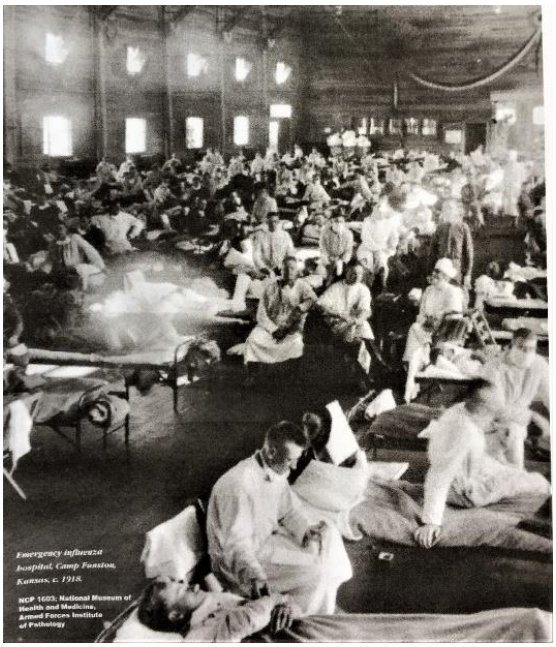
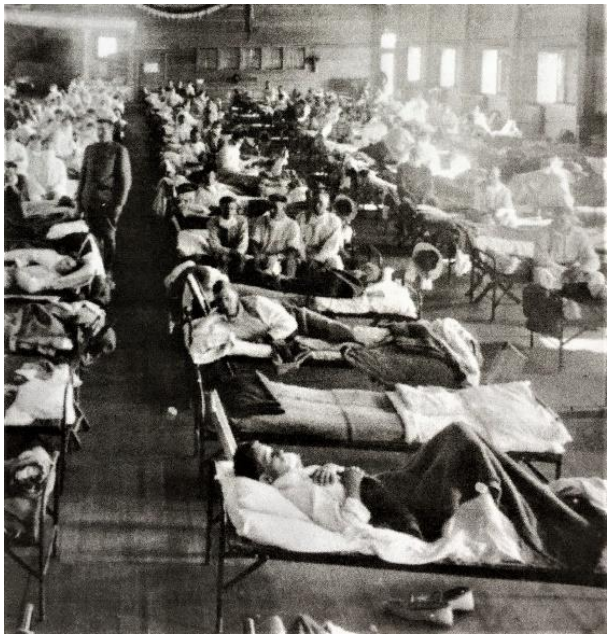
3. The Spanish Flu

And so, my Little Dear One, what Story shall we start with? How about the story of the Spanish Flu, since that is the one that got me here? Now ***that*** was an amazing story, very, very scary, really. And if it seems too scary, remember we can just skip over parts you don't want to know about. Way back in the spring of 1918 we saw these pictures in the newspaper about how many soldiers were sick in Fort Riley, Kansas, but we just thought, well, that's too bad, but they will get better and be able to join the war in Europe. They are young and strong. With the flu, it is usually the very young or the very old who die.





Let's look at "Wisconsin and the Great Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918" by Steven Berg:

