

# Carroll History Journal

The Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland, Inc.

## A PANDEMIC HITS HOME:

### WHEN CARROLL COUNTY WAS IN THE GRIP OF THE SPANISH FLU

BY ELEANOR S. DARCY

EBOLA! In 2014 that word caused great alarm throughout the world. Daily news reports carried frightening stories describing chaos and death in West Africa as the pandemic swept through Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. The images were stark and alarming. A virulent virus, Ebola infected nearly 28,000 people, killing more than 11,000. Even here in the United States, some panicked as doctors and nurses who had been working in clinics in Africa returned home.

In the Middle Ages bubonic plague, better known as the Black Death, was far worse. It struck the Mediterranean in 1347, having travelled with rats carrying the bacillus on Italian trading ships sailing from the Crimea to Istanbul, Crete, Greece, and Sicily. Because plague is disseminated by rats and fleas rather than coughs and sneezes, it spreads quickly even in rural areas. By 1352, it had infected all of Europe as well as the Near East and North Africa and passed back into Russia where it died out after having killed 50 million in Europe, 60 percent of the population.

Shortly after entering World War I, the United States was struck by another plague. The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 infected more than 500 million persons worldwide—about a fifth of the world's population—and caused the deaths of between 50 and 100 million, far more than the 9 million who died in World War I. Exact figures do not exist, but it is likely that more than 25 million Americans, or more than a quarter of the population, were infected. There were more than 675,000 deaths, both civilian and military, from influenza and pneumonia during the ten months from September 1918 to June 1919.

Although Carroll County was still rural in 1918, it was not spared the pandemic. A number of people owned automobiles used to visit friends and family not only in Carroll County but also in Baltimore, Washington and

## Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases



**As Dangerous as Poison Gas Shells**

This cartoon warning of the dangers of the flu appeared in all the Carroll County newspapers in October 1918.

farther afield in Detroit and New York. Many had sons at Camp Meade whom they visited whenever possible or who came home on leave. Not far from Carroll's northern border, in Gettysburg, was Camp Colt, a temporary training camp under the command of Major Dwight D. Eisenhower, where 10,000 men were learning to fight with tanks. On September 15, 1918, 100 soldiers arrived from Camp Devens, Massachusetts, bringing the flu with them. At first the camp doctor dismissed their symptoms as reactions to inoculations, but soon so many men were ill that it became necessary to press Saint Francis Xavier School into service as an emergency hospital. From there the disease spread throughout the town.

The first evidence in the United States of what was to become a pandemic had occurred early in March 1918 when some 500 recruits at Camp Funston, Kansas, came down with the flu. The camp was crowded, and the men,

most of whom came from rural areas, had no immunity. It was late in the flu season, however, and in two weeks it was over. Illness in an army camp was not unusual except that a number of men developed pneumonia and 48 died. Similar outbreaks occurred at other training camps without attracting much attention, particularly as there seemed to be no parallel civilian illness. There were, however, two notable exceptions: in March, more than 1,000 men developed influenza at the Ford Motor Company plant in Detroit, and in the next two months about a quarter of the inmates at San Quentin prison in California became ill and three died. When statistics were compiled later, the number of deaths nationwide in the spring of 1918 caused by influenza and pneumonia was higher than usual but passed unnoticed. All in all, given the crowding in the camps, it was not a notable flu season. And then the flu died out.

Soon, however, influenza appeared among American troops overseas. In March, 36 men of the 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry became ill while en route to Europe. Six died. By mid-April, there was flu at the American Expeditionary Force camp near Bordeaux, France. British, French, and German troops were quickly infected. Then, just as it abated among the fighting forces, it flared up again in the civilian population. By May, it had spread to southern Europe where it was particularly widespread in Spain.

