

October 15, 1918: A day in the life of the Spanish Flu

The Bethlehem Gadfly Spanish Flu April 16, 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 spends a lot of time watching the television news.

These shows sift, organize, and synthesize the news for us.

The situation was quite different for the readers of the *Morning Call* in 1918.

Spanish Influenza news was scattered throughout a typical 14-page issue.

Here are some of the pieces scattered throughout the October 15 issue with which *Morning Call* readers would put together their daily mosaic on the status of the dreaded disease.



It's interesting in the light of our current squabbles that all defensive activity was orchestrated at the local/state level; only now, at the apex of the disease in Allentown and Bethlehem, was there an attempt from a national level to fight the disease.

— Those who argue today that sparsely populated areas should be “open” because safe should take a lesson from Phifer’s Corner (somewhere near Lehigh), so small that it no longer shows on the map: “Phifer’s Corner has quite a large number of cases of influenza, many of whom are dangerously ill.” If it can strike Phifer’s Corner, it can strike anywhere.

— Marcus Young is in critical condition from the Flu, completely unaware that his wife died of the “same disease” last week.

— Both ambulance drivers who took Miss Katie Urffer to Allentown Hospital for the Flu were stricken immediately afterward, one “staggered into the office” and then “fell over.”

— Albert Dion, who drew the first number in the June draft, dies at Camp Lee.



— The **Adelaide Mills** were closed for cleaning.

— Nuns from a parochial school were sent to Philadelphia to tend the sick.

— Though “eager to go to France,” “no happier crusader in all America,” and in the “pink of health,” Sergeant Major Perry Tifft died in an Army hospital.

**BOTH BOROUGH DOCTORS
DOWN WITH DISEASE.**
Portland has two physicians and both
are ill with Spanish **influenza**

- The Kaler Hotel in Mahonoy City was turned into a hospital.
- Drown Hall at Lehigh University, home of Gadfly’s English Department, was turned into a hospital.

**SCARCITY OF FLOWERS
DUE TO INCREASED DEMANDS** (for funerals — so
macabre!)

- Masks were supplied to ambulance staff.
- “Conditions at the State Hospital for the Insane are alarming.”
- Edward Koons, “a big, powerful, robust man . . . was unable to combat the ravages of the terrible scourge.”



Percy and Ferdie

It was, uh, a busy day on the Flu beat.