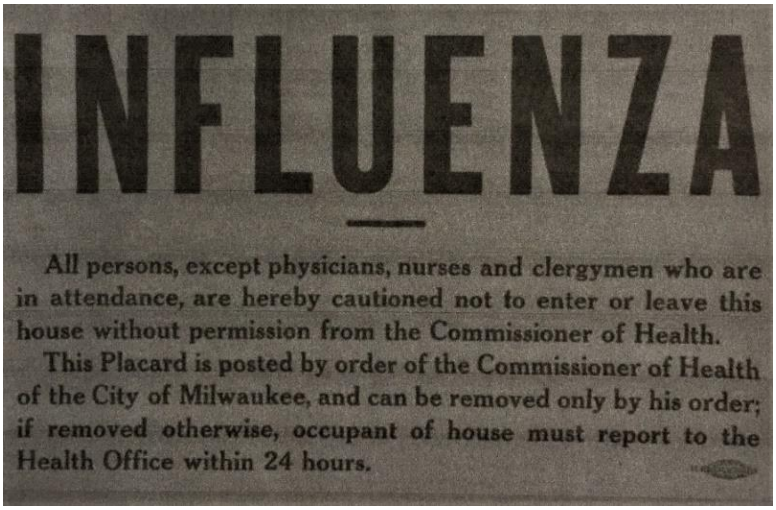
The origins of the epidemic remain obscure even today, but one theory suggests that the disease first emerged with a milder virus that subsequently mutated into a different, more lethal form. The less deadly strain of the flu may have made its first appearance at a military base in Fort Riley, Kansas, in the days following a violent dust storm on March 10, 1918. As the dust settled, soldiers began reporting to the base hospital with body aches, lethargy, coughing, and high fevers. By noon, 107 soldiers had been admitted. Within five weeks the disease had spread through the nation's armed services, incapacitating 1,127 soldiers and sailors and killing forty-six. But most of the affected soon recovered, resumed their military training and then departed for France to join the American Expeditionary Force. It seems likely that those American servicemen carried that mild form of the flu with them to Europe, where they shared it with their French and British allies as well as their German foes. As the theory goes, sometime after the infected American troops reached Europe, the microbes mutated into their more deadly and virulent state. The new, more lethal virus raged throughout continental Europe in the spring of 1918 and became known as the "Spanish influenza" probably because, as a neutral country, Spain did not censor its newspapers' coverage, thus providing the rest of the world with the first news of the epidemic. By late spring, cases had appeared in Scotland and England. By August

the new form of the virus had reached India, Southeast Asia, Japan, China, the Caribbean and Central and South America, often progressing along major international trade routes.

Strangely, the United States was one of the last countries to be affected, but the flu eventually came. *On September 14, 1918, Boston reported the first case of the Spanish flu in the United States. Within a week, cases appeared in other American cities with naval bases: Baltimore, San Francisco, Chicago, Mobile, and New Orleans. By the third week in September, the Great Lakes Naval Training Station near Chicago reported 4,500 cases and 100 deaths, and Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois, just 20 miles from the Wisconsin border, had 400 sick soldiers.*

During the week of September 28, 1918, one of the first cases of influenza in Wisconsin appeared when two sailors from the Great Lakes Naval Training Station fell ill while visiting Milwaukee. Upon realizing that the two had the flu, the city health department immediately conducted a telegram canvas of the city's physicians, who reported only 98 patients with bad colds or flu. The health department requested physicians to report any new influenza cases immediately. Six cases were reported on September 26, 24 on September 27, 62 on September 28, and 97 on September 30. On October 2, a two-day decline in the number of cases was followed by the first four influenza deaths. Five days later, 256 new cases were reported, together with nine additional deaths. The flu then ripped through Milwaukee, infecting hundreds of people each day, peaking on October 22 with 588 new cases. After a brief lull in early November, the disease returned and infected thousands more before finally trailing off in late December.

By the end of 1918, more than 675,000 Americans had died from the flu, most between the ages of 19 and 42. I was 27. By December of 1918 this influenza had sickened almost 103,000 residents in Wisconsin, and 8,459 Wisconsin residents died during late 1918 and early 1919, more than were killed in World War I, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War combined. In a normal flu year, typically less than 1000 people in Wisconsin died from the flu. The scariest thing was that no one knew for sure what caused it or how to protect yourself against catching it. Another 15 years would have to pass before the electron microscope would be invented. That would revolutionize our knowledge about bacteria and viruses and we would know how they passed from person to person and therefore, how we could protect ourselves from them. It was suspected that the 1918 flu was spread by coughs and sneezes.



People came back from Milwaukee telling us about seeing these signs on the houses there, where the people who lived in the houses could not come out and no one could go in. Food packages had to be left at the door.

In December of 1918, the Wisconsin State Board of Health declared that the "Spanish flu" epidemic would "forever be remembered as the most disastrous calamity that has ever been visited upon the people of Wisconsin." So you see, that flu that we all thought was just a normal flu had actually turned itself into a different flu, one that killed a lot of people. During 1918-1919, 500 million people in the world were sickened by the flu, and an estimated 50 million of them died.