Surprisingly, none of this attracted much attention in the public press. In the United States, influenza was not yet a reportable disease, and in wartime Europe, the press was heavily censored. Things were different in Spain, which was neutral in World War I. There, the virulence of the disease was openly acknowledged—millions were ill, including the king—and it gained a name, “Spanish influenza.” Then, following shipping routes, it quickly circled the globe, appearing in Africa, India, China, South America, and elsewhere. On August 27, sailors at the Navy’s Commonwealth Pier in Boston reported sick. From there it spread to the civilian population and, most ominously, to soldiers at Camp Devens. By mid-September, cases had been reported all over the United States, and a month later, it was in all but five states.

In Maryland, the first cases of flu had appeared at Camp Meade by September 24, 1918. Although the sick were isolated, no other precautions were taken. Before long, 1,900 soldiers were ill as were another 300 at the military hospital at Fort McHenry and 1,150 at Aberdeen Proving Ground. The commander of Camp Meade closed public meeting places, forbade the men to leave camp, and permitted only civilian workers onto the base. But the Baltimore and Maryland health commissioners appeared



Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, D.C., during the great Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919. (Library of Congress)

unconcerned even though there were ten cases in the city, spread by civilian workers from the bases. On October 1, not wanting to cause panic among the residents, Baltimore Health Commissioner John D. Blake ordered street cars and theaters to be well ventilated and encouraged residents to use handkerchiefs. By October 6, however, the disease was spreading rapidly, especially in crowded tenements among immigrants, many of whom spoke little English.

Hospitals were soon overwhelmed. Johns Hopkins Hospital dedicated six wards to flu patients but finally had to turn people away. Three of their doctors, three medical students, and six nurses died. Businesses were hard-pressed by absentees: 300 street-car motormen were ill, as were a quarter of the telephone company’s employees. Because an operator was needed to connect calls, telephone service was limited to emergencies only. After 30,000 pupils and 208 teachers were absent on October 7, the school board finally closed the city schools. On October 9, Blake closed movie theaters and other assembly places, and the next day he restricted shopping hours, although he permitted saloons to remain open because alcohol was believed to have medicinal value. In fact, the military apparently favored whiskey and quinine as a treatment for the flu. Regulations changed daily. Churches and poolrooms were closed. Dentists were required to wear face masks, a frequent but ineffective requirement. Eventually, even the hours for saloons and bars were restricted.

Twenty-four thousand cases of flu were reported in Baltimore in 1918, although the total was probably three

times as high, and there were 4,125 deaths. By October 19, the number of new cases of flu started to drop, but the death toll continued to climb. Caskets and gravediggers were in short supply. Many families found it difficult to meet funeral expenses. The army sent soldiers to dig graves, and the city helped by lifting the requirement that bodies be embalmed and by making funds available for funeral expenses. Charities also assisted as they could. Gradually, Blake began to lift the restrictions on movement and gathering, finally reopening the schools on November 4, although attendance was very low.

Westminster's *Democratic Advocate* newspaper of September 27, 1918, also printed figures. In the 24 hours ending at noon on September 26, there were 6,139 new cases of flu in army camps nationwide, 723 new cases of pneumonia, and 170 deaths. All told, there were 35,146 cases of flu and 3,036 cases of pneumonia in army camps on September 26. A quarter of the men at Camp Devens had flu and ten percent had pneumonia. Although some dismissed Spanish flu as a "fashionable disease," others thought it ought to be called "German flu." In an editorial dated October 11, *The Democratic Advocate* was uncertain if the Germans were to blame but advised that the army camps be well guarded. Soon, however, it could no longer be dismissed. The local papers were full of news of illness and death and of the disruptions to ordinary routine that such illness causes.

