

A Previous Pandemic: A Look at Carroll County in the Grippe of the Spanish Flu  
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*We are in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, with well over 2 million cases worldwide and nearly 150,000 dead. In 2014, Ebola caused great alarm throughout the world, killing more than 11,000. In the Middle Ages bubonic plague, better known as the Black Death, was far worse. 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% of the population. Shortly after entering World War I, the United States was struck by another plague.*



Fighting the Spanish flu at Walter Reed Hospital in Bethesda.

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 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 farther afield in Detroit and New York. Many had sons at Camp Meade whom they visited whenever possible or who came home on leave.



An Aug. 8, 1918, Camp Meade letter from the owner's grandfather, William Earl Wright, before the first cases of influenza in Maryland appeared at Camp Meade on Sept. 17, 1918. According to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Camp Meade was the first part of Maryland struck by the pandemic and was also the most devastated by it. (Courtesy Kevin Dayhoff)

Not far from Carroll's northern border, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 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.



During the influenza epidemic of 1918, quarantine centers and emergency military hospitals like this one in Camp Funston, Kansas, were constructed at various outposts throughout the U.S. A third of the world's population was infected, and at least 50 million died (675,000 in the U.S. alone)—making the Spanish flu among the deadliest outbreaks in human history. This iconic photograph is from a collection belonging to the National Museum of Health and Medicine, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Washington D.C. (National Museum of Health and Medicine // Wikimedia Commons)

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 one thousand 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 15th 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.



The most severe pandemic in modern history was the 1918 influenza pandemic, an H1N1 virus, according to the CDC. Caused by the H1N1 virus, the influenza spread worldwide. About 500 million people, one third of the world's population, were infected. At least 50 million people worldwide were killed, about 675,000 of those in the United States. Here, members of the American Red Cross remove Spanish influenza victims from a house in St. Louis in 1918. (St. Louis Post-Dispatch/St. Louis Post-Dispatch/TNS)



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 Aug. 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 Sept. 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 unconcerned even though there were 10 cases in the city, spread by civilian workers from the bases.

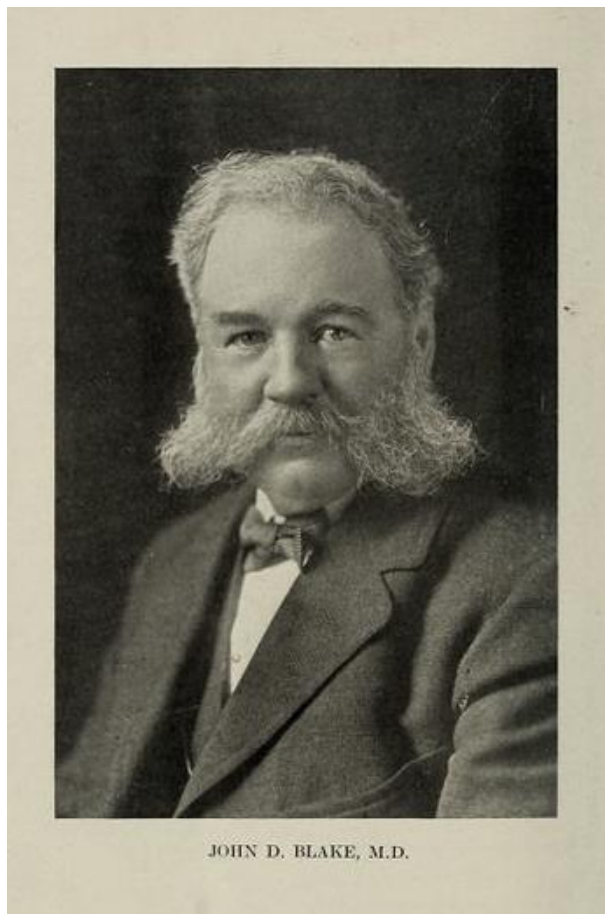


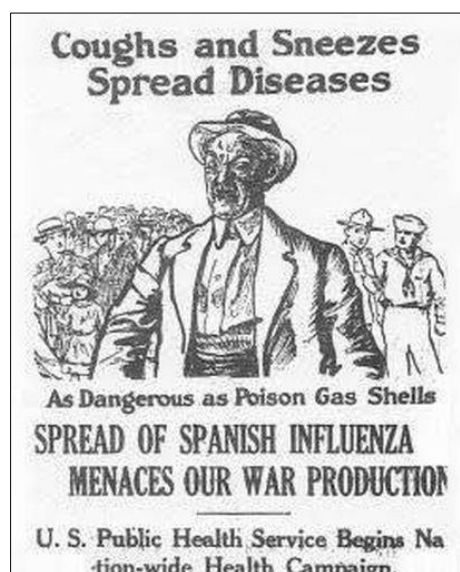
Image of John D. Blake, Health Officer, Baltimore, College of Physicians & Surgeons, Class of 1875. College of Physicians & Surgeons Merged with the University of Maryland in 1915. (Images from Historical Collections, Health Sciences and Human Services Library, University of Maryland, Baltimore.)