Those infected by the new virus at first experienced an illness that resembled the common winter flu, characterized by chills, fever, delirium, sore throat, headache, dizziness, muscle pain, hair loss, watery eyes, general lethargy and a short, dry cough and temperatures of 101-105 degrees F. These symptoms generally dissipated after two or three days, though the cough and a general malaise might linger for another week or two. What made the 1918 strain of flu different, and deadly, were its rapid onset and dire complications. Common flu was ordinarily foreshadowed by symptoms and set in gradually. In 1918 the flu spread rapidly and often incapacitated its victims without warning. People in apparent good health would suddenly collapse with the flu, some dying within hours. Furthermore 20% of the infected individuals, mostly those who resumed normal activities before the disease had fully passed, developed pneumonia. Up to half of those who caught pneumonia developed heliotrope cyanosis, a condition that filled the victims' lungs with a thick blackish liquid, turned their skin bluish black, and usually proved fatal within forty-eight hours. While the common flu often caused fatalities among the very old or the very young, the influenza epidemic of 1918 paradoxically took its most severe toll on those between the ages of 25 and 40, men and women in the prime of life. There was no cure for the Spanish flu, and the only effective treatment was two weeks of undisturbed bed rest.

Worst of all was that the disease was highly contagious. It could be spread by contact with sick individuals, but influenza was also an airborne virus. It was borne from place to place within the respiratory systems of infected individuals who filled the air with the virus each time they coughed or sneezed. Unsuspecting bystanders inhaled the virus into their lungs where it multiplied and attacked them. If not exposed to sunlight, the virus could remain alive and airborne for hours, gently drifting through enclosed spaces on air currents or through ventilation systems. A single sick person could contaminate everyone in an enclosed building or railroad car and leave the virus behind to infect even more after departing. Large, indoor public gatherings posed the greatest danger with the potential to infect hundreds or thousands of people at a time. As fall turned into winter, the disease had even more favorable conditions for spreading as people spent more time indoors and closed their windows against the cold.

When the flu first broke out in Europe, our newspapers carried a report or two about it, mostly because it was killing some of our soldiers. There was sadness at the deaths, but no concern that the disease might come to this country. Then when it did arrive here in

the middle of September, we started reading alarming reports about some cities like Philadelphia where there were 1500 cases of the flu among the sailors and soldiers at the Navy Yard, and doctors thought it spread from there to the population of the city during a Liberty Loan Parade. In five weeks, 12,000 people died in Philadelphia, 350 people every day, and corpses were piling up even on the street because all the mortuaries were full and emergency workers were falling ill. All health workers and anyone working with the public had to wear masks, like this policeman in New York City. This was shocking news, and we became uneasy, but we still thought this flu was something only big cities got because people lived so close together. In Wisconsin, Milwaukee was the first city hit, and the most affected. But we did not think this flu would come to us if we lived on healthy farms. We had clear, cold well water, fresh food we grew ourselves, and fresh air. Then as fall came on and we were concerned with getting the last of the vegetable crops in and making sure our farms and buildings were prepared for the coming snows, we heard about the death in Utah of the daughter of one of our Bloomington friends. They brought the girl home for her burial. This suddenly made the disease real. Then our newspapers, *The Bloomington Record*, *The Grant County Herald* and The *Lancaster Teller*, ran a few syndicated news articles from Madison as well as Milwaukee, and we became truly alarmed, because it was clear that the disease was now in Madison, a medium-sized city less than a hundred miles from us. There were some Bloomington students at the University of Wisconsin there.

Madison had its first cases in early October. The flu began on the University of Wisconsin campus among participants in the military-run Student Army Training Corps SATC. Because the epidemic first appeared on military bases, it was natural that Madisonians would assume that the SATC students might pose an influenza risk. Rumors abounded, and the Dean tried to quash them to avert a panic, telling worried parents that this was only the normal annual cold and flu season among the students. The day after the Dean assured parents that there were no flu deaths on campus, Arthur Ness, an SATC member and University of Wisconsin student, died at St. Mary's Hospital.