The first mention of the flu (also called grip, or gripe) in Carroll County appeared in the local papers on September 27. The *Union Bridge Pilot* reported that, although Charles Minnick and his two sons had gripe, their illness could not be called Spanish influenza. *The Democratic Advocate* of the same date, reporting more widely, announced the quarantine of Camp Meade and the cancellation of the mobilization of draftees "On Account Of Spanish Flu." The local papers also began reporting influenza deaths, at first of local servicemen, former residents, or residents of neighboring communities. One of the first local men to die was Frank Monroe Miller, 18, at the base hospital, Hampton Roads, Virginia, on

**ALL CHURCHES, SCHOOLS AND PICTURE SHOWS ORDERED CLOSED AND ALL PUBLIC GATHERINGS PROHIBITED.**

On Tuesday the State Board of Health ordered Dr. L. K. Woodward, county health officer for this county, to order all churches, schools and picture shows to close immediately and to prohibit all public gatherings, such as funerals, public meetings public sales etc. Upon receipt of the order Dr. Woodward notified the board of county commissioners and the district health officers were notified immediately to see that the order was carried out. The increase death rate in this county and the apparent carelessness of our citizens in the matter of observing the rules for the prevention of the spread of influenza forced the health authorities to act promptly.

*American Sentinel*, 11 October 1918

October 4. On that same date Dr. Lewis K. Woodward, secretary of the Board of Health for Carroll County, found it necessary to make a public statement in the *Advocate* "Concerning The New Disease, 'Spanish Flu'." He equated it with "old-fashioned grip," listing a number of reasonable precautions for bacterial disease (although influenza is viral, a difference not then understood), and ending with a postscript: "The State Board of Health has not deemed it necessary to close our schools." The Carroll County *Times*, however, under the headline "Spanish Influenza Continues Its Rage," reported 440 new cases and 8 deaths in Baltimore on October 1 and 353 cases in the rest of the state, including 34 in Carroll County (third highest of the counties), while Camp Meade had 914 cases. Yet some public meetings and relief groups thought it safe to announce forthcoming events: the Great

Frederick Fair was to take place October 22-25, and even Camp Meade advertised a public auction of horses and mules for October 14. But Western Maryland College, where several students were "dangerously ill," had been quarantined on September 30.

The gossip columns in the local papers give a fairly detailed picture of life in Carroll County in 1918, from Shipley to Millers to Bark Hill. Early September saw happy news of visits and visitors, parties, and Sunday drives. It was not until late in the month that the first reports of unusual illnesses and deaths began to appear. By October, however, the reports were far more ominous. Flu was turning into pneumonia and bringing death in its wake, often suddenly to those in the prime of their life. Private Howard Frock of Taneytown, 23, died at Camp Meade on October 5, leaving a bride of six weeks. Sometimes, it was the other way around. At least one Carroll county soldier in France lost his wife, a new mother in Millers, to the flu. Hilda Bennett Thomas, 36, wife of W. Frank Thomas of Westminster, founder of Thomas, Bennett, and Hunter, died leaving three children. Twin sisters, Gladys Hunter Blizzard of Westminster and Helen Hunter Wilson of Paoli, Pennsylvania, died three days apart at 23. Neither knew the other was ill. Gladys left two children. Following a double funeral, they were

buried side by side in Westminster Cemetery. Bernard F. Shriver, 29, of Union Mills and son of the owner of B.F. Shriver Company, died on October 24.

Some farmers may have avoided the flu by isolating themselves on their farms. Others may have died at home untended by outside help. No one was really safe. Outlying hamlets each had a well-attended church, a school, a general store—where “store loafing” was eventually discouraged as a source of infection—and perhaps another local business or two, while the larger towns boasted movie houses, department stores, garages, restaurants, and more. The women often belonged to church or Red Cross groups engaged in war work. Many of these activities were necessarily curtailed as the emergency progressed, although the Liberty Bond drives to support the war were never cancelled.

Unlike previous flu epidemics that primarily had afflicted the very young and very old, the Spanish flu also targeted those with strong immune systems—young adults between the ages of 20 and 40. Because of this, whole families often became ill with flu and, more alarmingly, pneumonia, and the death notices were no longer just of service men. Olive Datson, 28, a high-school teacher, died of pneumonia on September 30 after an illness of only two days. A week later, it was reported that Chester A. Ebaugh, 32, of Carrollton Station had died of flu and pneumonia leaving a wife and several children as had William Arthur Kimmey, 28, who lived near Spring Mills. Sallie Myers of Middleburg had gone to Baltimore to nurse her daughter, Bessie Fisher, who was ill with pneumonia. Schools, churches, and all public meeting places had been closed by order of the state’s Board of Health on October 8; public, private, and home funerals were forbidden; and the front page of *The Democratic Advocate* of October 11 carried nearly 30 brief obituaries. Students were sent home from colleges, parents were summoned to Camp Meade to see dying sons, Edith Ayres of New Windsor was sent off to a New York school to substitute for her ill sister, and many family members were called on to nurse ailing relatives. On October 18, the Frederick fair was finally cancelled for the first time since the Civil War.

