

The Louisville Historian

RECEIVED

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The Influenza Epidemic of 1918

"I had a little bird and it's name was Enza,
I opened up the window and in flew Enza."

The influenza epidemic of 1918 has been largely forgotten except for those in the medical and history communities who understand the consequences of the unrestrained spread of communicable disease. The death toll, worldwide, from the 1918 epidemic is conservatively estimated at twenty-one million but some suggest that it may be as high as forty to fifty million. Nationally, influenza was responsible for the deaths of at least 500,000 people. In Colorado, with a population of 1 million, statistics show that 7,783 people died in 1918 (mostly in October, November, and December) out of 44,803 who contracted the disease. The origins of the Spanish Flu and its subsequent impact on the United States would test the courage of the American people and galvanize the strength of the medical profession.

When the influenza epidemic took a stranglehold on the United States, this county and the world, was preoccupied with the slaughter taking place on the European battlefields. The United States had entered the war in 1917 and had just sent troops to France in March and April of 1918. It now seems quite likely that this new influenza originated in the United States beginning in March. The first reported cases of influenza in Europe occurred near seaports and coincided with the arrival of American troops. In fact, some troops were stricken with pneumonia during their voyage to Europe in March of 1918 and very soon troops in France would be hit with influenza that would be marked with extremely serious pneumonia and would be highly contagious. Soon the epidemic would spread to Spain where an estimated 8 to 10 million Spaniards would contract the flu. The term, Spanish Flu, is misleading in that we now realize the epidemic didn't start there but came to the world's attention because Spain publicized the event more than any other country. The spread of influenza was now inevitable as troops exposed to the strain would carry it to a variety of foreign ports of call.

By the fall of 1918 American army bases were feeling the heavy onset of the epidemic. Camp Devens in Massachusetts saw increasing numbers of soldiers coming to the base hospital complaining of aching backs and legs, and suffering from coughing, dripping nose, and sore throat. At Devens there were 31 admissions to the hospital on the second day of the month, 142 on the tenth, and 1,176 on the eighteenth. The total number of influenza cases, by the eighteenth of September, 1918, in Camp Devens had risen to 6,674. While illness had hit military bases in large numbers previous to this it was now obvious that this malady was a different. No one had ever seen a strain of

influenza that developed into deadly pneumonia. The Devens 2,000 bed hospital now had 8,000 sick men stuffed into every imaginable place and even drafty barracks had to be set up to accommodate the growing number of sick. Naturally, the doctors and nurses caring for the sick were likely to contract the illness and at Devens 90 out of 300 health care workers were affected in some way. Dr. William Henry Welch, a trouble-shooter for the Army Surgeon General, toured Camp Devens and observed, "...lines of cots and prostrated soldiers, whose linens were often stained with bloody sputum and the sudden nosebleeds that were symptoms of the influenza. In the morgue, bodies, the color of slate, were stacked like cordwood or lying about the morgue floor. In the open chest of a dead man Welch saw the blue, swollen lungs of a victim of Spanish Influenza for the first time. Cause of death? That at least was clear: what in a healthy man are the lightest parts of his body, the lungs, were in this body two sacks filled with a thin, bloody, frothy fluid."

The introduction of the flu in Colorado most probably came from military and civilian sources. October outbreaks in Pueblo can be traced to a family from Newton, Kansas shortly after they arrived in the city and Denver's first influenza death was Blanche Kennedy who contracted the illness while visiting Chicago.

There seemed to be few places to escape the epidemic and frantic measures were taken to protect communities from the dread disease. Gunnison closed down its schools and prohibited public meetings in addition to physically closing off the town to outsiders by blockading roads. The mining town of Ouray had to hire guards to keep miners from Silverton and Telluride out of town. In Colorado Springs the homes of flu victims had signs posted that read "Sickness," in many communities gauze masks were provided for the citizenry, and a number of towns made it illegal to spit in public places. In Denver only hotels, restaurants, and drug stores could stay open past 6:00 p.m. and streetcars limited the number of passengers they could carry and drivers were told to keep all of the windows open. On a train headed for Durango a man died and on arrival the bedding he used was burned and the railroad car fumigated. Some thought that the ingestion of alcohol would help stop the spread of the disease but in most cases distribution was disallowed because in 1918 the manufacture and sale of liquor in Colorado was illegal with the exception of alcohol imported from other states for medicinal and religious reasons. Some advice to block the influenza included cutting down on meat, eating fruits and vegetables, and even advising people to vote Republican.