MADISON, WIS., FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1918

INFLUENZA AT CAMP IS DENIED

University Soldiers Suffering From Grippe, Physicians Declare

150 IN INFIRMARY

Removal of Sick From Barracks is Precautionary Measure

Rumors which have been spread about the city that there is a Spanish influenza epidemic at the university is denied by medical officers in charge of the S. A. T. C.

About 150 men have been removed to the infirmary and the University club and examinations have been made, but up to the present, not a single indication of the influenza has been discovered. Physicians declare that most of the men are suffering with bad colds and grippe. Their removal to the infirmary is a precautionary step.

Most of the men who have been placed in confinement have been given the usual test and none have showed signs of the epidemic which is sweeping over the country.

Ten men were removed from their barracks to the University club this morning.

The Capital Times

Tells of Conditions.

The following letter concerning the situation has been sent by Dr. Harsken to Dean Birge:

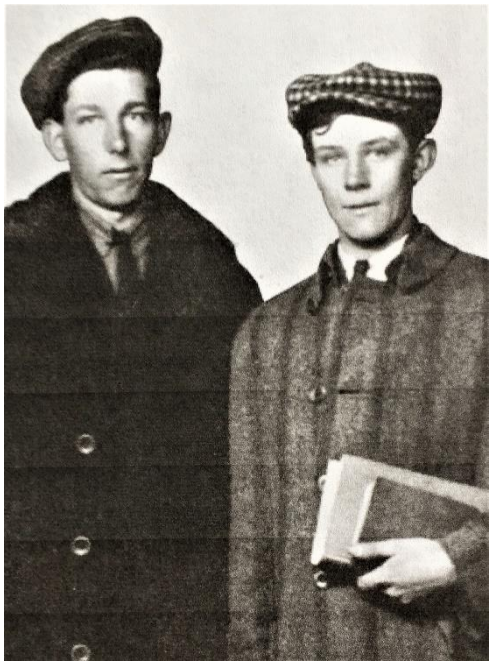
"I desire to report that approximately 80 patients were transferred yesterday from the overcrowded infirmary at the Raymer house to the new infirmary at the University club. About 80 other students, chiefly of the S. A. T. C., were likewise provided with beds in the new infirmary. At present there are approximately 170 men in the new infirmary of whom about 70 belong to the vocational group and 100 to the S. A. T. C. There are 17 girls confined to bed at the girls' infirmary and a number of other girls confined to their rooms. There is as yet no evidence that we are dealing with a true so-called Spanish influenza.

"The cases are mild in type as compared with the symptoms described for the Spanish influenza, and bacterial cultures which, however, haveled to somewhat inconclusive results when carried out in case of the known Spanish influenza epidemics, have thus far here lent no support to the idea that we may be dealing with an epidemic of Spanish influenza here.

"When college opens in the fall, we always have had a considerable number of grippy colds among the students. Many of these have been cared for in their rooms at home. The development of the barrack system of living has rendered it advisable to care for all of these students who show any fever at a central infirmary. This accounts for the large number of patients now at the infirmary. As mentioned above there are few cases among the students of severe illness.

Take Precautions.

"On consultation with Major McCaskey, we have decided to set aside a room in each house in which students may be placed who show any signs of illness. From these rooms students will be transferred to the new army infirmary if it seems to be of a nature to demand infirmary



We looked at the photo of young Arthur Ness in his jaunty black cap, and we felt numb because he was so young and healthy. We saw pictures of the Anti-Tuberculosis Staff called to extra duty, all wearing masks, and we learned that those who did not wear masks often became ill and died. We also learned about the really horrible fact that people who had died of the flu often turned blue-black because their lungs filled up with blackish fluid that basically drowned them. Once the tell-tale blue-black corpses appeared, there was no longer any doubt that the Spanish flu had arrived in your community. All of this was going on while the war raged on in Europe and we tried to get news of our young men there.

