Counequal. cil, sitting as a Board of Health, adopted a ing v blanket quarantine in an attempt to halt Artille the further spread of the disease. All Schwa saloons, moving picture houses, soda its ba fountains, ice cream parlours and public Batter and private schools were closed from the Augus fourth of October to the sixth of November. W. L A number of people died from the disease. They I The exact number is unknown, as many lowing cases, especially those among the foreign teau T population on the South Side, were tended in Belg at home by members of the family and not Armist Mongo reported. United Then the war ended and the city's resithey w dents rejoiced with the rest of the country. in which On December 17, 1918, Schwab returned 311

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: The Golden Years, 1841-1920 (1976)

- In Bethlehem, hospital capacity eventually was not sufficient.
- And satellite space was needed.
- Washington School? Where was Washington School?
- Case numbers escalated quickly to the danger point within a month.
- Interestingly, we had no Board of Health remember that Bethlehem was only born as a city in 1917, inauguration of the first mayor occurred only 9 months before the outbreak.
- By god, there was a blanket quarantine a shelter in place.
- Like now, schools were closed.
- The list of other closings mentioned specifically includes watering holes and other fun entertainment and food gathering places.
- So what exactly does "blanket quarantine" mean? Were non-essential businesses closed? Were people advised to stay home?
- We need to remember that a war was going on!
- The duration of the shutdown was about a month.
- Exact number of deaths unknown.
- I wonder where victims of the disease were buried Roy, at Fairview?
- Interestingly, the Southsiders handled the crisis differently.

Wow! Gadfly would love more granular detail about day-to-day life in our town during this time. He can't wait till he can get to *the Globe*. Anybody have suggestions for other resources?

But let's see what the files of the *Morning Call* yield.

In the meantime, is there any family lore in the memory banks of longtime city residents that you can share?