No matter what methods were used it became apparent that this epidemic would have to run its course. A number of communities would be hit by the illness and, believing it had passed, would ease restrictive measures.

Unfortunately, the influenza would soon come back and access to public places would have to be limited again. In Boston the city cancelled Liberty Bond parades and sporting events. On October 6, 1918 Philadelphia recorded 289 deaths in a single day

and 851 New Yorkers succumbed in one day, and interestingly, the crime rate dropped 43% in Chicago. The month of October would be brutal for this country; 195,000 Americans would die from influenza.

The great Influenza Epidemic of 1918 would ravage this country and the world for less than one year. The United States would not see another epidemic of these proportions thanks to the advancements of medical immunology and the diligence of the medical community.

Sources:

Leonard, Stephen., The 1918 Influenza Epidemic in Denver and Colorado, Colorado Historical Society, 1989

Crosby, Alfred W., America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918, Cambridge University Press, 1989

Shivaree

A wedding tradition that was very popular in the American midwest and spread to other regions of the United States was that of the "shivaree."

The word "shirvaree" is derived from the French word charivari, which, loosely translated means "headache." A shivaree was a loud, mock serenade, often held in tribute to a newly wedded couple. It usually happened after dark, when the honored couple was in bed but could also take place immediately after the wedding. A group would gather outside their home, then, when the signal was given, those outside would do anything to make a racket. They'd beat kitchen utensils against pots and pans, ring bells, blow car horns or set off fireworks. When the couple was finally roused, the gathered group held a small party in their honor. Sometimes, as part of the honor they would even parade the couple down the street in their nightclothes.

Everything that was done to the newlyweds was done in fun although sometimes they just had to grin and bear it. One story relates how the newly married couple came home from their wedding reception only to find their bed on the roof of their house and another couple had to search for the parts of their bed which was hidden throughout the house. Once, a husband and wife were awakened at 5:00 a.m. by twenty of their closest friends who demanded that the new wife cook breakfast for everyone. She was allowed to use only the available ingredients in her kitchen. Talk about pressure!

Museum Wish List

As we continue our inventory of the museum collection, we realize that there are items we would like to acquire for the museum. If you have any of these items you would be willing to donate, please call 303-665-9048 and let us know. All donations to the museum, a non-profit institution, are tax deductible. Thank you for your support!

- * Children's clothes and toys (1900-1950)
- * Louisville High School Yearbooks (Cargos)
- * Years prior to 1944, 1949, 1954, 1961, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1968, 1969, & 1970
- * Photographs of the museum buildings and property prior to 1950
- * Items and photographs associated with Louisville's
- * U.S. Navy summer uniform

LOUISVILLE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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 Robert Louis Piccone
 Helen Silko
 Joan Tuley
 Robert Massa

We apologize for any omissions or misspellings. Please contact the museum with corrections to the above list of names.

THE MUSEUM CORNER

By Carol Gleeson

Happy New Year! The museum is starting the year 2001 with new exhibits, customized display cases, updated sale items, newly purchased books, and a thorough cleaning. Thanks to the City of Louisville visitors to the museum will find a newly installed handrail as they step into our main building. The Miner's house is displaying a new sign designed by Paula Enrietto. Thanks, Paula! With these recent improvements, the museum proudly opens its doors for visitors. Please stop by and view our new improvements and share in the unique history of Louisville.

During fall 2000 we welcomed a variety of tour groups into the museum. Second and first grade classrooms from the Louisville elementary schools toured both buildings and the historic downtown area. Adult groups, including the Oldsmobile Club and Senior Citizen organizations, enjoyed guided tours before dining at our restaurants on Main Street. The Louisville Cub Scout troops continued to be frequent visitors to the museum. We are grateful for these scheduled tours and welcome the opportunity to share our local history.