Madison took quick action and effectively "shut down" the city by forbidding congregation at all public venues, with a quarantine of infected individuals. Health officials concentrated on preventing the spread of the flu through public information campaigns. Local authorities printed posters, and the State Board of Health issued quarterly bulletins of the progress of the disease, as well as information on how to prevent the spread of disease. When Johnnie took our milk into town

he would sometimes bring back *The Capitol Times* of Madison so we could watch the progress of the disease.

Sanctions were issued against public coughing, and public spitting laws were to be strictly enforced. In Milwaukee 8 men were fined $5 each for spitting. Kissing and shaking hands were discouraged. Church doors were locked, and there was to be no ringing of church bells except for the Angelus. There were some exemptions, as for weddings and funerals, with only near relatives in attendance. Priests could offer confessions and communion, and individuals could offer private prayers in the churches provided no large numbers of people were present. All confirmations were postponed and all schools closed.

The Capital Times

OCTOBER 22, 1918

SISTER NURSE AT ST. MARY'S SUCCUMBS

Dies of Pneumonia After Caring for Soldier Patients During Epidemic

After nursing influenza and pneumonia patients since the outbreak of the epidemic Sister Mary Fortunata of St. Mary's hospital succumbed to pneumonia Monday night after three days of illness. She had been in charge of the floor given over to the pneumonia patients from the university camps. Sister Fortunata came to St. Mary's hospital six years ago from St. Louis. She is survived by an uncle, Bernard Bruggemann, Bartelso, Ill. No arrangements for the funeral have been made.

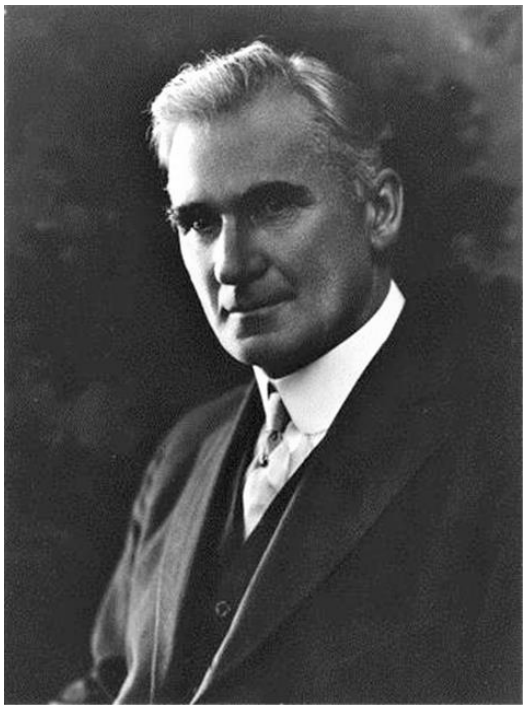
Two deaths occurred at the General hospital Monday. Mrs. Tillie Bold, wife of Harry Bold, 751 West Washington, died there Monday evening of influenza. The funeral will be held from the Schroeder funeral chapel this afternoon. She is survived by four children, Bertha, aged 11; Robert, aged 8; Samuel, aged 6; and William, 7 weeks old. Mrs. Joseph Jastrow has been caring for the baby during the illness of the mother.

Mrs. Charles J. Berend, 15 North Brearly street, succumbed to pneumonia Monday afternoon at the General hospital, after a weeks' illness. The funeral will be held Thursday at 1 o'clock from the home. Interment will be made at Westport cemetery. The Rev. Otto J. Wilke will officiate. Mrs. Berend is survived by her husband and four children, Ruth, Mildred, George and Charles; her mother, Mrs. William Ziesch, Burke; five sisters: Mrs. William Guecks, Ashland; Mrs. Bertha Blatterman, Sun Prairie; Misses Clara, Amelia, and Alvina Zeisch, Burke; and two brothers, William and Henry Ziesch, Burke.

Lucille Kelly, aged 3 years, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Kelly, 316 East Main street, died at the General hospital Sunday morning. The funeral will be held from the home Wednesday.

