

In an emergency, close all places where people congregate

The Bethlehem Gadfly coronavirus, Spanish Flu, Uncategorized April 5, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the coronavirus/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).

October 5, 1918.

Twenty-two days since the *Morning Call* announced the arrival of the Spanish Flu in America.

Now it starts to get really interesting.

The State Board of Health sent a detailed letter to all of the Boards of Health in the state.

Oct 5 1918 Health Instructions

The opening thrust of the letter was to rehearse all of the commonsense things you could (should) *do on your own* (such as covering your coughs, getting fresh air, and so forth) to combat the dreaded disease.

But the main operational thrust of the letter was to suggest all of the things that the state could *do to you* to combat the dreaded disease.

The main operational thrust of the letter was the invocation of the police power of the local government if necessary to control your behavior for the common good.

For instance, a decidedly get-tough policy on spitting through dramatic enforcement of the “anti-spitting act” was explicitly recommended.

sneezing. Probably nothing would better fix the attention to the need of covering the mouth and nose with a handkerchief when coughing and nothing would better fix the attention of your citizens upon the danger of infection from the droplets of moisture thrown out while coughing and sneezing than for you now to enforce the anti-spitting act. A few arrests made each week of persons spitting on sidewalks, railway platforms in railway carriages or other public places would fix the attention of your citizens upon this sort of care in a way that would offer protection against respiratory dis-

eases now and in future. We, therefore strongly urge that such examples be made now.

One is tempted to make a joke out of perp walks by spitters or spitters in stocks at Broad and Main until you remember the bus driver who just died from the coronavirus after **making a video** complaining of passengers who coughed on him.

Not so funny. And it would serve the knuckleheads right.

But here's the key nugget in the Board of Health directive:

longer when cough persists. Should the disease become unduly prevalent in your community, all places where persons congregate in numbers should be closed.

Who gets to decide when the disease is “unduly prevalent” or, in fact, whether the disease is a “disease” at all?

Sound familiar? Sound like something from the nightly news?

Let's see the tension between Allentown and Bethlehem and, apparently, within Bethlehem, on these questions.