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MUSEUM NOTES: APRIL 23, 2020

The 1918 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC (continued)

As discussed in last week's Museum Notes, the 1918 Influenza Pandemic ran from Spring 1918 to Spring 1919. We know that the 1918 virus affected Canadian, but we do not have many firsthand accounts. None of the biographies, recollections, personal papers, or newspapers in the museum's collection document about the pandemic while it was happening. Furthermore, there are no known copies of the Canadian Record from 1918 and only June-December of 1919. Oh how I wish we had those newspapers! However, we do have a few primary sources upon which to know how Hemphill County was affected during the pandemic.

There were three waves, or cycles, of the 1918 virus. The first wave started in March 1918 among soldiers at training camps. In Hemphill County, over 100 young men were drafted to support the war effort. Fifteen of those died while in uniform. One of the 15, James Robert Pullum (1894-October 1918) is documented as dying from Influenza while at sea. However, three other men, Charles Dent (1885-July 1918), William Leslie Calhoun (1891-October 1918), and Ira Jasper Hansbro (1895-May 1919) all died of Broncho Pneumonia.

During the 1918 Influenza Pandemic, most victims died from a combination of bacterial pneumonia following the influenza virus infection. So, it is more than likely that the other three men (Dent, Calhoun, and Hansbro) died from complications from the flu followed by pneumonia. Therefore, potentially more than 25% of Hemphill County's military members who died during the war succumbed to the 1918 virus infection.

The second wave occurred when infected American forces in Europe returned to the United States, around September 1918. This second wave spread quickly and was particularly deadly, including the young and healthy. It is generally believed that the original virus mutated while in Europe and was a new strain when it came back to America.

Overall 2,100 Texans died from the 1918 influenza. The first documented case of influenza in civilians was reported to the Texas State Health Department on September 21, 1918. The Amarillo Daily News picked up the "Spanish Influenza" story on October 3, 1918. On October 11th, the Amarillo City Health Officer, Dr. G.T. Vineyard, announced there was only one documented case of pneumonia caused by influenza. Dr. Vineyard stated that there was no need to shut down businesses, schools, or places of amusement, and furthermore civilians should not worry about the flu. However, four days later, on October 15th, Amarillo Mayor Lon D. Marris prohibited public gatherings, closed all schools, churches, pool halls, picture shows,

lodges, clubs and club meetings, social entertainment, and non-essential businesses in an effort to stop the spread of the virus.

On October 22nd, Amarillo Mayor Marrs made further prohibitions. People were no longer allowed to meet returning Soldiers at the train station. Neighbors had to discontinue visits and social calls. People could not gather in large numbers. Ice men were no longer allowed inside offices or residences to deliver ice. And, people dropping off their laundry had to wrap it in paper and leave it outside the laundromat's door. Additionally, the Volunteer Medical Service Corps of the Council of National Defense instructed all Americans to clean and disinfect their homes thoroughly, for towns and cities to establish emergency hospitals for flu patients, and for doctors to not perform any surgical operations unless absolutely necessary to save lives.

As I mentioned earlier, there are no known copies of the Canadian Record for 1918. So, what happened in Hemphill County? Here is what I have been able to find.

The Beargrass Annuals skips the 1919 yearbook. In the 1920 annual, the Senior Class wrote "Because of the 'flu' epidemic, our Junior year was rather a short one..." The Junior Class wrote, "In our Sophomore year the 'flu' came to town. As we do not believe in doing things by halves, most all of us had it, but we managed to pull through it all." So, from the writings of the students themselves, we learn that Canadian schools closed early to prevent spreading influenza, but I could not find out when the schools closed or if the students were home taught as we are doing now.

We also know that the 1918 virus overwhelmed Canadian's first hospital owned and operated by Dr. H.C. Caylor. The basement of the W.C.T.U. became a make-shift hospital to handle the overflow of influenza patients. Volunteers turned nurses cared for 80 patients in the W.C.T.U. and only 2 patients died there.

Between September 1918 and August 1919, the second and third waves, a total of 47 people died in Hemphill County. Over 40% of the deceased, the 20 individuals identified below, died from influenza during those two waves:

-Clemmons Raynor Ruggles (1918-September 1918) 6 months old -John Riley Price (1877-September 1918) 41 years old -William Carroll Poff (1878-October 1918) 40 years old -Georgia (Dillingham) Benham (1897-October 1918) 21 years old -Clem Nix (1890-November 1918) 28 years old -Evanline (Wood) Douglas (1884-November 1918) 34 years old -H. E. Glisson (1859-November 1918) 59 years old -Ida Elizabeth Mathews (1917-November 1918) 1 year old -James Martin Swire (1881-November 1918) 37 years old -John Emmitt Copper (1882-November 1918) 36 years old -Richard Glenn "Dick" Keever (1890-November 1918) 28 years old -Ruby Fay Hill (1893-November 1918) 25 years old -Eva May (Choate) Keahey (1887-December 1918) 31 years old -Perry Austin Shoaf (1882- December 1918) 36 years old -Perry Harvey Shoaf (1914-December 1918) 4 years old -Austin Lee Hardin (1883- January 1919) 36 years old -Hattie Ida Lou (Hawk) Mathews (1883-February 1919) 36 years old -Jimmie Edgar Benham (1918- May 1919) 1 year old -Larence L. Swartz (1882-June 1919) 37 years old -Lula M. Bledsoe (1915-August 1919) 4 years old - Little Lula contracted influenza in late 1918. She never fully recovered from it and in August 1919, she died as a result of ill health following

the flu. I have been able to find.

During the pandemic, C.C. Stickley, the funeral home director and undertaker in Hemphill County, traveled throughout the Panhandle tending to more than 50 bodies. According to a Canadian Record article from October 16, 1919, at one point Stickley was so busy that for 5 days straight he never took off his coat and was only able to catch sleep while standing up against a wall. One question I cannot answer with certainty is did Canadian shut down businesses, churches, the Palace Theatre, etc., like Amarillo did. I cannot find any primary documents to say yes or no to it. There is no mention of the epidemic in the City Council records. In the Hemphill County Commissioner Court records, in November 1918, the county paid for disinfectants from J.C. Studer and Humphry Grocery Brothers for the [Enfluenza] Epidemic. In December, the county paid for 3 coffins for an unidentified Mexican, Dick Keever, and J.E. Copper. The county also paid for medicine that same month from Baders Pharmacy and Murrell Drug Company. So, my guess is yes. Maybe not to the degree as we are now, but maybe they did close down some non-essential businesses since the schools were closed, the W.C.T.U. became a hospital, and the county paid bills directly associated to the pandemic. If only we had something from then to tell us.

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HemphillCountyHistory@RiverValleyMuseum.org

(<mailto:hemphillcountyhistory@rivervalleymuseum.org>)