Mrs. James B. Evans died at her home, 1611 Adams street, Sunday. She is survived by her husband and five small children, Ruth, William, Robert, Ralph, and Dorothy.

The funeral services will be held Thursday afternoon. The arrangements have not been completed, pending word from relatives of Mrs. Evans in Pennsylvania.



Fortunately for Wisconsinites, in 1876 the Wisconsin legislature created the State Board of Health, making Wisconsin the seventh state in the nation to do so. The Board of Health had broad powers, and every town, village and city in the state had to have a Board of Health with responsibility to report to the state board. As a result, 1685 local Boards of Health were available when the State Health Officer Dr. Cornelius A. Harper took full advantage of the infrastructure and called for a statewide educational campaign aimed at informing the public that anyone with a severe cold should stay at home and away from public gatherings. He gave local offices the power to enforce mandatory isolation if citizens did not comply. On October 10 Dr. Harper took the unprecedented step of ordering all public institutions closed, including schools, churches, theaters, saloons, everything except factories, offices and places of regular employment. Nowhere in the United States was such a statewide and comprehensive order issued. Within a day, virtually every local government in Wisconsin had cooperated and put the

order into effect. Dr. Harper is credited with saving thousands of lives. Wisconsin emerged from the epidemic with one of the lowest death rates in the nation, 2.91 deaths per thousand people, compared with a national average of 4.39 deaths per thousand.

Our newspapers by now were carrying news about school closings, church schedules, public health notices, and continuing news about the spread of the flu and sometimes the numbers of people who were dying. It was a difficult time. One bright spot in our lives was that the news coming out of Europe seemed to indicate that our soldiers were finally starting to push the enemy back.

OFFICIAL NOTICE

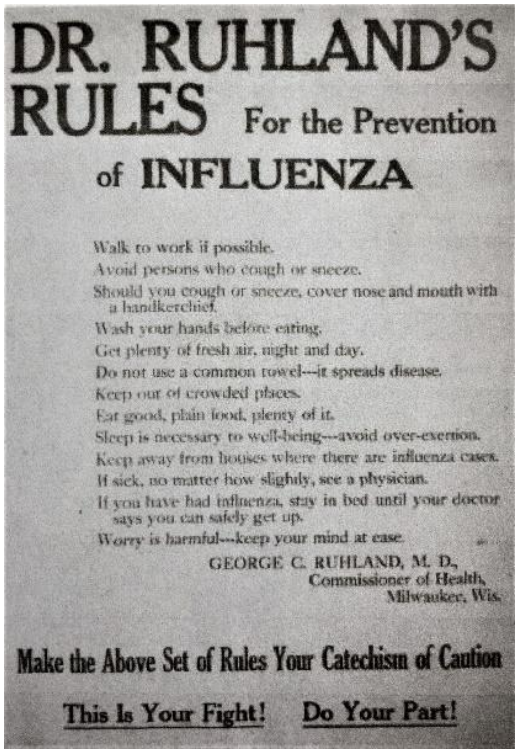
Notice is hereby given to all persons concerned that by reason of the appearance in epidemic form of Spanish Influenza in the City of Pullman, for civic reasons of public health protection, all public places where people assemble are

CLOSED

This includes schools, all places of amusement, dance halls, pool rooms, churches, Sunday Schools, lodges, conventions, etc.

This order to become effective at noon, Thursday, October 10, 1918. When all danger of epidemic has passed this order will be raised.

Dr. J. L. GILLELAND,
City Health Officer.



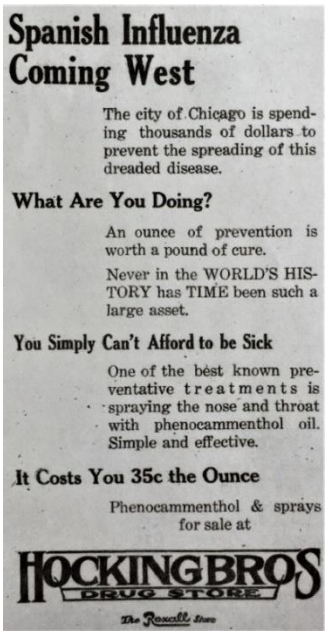
DR. RUHLAND'S RULES For the Prevention of INFLUENZA