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 Oct. 7, the school board finally closed the city schools. On Oct. 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 Oct. 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.



This Public Health Service poster from the great Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 underscored the threat of the disease by comparing its casualties to those inflicted by poison gas shells. (Courtesy of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum)

Westminster's *Democratic Advocate* newspaper of Sept. 27, 1918 also printed figures. In the 24 hours ending at noon on Sept. 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. A quarter of the men at Camp Devens had flu and 10% had pneumonia. Although some dismissed Spanish flu as a "fashionable disease," others thought it ought to be called "German flu." In an editorial dated Oct. 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 Sept. 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 Oct. 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 eight deaths in Baltimore on Oct. 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. 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 Oct. 14. But Western Maryland College, where several students were "dangerously ill," had been quarantined on Sept. 30.

**Look out for Span-  
ish Influenza.**

**At the first sign of  
a cold take**

**HILL'S**  
**CASCARA**  **QUININE**  
**-BROMIDE-**

**Standard cold remedy for 20 years—in tablet  
form—safe, sure, no opiates—breaks up a cold  
in 24 hours—relieves grip in 3 days. Money  
back if it fails. The genuine box has a Red top  
with Mr. Hill's picture. At All Drug Stores.**

Advertisement from January 21 1919 for Spanish Flu Medicine. (Baltimore Sun)

The local papers with their gossip columns give a fairly detailed picture of life in Carroll County in 1918, from Shipley to Millers to Bark Hill. In early September, we find 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, 23, of Taneytown died at Camp Meade on Oct. 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, Helen Hunter Wilson of Paoli, Pennsylvania, and Gladys Hunter Blizzard of Westminster 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.



A masked typist is shown during the time of the Spanish flu.

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 Oct. 8; public, private, and home funerals were forbidden; and the front page of *The Democratic Advocate* of Oct. 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 Oct. 18, the Frederick fair was finally cancelled for the first time since the Civil War.



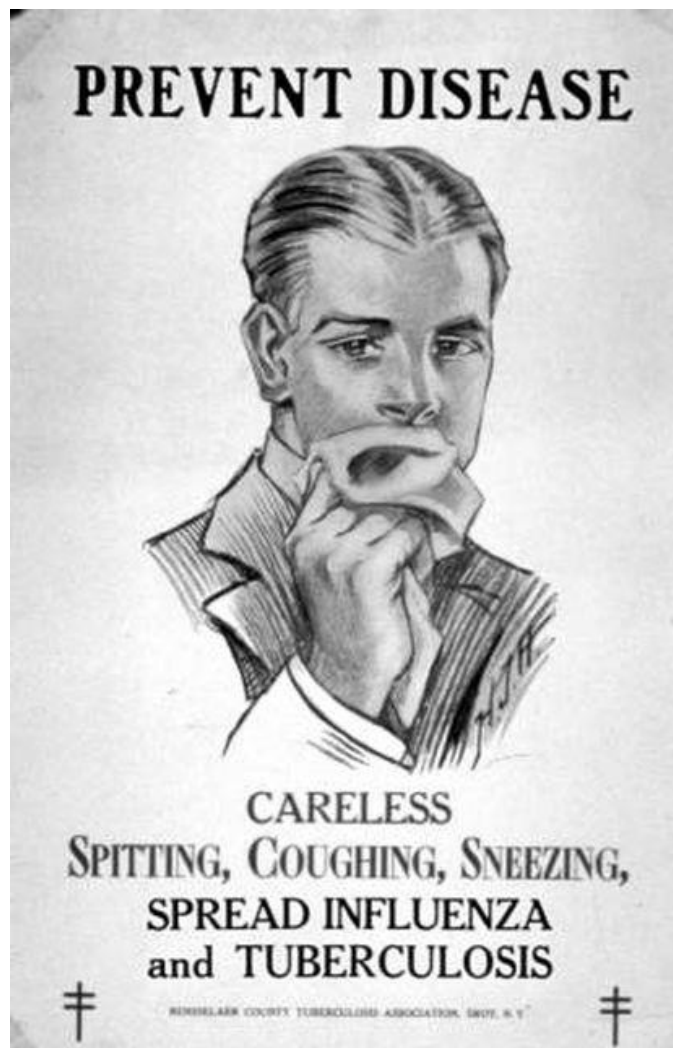
During the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918, Red Cross headquarters in Chicago had its workers wearing face masks as they prepared bandages. (UPI, UPI)

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 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 doctor's 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 Nov. 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 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.



An advertisement in the time of the Spanish flu urging people to do their best not to spread it.

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% 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 Oct. 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.

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 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 Oct. 25, Western Maryland College played football in Annapolis. On Nov. 6, the War Work Supper took place in Westminster, and

the Community Show with its farm exhibits was held in Union Bridge on Nov. 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.

Overall, 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 Feb. 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.