In November, the museum was featured on Channel 4, "Colorado Getaways." Along with other businesses on Main and Front Streets, the museum benefited from the flattering review and publicity. Our number of walk-in visitors increased considerably after the November 4th feature.

The Louisville Historical Commission joined the festivities on Main Street during the Parade of Lights on December 2nd. Commission members greeted visitors with wassail, cookies, and conversation. Christmas ornaments, made by Marion Junior, were sold to appreciative visitors. The holiday open house was a great opportunity to share the museum and to visit with many of you.

Just in time for the holiday season, the Louisville Historical Commission started selling the second edition of Carolyn Conarroe's book, *The Louisville Story*. The book is available for \$10 at the museum. Please stop by or call us if you're interested in viewing or purchasing a book. We highly recommend the book!

With the start of the New Year, there is a vacancy on the Historical Commission Board. Cassandra Volpe resigned from the Commission at the November meeting. She will be missed! Her professional experience and knowledge as an Archivist at the University of Colorado at Boulder provided valuable contributions to the development of the museum's preservation methods. If you are interested in being a member of the Historical Commission, the City of Louisville is currently accepting letters of interest for this vacancy.

In closing, I would like to draw your attention to two new articles in the newsletter. Please note the article titled, "Wish List." In this article we specify a list of items we would greatly appreciate in our museum collection. The second article, titled "Thanks to New and Renewing Members!" recognizes the new and renewing members of the Louisville Historical Society. I would also like to acknowledge Betty Buffo and Isabelle Hudson for their weekly volunteer efforts in the museum. Their efforts and friendships are sincerely appreciated.

DONATIONS

The Louisville Historical Museum has received the following donations during the months of September through December. We sincerely appreciate these recent donations.

Anne Huey	Child's wooden sled
Richard Franchini	Miner's aluminum lunch pail
Randy Luallin	Well water pump
Donna Schreiter	Flatirons

MEMORIAL DONATIONS

In Memory of:

*Emajane Enrietto, Bennie LaSalle, Tim Kelly,
and Andrew Deborski*

LOUISVILLE HISTORICAL MUSEUM MUSEUM HOURS

1001 Main Street
Louisville, CO 80027

Tues., Wed., & Thurs. – 10AM to 3PM
First Sat. of every month - 10AM to 3PM
303-665-9048

Louisville Fire Department

Fire Chiefs

1912-2000

1912 - 1917	Ben Woods	1963	Joe Santi
1918-1928	Ben Niehoff	1964	George Lazuk
1929	L.J. Mossoni	1965	Ron Leggett
1930	Mike Fabrizio	1966	Les Davis
1931	Ben Newrock	1967	George Brown
1932-1935	Harry Jenkins	1968	Art Symanski
1936	Eugene Madonna	1969	Dean Weber
1937	Art O'Hanion	1970	Don Spurr
1938	Charles Bottnelli	1971-1973	Bill Ryan
1939	Mike Fabrizio	1974	Ken Buffo
1940	John Lombardi	1975	Duane Elrod
1941	John Ross	1976-1977	Tom Poydock
1942	John Jacovetta	1978-1979	Howard Pollock
1943	Pete Franchini	1980	Wayne Varra
1944	Jim Fenolia	1981	Dale Fry
1945	John Stevens	1982	John Littlejohn
1946	Ricco Ferrari	1983	Larry Hudson
1947	Harold Cornelius	1984-1986	Dan Ross
1948	Dom Tomeo	1987-1988	Chuck Schmidt
1949	Bill Dhieux	1989	Phil Paolilli
1950	Joe Campana	1990-1991	Vince Ferrera
1951	L.C. Graves	1992-1996	Mike Rangel
1952	Andy Deborski	1997	David Yost
1953	Nick Patete	1998	William J. Dhieux
1954	Darwin Johnson	1999-2000	Cris Brewer
1955	Arnold Banyai		
1956	Tom Cable		
1957	Herb Steinbaugh		
1958	Lawrence Caranci		
1959	Frank Malczyk		
1960	Gene Barday		
1961	Leo DeBorski, Jr.		
1962	F.W. "Bud" Barday		

Louisville Historical Commission
749 Main Street
Louisville, CO 80027

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Louisville Public Library
950 Spruce Street
Louisville CO 80027