Walk to work if possible.
Avoid persons who cough or sneeze.
Should you cough or sneeze, cover nose and mouth with a handkerchief.
Wash your hands before eating.
Get plenty of fresh air, night and day.
Do not use a common towel---it spreads disease.
Keep out of crowded places.
Eat good, plain food, plenty of it.
Sleep is necessary to well-being---avoid over-exertion.
Keep away from houses where there are influenza cases.
If sick, no matter how slightly, see a physician.
If you have had influenza, stay in bed until your doctor says you can safely get up.
Worry is harmful---keep your mind at ease.

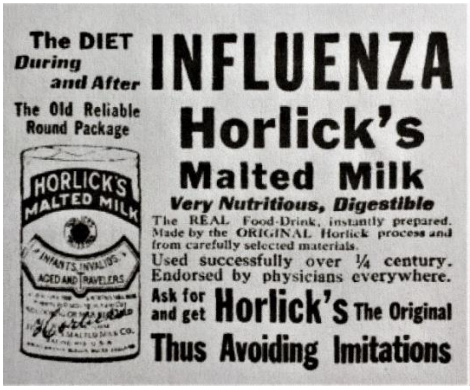
GEORGE C. RUHLAND, M. D.,
Commissioner of Health,
Milwaukee, Wis.

Make the Above Set of Rules Your Catechism of Caution

This Is Your Fight! Do Your Part!



Entrepreneurs quickly took advantage of an opportunity to sell products that promised to prevent or help cure the flu.



The newspapers carried so many ads like these that we didn't know what to believe, what product might help us avoid the flu. Some of us started wearing masks in public.

Business leaders, local governments, the general public, and social service agencies in affected communities stepped up and did an admirable job of providing needed support services like educational canvassing of the communities, driving supplementary ambulances and providing transportation, offering buildings as temporary hospitals, trying to substitute for downed undertakers and medical personnel, relieving over-burdened families who had main care-givers down, taking care of farm animals, etc. But rural towns and villages were particularly hard hit, having nearly half of the fatalities but only 45% of the state's population. Shortage of medical personnel, dispersed populations and lack of resources to mount public health campaigns, and populations not informed about the severity of the disease all contributed to a high fatality rate. What eventually became clear was that those who stayed in bed on strict bed rest for two weeks usually recovered, while those who tried to resume normal activities after the first two to three days of illness had passed, were the ones who relapsed and quickly died.

Fall 1918 – How the Flu Swept Through Madison, WI
24 Madisonians died in September

- Oct. 10: There were more than 300 sick among the Student Army Training Corps encamped at the UW and seven citizens lay dead. The Madison Board of Health met and ordered all theaters, moving picture houses, schools, churches and other places of public gathering closed for an indefinite period.
- Oct. 11: It was believed that the flu was caused by infectious dust swirling through the air so seven street-flushing wagons were watering the streets. The Madison High School football team canceled its game with Rockford. Thirty-two of the city's 221 teachers were reported ill. Two streets, Mendota Court & Irving Court, were closed because of the high number of cases. Both Madison General and St. Mary's Hospitals were filled to capacity.
- Oct. 12: Four victims. Three of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Herman's seven children have died since Tuesday.
- Oct. 14: Death toll 11. A Catholic priest, a businessman, a minister and a doctor are among those taken.
- Oct. 15: Three UW men died. There are between 3,000 and 4,000 cases in the city, and 685 at the UW.
- Oct. 17: Seven more dead. Plans were made to turn Christ Presbyterian into an emergency hospital.
- Oct. 22: 11 more dead, including Sister Mary Fortunata of St. Mary's Hospital.
- Oct. 28: 13 more deaths, including assistant postmaster Ingwald Nelson, who died a day after his 7-year-old son Arthur.
- Oct 29: Five deaths, including Louise Vale, a former actress and wife of New York millionaire Travers Vale.