The difference in medical facilities between Baltimore and Carroll County reflected the difference between a crowded port—Baltimore’s population in 1920 was 733,826, half of the

## “FLU” AND PNEUMONIA TAKE HEAVY TOLL

Many Homes in This City and County  
Bereft of Dear Ones--Influenza  
and Pneumonia the Cause

### DOUBLE FUNERAL FROM ONE HOME

American Sentinel, 18 October 1918

state’s population—and open country with a few towns and many hamlets. A photograph of the Carroll County Medical Society taken on July 14, 1915, shows only 16 physicians, and by 1918, some of the younger doctors had been drafted. Although all Carroll’s doctors probably had offices, they were also making house calls, taking their dispensaries with them and driving long distances to see patients too ill to come to town. All were kept frantically busy with influenza patients—one doctor was reported to have seen 65 patients in one day—and inevitably, many became ill themselves. Dr. Woodward retired to Old Point Comfort, Virginia, to recover.

*The Pilot* of November 1 carried the obituary of Dr. H.W. Krantz, 27. Dr. Krantz, a graduate of Washington College and the University of Maryland medical school, had established a practice in Union Bridge in 1916, becoming the doctor for the cement company soon after. In the fall of 1918, he was drafted and, before reporting for duty, he and his wife and small child went to Connecticut to visit with his family. Hearing of the ravages of the flu in Union Bridge, he voluntarily returned only to die of the disease a few days later.

The doctors’ services were supplemented by midwives and druggists, the latter dispensing drugs, patent medicines, and advice. There was no hospital in the county, so those who needed more sophisticated care had to go to Baltimore or Frederick. In some towns—Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, for

## SPANISH INFLUENZA CONTINUES ITS RAGE

Thirty-Four Cases of the Epidemic  
Reported in This City and  
The County.

### One Family's Tragedy

On September 5, 1908, the families of Ella Albaugh and Lawrence Gillelan gathered in the parlor at the home of Ella's parents, Mr. & Mrs. George W. Albaugh. They were there to celebrate the marriage of a daughter of one of Westminster's leading merchants to a rising young businessman. On February 2, 1919, the families gathered in the same room again—this time for Ella and Lawrence's funerals.

Lawrence had come down with the flu in mid-January, but his condition was not deemed serious until a few days later when, like many flu patients, he developed pneumonia. It seemed as if the disease had passed Ella by until she was suddenly struck down. According to the *Times*, she was "ill only one day and night" before she passed away on January 29. Doctors called in a specialist from Baltimore, but Lawrence's condition deteriorated and he died on January 31, only two days after his wife.

The Gillelans left behind three daughters: Elizabeth, 9; Ruth, 7; and Margaret, 3. The girls went to live with their grandparents, George and Ella Troxel Albaugh.



The Gillellan family, 1917

	28 <sup>2</sup>	Estate Ella T. Gillelan	(46 21 34) NMC	333.00
COBBE	31	Solid mahogany state casket		
		silk crush pillow set, gunmetal	FLU	
		ext. handles & name plate	\$275.00	
		Embalming	10.00	
		Slate vault	35.00	
		Cemetery charges, lined grave	13.00	

These entries from the Sharrer business ledger show the expenses for the funerals of Ella and Lawrence Gillelan.

