

“Bethlehem is closed up tight”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Spanish Flu April 7, 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).



The directive from the state to shut down certain businesses because of the Spanish Flu came on a Thursday night.

As you can sense from the Mayor’s reaction to the idea of a quarantine in our last post, Allentown did not go gentle into that good night.

The above article in the Monday October 7 *Morning Call* reported that A-town “was the only municipality in this part of the state that did not immediately comply with the order.”

But it also reported that the order would be “rigidly enforced” beginning that Monday morning after saloons remained open Saturday night and a few movie houses that didn’t close did a “tremendous business.”

The paper reported that Bethlehem, however, was “closed up tight,” though the order to close was “taken with poor grace in many quarters.”

Remarks “from the pulpit,” for instance, indicated “the feeling there is against the ruling.”

Certain businesses in Bethlehem were closed immediately Friday morning, but the ice cream and liquor dealers invented the practice of take-out to temporarily skirt the order.

To avoid the loss of thousands of gallons of ice cream, the dealers were permitted to sell to the “family trade only” on a take-out basis. And the liquor dealers did a “big business” selling “their goods by the quarts thru the windows” on Saturday, “the biggest day they have had in many moons.”

The Bethlehem police had orders to enforce the shut-down, “raiding” Southside Coffee Houses at 429 and 523 E. Third St. on Sunday, arresting a total of 37 men. The paper (oddly?) specifically reported that both Coffee Houses were run by Greeks, one of whom “got away.”

Raiding “Coffee Houses”? Is that code for something else?

And singling out Greeks? What’s up with that?

And who do we find among the raiding officers but an “E. Gallagher”!

Gadfly meets his doppelganger.

Wasn’t ready for that.