50 Madisonians died in October

- Nov. 2: UW Homecoming was called off.
- Nov. 9: The Capital Times carried an announcement that schools would reopen on Monday, Nov. 11.

However, on the morning of November 11 whistles sounded at 2:40 a.m., announcing the Armistice and the end of World War I. News of the signing of the Armistice at 11:00 that morning in France flew around the world as people everywhere surged into the streets of cities and towns to embrace their neighbors and cry about the young men who would not be returning home. This had been called the War to End All Wars, and we still believed that. We felt proud to be the people in history who had lived through such a difficult time and had survived to make the world forever safe and peaceful. City streets, which had been nearly abandoned for a month or more, immediately filled up with people all caught up in massive celebrations. In Bloomington, the urgent and joyful ringing of all the church bells together was soon joined by booming fireworks, and it was all so loud that it carried on the wind for miles. Suddenly the roads were clogged with shouting, laughing people in cars or with horses and buggies rushing pell-mell to join their neighbors in a triumphant parade and celebration in town, ending up at the new Band Stand downtown, which we had built in 1913.

Johnnie and I quickly dressed our young children, put on our church clothes, and piled into our Ford to join the parade into town. The streets were jammed with people, all waving at us as we came in. We couldn't stop laughing and hugging each other and talking with such pride about our courageous young men who had fought so valiantly for this victory. Those who had received letters from their loved ones in Europe passed them around for us to read. People were waving flags and banners and giant newspaper headlines and shouting and singing the national anthem. There were a lot of people who wished the town had not voted on April 8, 1909, to go dry. How good it would be to celebrate with a stein of German draft beer! The soda shop passed around bottles of soda. It was a time like we could not have imagined, Little Dear One. So many people! I think all 700 people who lived in Bloomington at that time were soon on the streets.

Look at this huge flag, little Johnnie! Did you ever see one so big? They said it took eight men to hang it up, one on each end of the four cables on top of the buildings, and four below to make sure the flag went up straight. This flag was bought for the Independence Day celebration in 2008 and was carefully preserved in mothballs when not in use.

Unfortunately, some of the people in the crowds that day in 1918 still had the flu or had been exposed to the flu. I heard some coughing, and I saw there were a few people wearing face masks. But dear little Johnnie, it just didn't seem right to think about such a killer disease in the midst of a celebration like that. Surely our jubilation and happiness would protect us from such a thing? I did not put on a mask, and I hugged my friend who I noticed was coughing a little. But we were in the chilly fresh air of fall, and I was such a strong and healthy person, how could anything bad happen to me?

But it did. I became infected with the flu virus that day during our wonderful celebration. Then when I got sick a few days later, I knew we were supposed to stay in bed for two weeks. But Little Dear One, how could I do that? I had four small children, and a household to run, and a farm to help manage. Your Daddy's baby sister Patricia was only six months old and needing to drink milk. Your Aunt Lucille was not even three years old, your Uncle Marvin not yet five, and your Daddy just seven years old. I really felt I could not stay in bed when my family needed me. I just had to get out of that sick bed to take care of them, and I was so sure that I was strong enough to be able to get well without staying in bed for two weeks. Because I was coughing, I did put on the mask that the health authorities were recommending, so none of my family or relatives or friends who came to help us at that time caught the flu from me. Several people in New Vienna died of the flu, and one farmer was permanently blinded.

But I couldn't save myself. Eleven days after that wonderful celebration for the end of the World War, my world was suddenly black, and I found myself here on this hill.

Now that you are here, Little Dear One, I do wonder if maybe my destiny was to come here early so that I would be here for you when you came, so that you would not be alone. The ways of Destiny are strange.

And you know, my Little Dear One, sometimes I wonder if there will be another evil disease coming someday, a thing no one can imagine today. I simply refuse to think of that because I do not want to make a Story about that. But it is probably true what Dr. Joshua Lederberg, the evolutionary scientist said: "We live in evolutionary competition with microbes. There is no guarantee that we

will win." You and I will not be affected by these strange new diseases, but I wonder if those we love and have left behind will be. But that is not going to be part of today's Story. Let us talk about something else.