February 2, 1919

	28 <sup>2</sup>	Estate Lawrence Gillelan	(46 187 x 1) NMC	428.00
CEXNE	31	Solid mahogany state casket		
		silk crush pillow set, gunmetal		
		ext handles & name plate	\$365.00	
		Embalming	10.00	FLU
		Slate vault	40.00	
		Cemetery charges, lined grave	13.00	

example—emergency isolation wards were set up in schools, churches, or firehouses. But there is no evidence of that in Carroll County. Aside from servicemen, very few Carroll Countians died in hospitals.

Inevitably, so much illness had a tremendous economic effect on the state and on the county. By mid-October, 165 engineers for the Western Maryland Railroad were ill, and in November the railroad shops were working reduced hours. Not only had the Tidewater Portland Cement Company in Union Bridge lost its purchasing agent, W.B. Welch, but 65 percent of its employees were out sick, forcing the company to put some women to work in the packing department. After personally working for 62 hours straight, O.E. Shifler, manager of the Union Bridge Electric Manufacturing Company, placed an ad in the *Pilot* announcing curtailed hours: from October 19, electricity would be available only from noon until midnight. Both barbershops in Union Bridge were closed. Three-quarters of the employees of the El Dallo Cigar Company in Manchester were unable to work, and the mill in Haight was running only 10 or 12 looms daily. Many small businesses had only one or two healthy employees; some had none; farmers were short-handed. Coal became scarce in the county. Production was down by one million tons because of time lost by ill miners in Pennsylvania. The monthly bills from the telephone company were nearly a week late. There was an embargo on small shipments of corn and wheat from Union Bridge to Baltimore. The Union Bridge Bargain House announced that, because of government regulations, it would accept neither exchanges nor returns, possibly an advantage for their business. The completion of a house under construction in Oakland was delayed because the carpenters were ill.

F.A. Sharrer & Son, undertakers in Westminster, kept detailed records on each funeral, even marking the entries "FLU." The funeral for Vernon Stocksdale was elaborate and included a black suit, roses and carnations, a wreath, and a cross.

**JAMES M. STONER**  
WESTMINSTER, MD.

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and Embalmer**

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**apr15**

This ad ran in several local newspapers in late 1918 and early 1919.

How did people cope with all of this? In Havre de Grace, teachers and pupils kept from school helped local farmers pick apples. In Carroll County, friends and families filled in where they could. In a brief message in *The Pilot*, Mr. and Mrs. Charles F. Bowers of Bark Hill thanked their neighbors and friends who "did our work during our sickness." When Earl Lantz of New Windsor came down with the flu, his wife was away caring for members of her family, so John Lantz and his wife helped with the marketing. Clergy filled in as teachers; Katie Maddox of Sykesville went to Glen Burnie to fill in at the telephone company; grandparents and aunts and uncles took in orphaned children. After the death of Paul Strevig, 28, one of three members of the extended Strevig family to die of influenza, the Independent Order of Mechanics

Lodge of Union Mills buried him. He left a wife and three children, all of whom were ill. At least one Baltimore department store was enterprising enough to print an ad in one of the Westminster papers as soon as shopping hours were restored, inviting Carroll Countians to come see their new winter stock or at least to place a mail order.

By early November, things had quieted down a bit. There were fewer deaths and less illness. The United States Health Service warned that influenza would continue through the winter months and could well lead to an increase in tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, but

		20		
1918		Estate Vernon W. Stocksdale		347.00
30		by Ida F. Stocksdale		
		Silver grey plush couch		
		cocket, with gunmetal		
		extension handles and name		
		plate engraved	\$245.00	FLU
		Embalming	10.00	
		Black Suit	23.00	
		Pillow roses & carnations	10.00	
		Wreath " "	10.00	
		Cross " "	10.00	
		Slate Vault	35.00	
		Silvering Vault	4.00	
				21

it was time to lift the restrictions on normal life. Schools—those that had teachers—were open again but might close if there were a new local outbreak. Church services, limited at first, were permitted, and the movie house in Union Bridge, after being refurbished while closed, reopened in mid-November with Robert Warwick in *The Argyle Case* and Norma Talmadge in *Poppy*. As early as October 25, Western Maryland College played football in Annapolis. On November 6, the War Work Supper took place in Westminster, and the Community Show with its farm exhibits was held in Union Bridge on November 20. The local columnists began to turn their attention to more normal affairs: the weather and the harvest, meetings, visiting, and whooping cough.

