

# MANSFIELD MEMORIES: The Spanish Influenza struck Mansfield during WWI

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In the autumn of 1918, World War I was nearing an end. But few were prepared for the next crisis that was about to kill more people globally than the war itself: the Spanish Influenza.

A horrific flu strain which was incorrectly associated with Spain, the “Spanish Influenza” killed more than 20 million people worldwide in a six-month span, far more than the war did (11.9 million) over four years. In the United States 600,000 lives were lost, and in Massachusetts the death toll was 22,000.

And sadly, Mansfield was no exception. From the outbreak in late September 1918 through the following February, 44 Mansfield residents died of the flu. The town was in crisis mode from late September until the first week of November, when the worst of the epidemic subsided. Death by Spanish Flu was horrible, and there was great fear over such a virulent outbreak. Fortunately there was also considerable cooperation to see the crisis through.

The first death by Spanish Influenza in Mansfield occurred on Sept. 24, when John Malloy of Chauncy Street, a 20-year old employee of the S.W. Card Manufacturing Company passed away. By then the town was beginning to mobilize against the flu. That same day the public schools were closed and would not reopen for an entire month. Local factories were decimated by a lack of workers. To prevent further spread of the disease the Board of Selectmen soon banned all public meetings and ordered all funerals private.



### Much Sickness in Town

Nearly 200 cases of Spanish influenza are reported in town this week. Our physicians are handling the malady skillfully and if those afflicted will be wise in their conduct it is thought serious results will be avoided and the disease finally mastered here. A few simple rules should be observed. Avoid promiscuous crowds. Do not allow any one to sneeze in your face. If you are afflicted go immediately to your home and summon your physician at once and follow his advice closely. Don't try to stave this sickness off. Others have tried it and friends have sent bouquets to the funeral. Prompt, skillful medical aid is the only safe aid with this new ailment.

And a string of sad stories began. Among them was Gussie Hanaford, also of Chauncy Street, whose husband and mother both succumbed to the flu within a span of two hours. There was Mrs. George Lameraux, a wife and mother of seven. Florence White, 34 years old, followed two days later by her husband Charles, 38. Several children and infants were lost, including a 6-year-old boy and twin 17-day-old girls. Five Mansfield servicemen died by Spanish Flu while serving in the war.

Our local doctors made endless house calls. There were far too many cases for them to handle, so the town established a "Community Hospital" at the Congregational Church. Miss O'Rourke, a Red Cross nurse from Lowell, was

appointed to run the hospital. Selectman William P. McDermott secured the services of two female doctors, a Dr. Bruce and Dr. Benedict of New York and New Jersey respectively. The hospital was opened for five weeks, treated 146 patients, and suffered 15 deaths. A "Community Kitchen" was also established at the Methodist Church for families that were sick and unable to cook.

The Community Hospital was considered such a success that a committee was appointed to consider a permanent hospital in Mansfield, but in the end no such action was taken.

The influenza crisis subsided in the first week of November, and the next week great joy arrived in the form of the Armistice that ended World War I. Nine more influenza deaths hit Mansfield through February 1919 when the strain finally disappeared and the frightening episode faded into history.

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