

The 1918 apex arrives in the Lehigh Valley

The Bethlehem Gadfly Spanish Flu April 10, 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 hasn't heard the word "apex" so much since sophomore geometry.

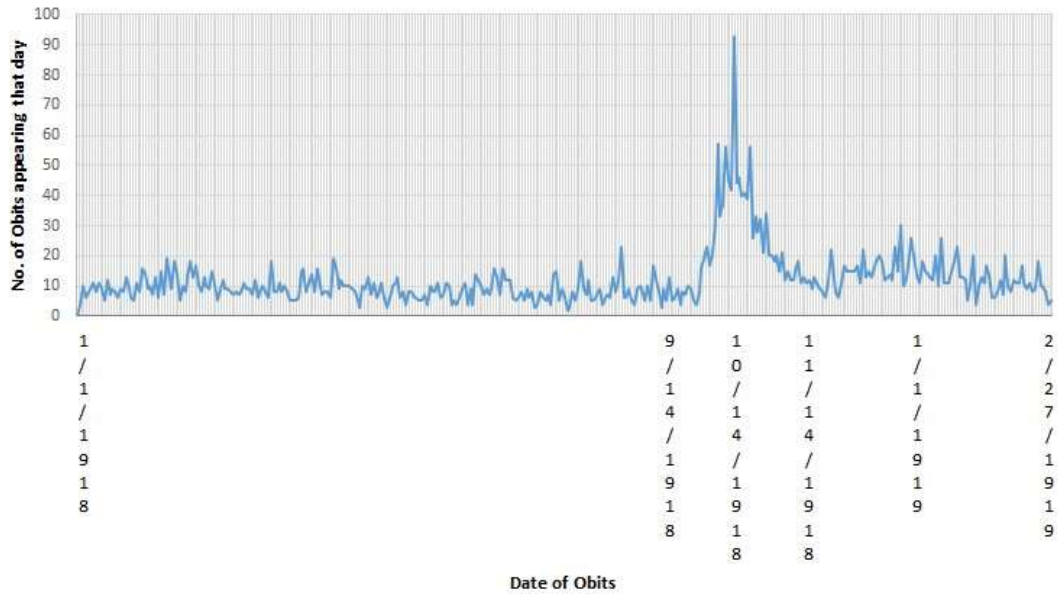
For the first half of the month of October 1918 readers of the *Morning Call* were greeted each day with a steady stream of influenza death notices, sometimes 6-8 individual ones per page. A death on S. 4th St., one on N. 6th St., one in Catasauqua, one in Whitehall, etc. And often with descriptive information about job, family, funeral arrangements.

Then, on the morning of Wednesday October 16, under the matter-of-fact headline of "Deaths at Easton due to Influenza Epidemic," readers were greeted with a list of 50 names arranged as simply and as clinically as if they were ingredients in a recipe: Frank Clayton, forty five, 627 Milton Ave.; Joseph Sparta, three months, 185 E. Canal St.; Pedro Fransciare, Phillipsburg; Walter Koch, nineteen, Nazareth. And so forth. 50 of them. One after the other. Without pause. Without a word of commentary. As if the number were too great to give each victim some individuality. As if there were only time now for bookkeeping.

Easton was reaching its apex of Spanish Influenza cases.

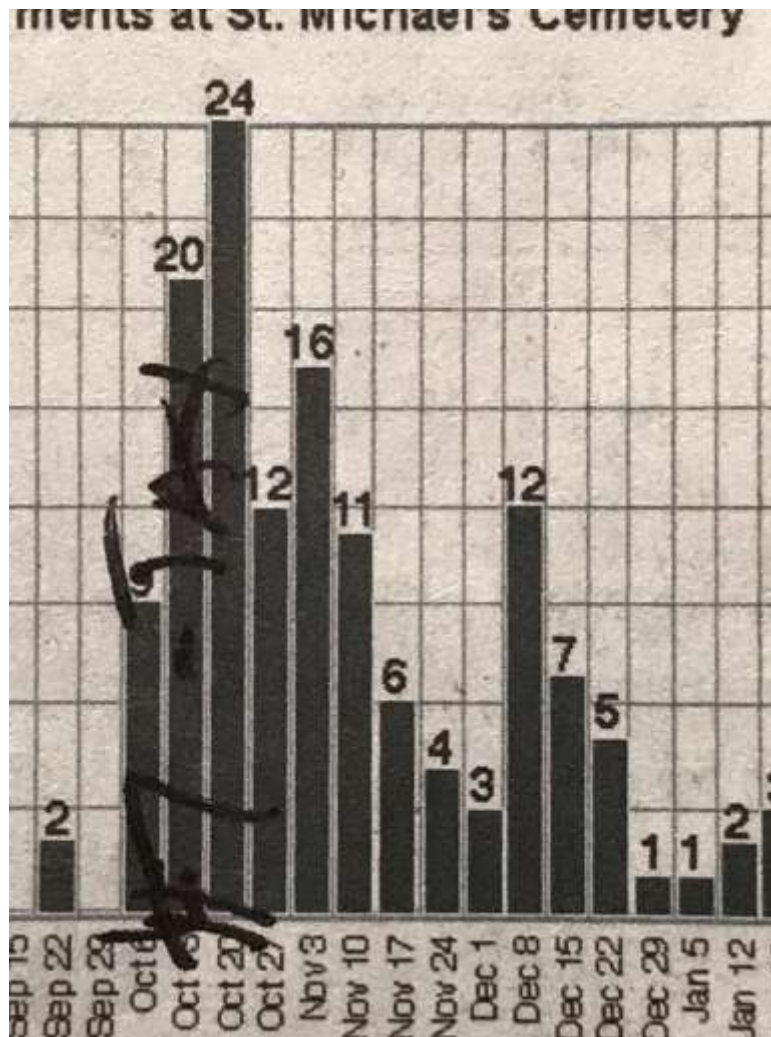
In this graph of the 13-month period between January 1, 2018, and February 27, 1919, done by a Gadfly faithful follower, we can see that there were an astonishing 93 Flu deaths in Easton October 14 — Easton's apex.

Obits in Easton Express - Average is 9/day



The second weekend in October 1918 was, in fact, a good weekend to be out of the Lehigh Valley completely, for Bethlehem, too, we know, also reached its apex then.

Look at the research about burials at St. Michael's cemetery, Bethlehem, done by Rosemary C. Buffington and published in the April 1 [Bethlehem Press](#).



It took literally just one month from its “arrival” in the United States as reported in the *Call* September 13 for the Spanish Flu to reach and to wreak its greatest havoc in the Lehigh Valley.

We have all learned in the past days that for the coronavirus what we are seeing *now* is the result of something that happened *two weeks ago*.

One is tempted to say that Spanish Flu acted the same way. Social distancing was implemented October 3-4 at the direction of state authorities. And the curve of deaths started to drop approximately 10-11 days later.

One is tempted to say that social distancing worked.