Nevertheless, influenza was still about. In December, Taneytown reported that the flu was worse than before, and in New Windsor, it was “quite prevalent again” in early January as it was in Marston. There were 30 to 40 cases, mostly children, in the neighborhood of Uniontown in mid-February. And there were still many deaths. Granville B. Bixler, 30, formerly of Wakefield, died in Baltimore early in January leaving a wife and three children. Ella and Lawrence Gillelan of Westminster both died of flu two days apart at the end of the month, leaving three young daughters.

### Flu Ban Raised.

**Flu conditions have improved and on Sunday the ban will be lifted in this county, except in Myers district where schools will not open and only day church services can be held on Sunday. All other schools will open Monday by order of the Health Board and the Board of Education except Flohrville school which will not open at this time. All places in this town, moving pictures, pool rooms, bowling alleys, public meetings, etc., which were closed on account of the epidemic will be opened Monday.**

*Democratic Advocate*, 8 November 1918

## Spanish “Flu”

One of the best Preventatives  
and Cures is

**BOYLE’S LAXATIVE COLD**

—AND—

**LA GRIPPE TABLETS**  
**PRICE 25c.**

**JOSEPH B. BOYLE, Druggist**  
**WESTMINSTER, MD.**

Despite doctors’ best efforts, there was no real cure for the flu. This ad for a local druggist ran in the Westminster newspapers in the fall of 1918.

Over all, little changed in Carroll County. Yes, there was an emptiness and sadness where death had taken family members, but death was more common in 1918-1919 than it is now. People did not live as long as we do today. Children, lacking vaccines, were more vulnerable to childhood diseases. The Carroll County *Times* of February 7, 1919, which carried Lawrence Gillelan’s obituary on page one, also reprinted an article from the Carroll *Record*, centered at the top of the same page, urging the establishment of a county hospital as a memorial to the soldiers who had died in the war. It took four decades for that to happen.

Meanwhile, the war was over, the pandemic sputtered out, and although life had changed in many ways, there was still work to be done. The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, deadly though it was, soon faded from public memory.

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## The Death of a Local Soldier

Franklin Monroe Miller, oldest son of Noah and Lizzie Miller, was born January 12, 1900, in Millers, Maryland, and grew up in Westminster. As a teenager, he was a Boy Scout and worked in the photographic studio of James D. Mitchell. Later he worked as a clerk for the Western Maryland Railway Company.

Frank and two school chums, Carroll Crawford and Glen Miller, joined the U.S. Navy near the end of World War I. All three were musicians and could serve in that capacity with the Navy. A newspaper article called Frank “a cornetist of unusual talent.”

He left home September 17, 1918, for training at the U.S. Naval Base, Hampton Roads, Virginia, Co. 42, Unit X. Within two and a half weeks, he was admitted to the base hospital where he died October 4 of lobar pneumonia. According to his obituary in the October 11 issue of *The Times*, “owing to the congestion of affairs at the Naval Base Hospital caused by the rapid growth of the epidemic” it took several days to return Frank’s body to his family. Because of the restrictions on public gatherings, the funeral was held at the Millers’ home with burial at Westminster Cemetery.



Frank Miller (right) with his friends Carroll Crawford and Glen Miller. Photograph courtesy of Virginia Hierstetter.



Mr. & Mrs. Miller at their son’s grave in Westminster Cemetery. Photograph courtesy of Virginia Hierstetter.

**About the author:** Eleanor S. Darcy was for 25 years assistant editor of *The Papers of Charles Carroll of Carrollton* and of the three-volume work *Dear Papa, Dear Charley: The Peregrinations of a Revolutionary Aristocrat . . .*, which won the American Historical Association's Jameson Award in 2005. She is a member of the Publications Committee and from 2009-2013, served on the HSCC's Board of Trustees as Secretary.

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