

MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

KEEPING HOMETOWN MEMORIES ALIVE

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INFLUENZA: THE WORLD'S FORGOTTEN PANDEMIC

100 years ago, the world lost approximately 6% of its total population. 100 million individuals were wiped out over the course of one year.

What happened to them? Why did so many die? What did they do to be taken so soon from their lives? They went to parades. They answered the draft. They aided those in need. They breathed in public. The 1918 Influenza, the "Spanish Flu," remains to this day one of the deadliest natural disasters in human history.

January 1918 saw the beginning of the influenza epidemic. At that point, the strain of influenza infected children, people who were already sick and the elderly. It behaved like a normal flu and had the same typical symptoms we experience today. The United States had been at war for just over one month.

Because the symptoms were typical of the flu at that time, no one panicked—yet. In April 1918, as the flu began to take out more people, there was criticism that there had not been enough preventative measures to combat the virus.

In addition to children, the sick and the elderly, soldiers were the main group of people who became infected. The reason for this was that the living conditions for soldiers were ideal breeding grounds for this strain of virus. Close quarters, massive troop migrations, immune systems weakened by malnourishment, and the stresses of combat and chemical



attacks, caused soldiers to be highly susceptible to the influenza. Their movement across the ocean was a leading factor to the alarming rate at which the disease spread. There was a lull in the virus during the summer of 1918. But as soldiers made their way to the battlefield, many of them brought contagion with them and awakened the outbreak in Europe.

By August, as the virus spread, it mutated and day by day it grew more deadly. It was at this point that the virus began its second and deadliest wave.

In addition to the normal flu symptoms, this strain put people into bed as if they had been hit by a bus. It very often turned into pneumonia, which turned people's skin black and blue. Lungs would fill with fluid and people would essentially drown. There were reports of people whose fevers were so high, their hair turned white and fell out. The second wave of influenza attacked not the elderly or children, but healthy young adults. People of ages 21 to 29 were the most

affected.

Because soldiers were the main group of people who were afflicted, regular civilians felt a false sense of security as they thought, "That won't happen to us, that's a soldier's disease." But then it did happen to "us."

As the war raged on, Britain, France, Germany and the United States censored early reports of influenza and mortality to maintain morale. Spain was not involved in WWI, so they did not censor their papers. When they reported that Spain's King Alfonso XIII was gravely ill with influenza, it gave the world a false impression that the virus originated in Spain, thus they nicknamed it the "Spanish Flu."

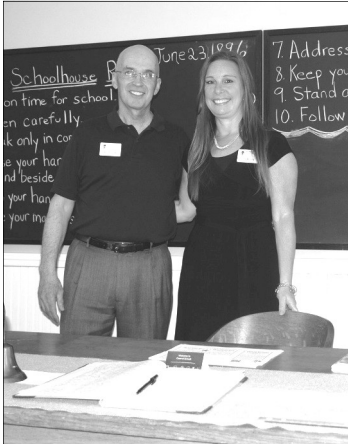
The war efforts were one of the major causes of contagion. In September 1918, 13 million men were drafted for the war. Men flocked to schoolhouses, city halls, and

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A NOTE FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT



Former MPHS President, Frank Corry and New MPHS President, Deb Rittle

Dear Society Members,

It's an honor and a privilege to be serving as your new board president. For the past several years, much of our focus has been on restoring Central School. Now that the restoration is complete, the Society is

entering a brand new era I am excited to be a part of.

In this new era, we're moving from building construction to building our programming, allowing us to focus on our important educational mission.

This past July saw our best attended Prairie Girl and Science of History Programs for children. A new offering this year, Living the Revolution, was also well-received. In the near future we plan to add historic birthday parties and Scout programs, as well as a History Camp next summer.

In September we successfully launched our Second Sunday program. (See below for more information.)

Our Living History Committee continues to organize fun and educational history-themed

programs for adults as well. Look for programs featuring Louisa May Alcott and the fascinating history of fascinators and fedoras in 2019. Other programs and new exhibits are in the works, too, including a blacksmith exhibit coming in mid-2019 which will add additional interest to our campus.

With so many exciting opportunities on the horizon, I am looking forward to leading the Society into the future by bringing history alive and making it accessible to our vibrant community.

Best regards,
Deb Rittle
MPHS Executive President



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Mount Prospect Stories: Wednesday, Oct. 24, 7-8:30 p.m., Mount Prospect Public Library
 - Second Sunday at the Society: Sunday, Nov. 11, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Historical Society campus
 - Holiday Housewalk: Friday, Nov. 30, 3:30-9 p.m., Triangle Neighborhood
 - Second Sunday at the Society: Sunday, Dec. 9, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Historical Society campus
 - Classic Christmas Movies: Friday, Dec. 7, 14 and 21, Central School, 7:30 p.m
- Call 847/392-9006 for more information.

SECOND SUNDAYS AT THE SOCIETY

In September the Society launched a brand new programming series. On the Second Sunday of each month, our campus will be open for visitors from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. This family-friendly open-house-style event gives the community a chance to drop in and see what we're all about. Hands-on, theme-based activities for kids of all ages will be offered. The Dietrich Friedrichs House

will also be open for tours.

September's program featured apple activities such as coloring pages, crossword puzzles, and a make-and-take apple chain project. Dozens of children and their families stopped in to participate. Others popped in just to take a peek at our newly restored Central School. All were thrilled to see the doors open to welcome them in.

The Dietrich Friedrichs house was available for tours as well. About fifty people were charmed by our museum as they toured through rooms filled with furnishings and artifacts reflecting 1917: the year our village was incorporated.

The first Second Sunday



was a spectacular success, and we're looking forward to seeing this program grow. Upcoming themes include pumpkins, turkeys and our annual Gingerbread Open House. From time to time, special events will be held in conjunction with Second Sundays. Each month, Society Board members will be on hand leading activities, guiding tours and answering questions.

We hope to see you on an upcoming Second Sunday! We're right in the neighborhood. Come see what we have to offer.



(Continued from page 1)

post offices to answer the call. Where the U.S. Health Department wanted to shut everything down, the war effort needed everything to speed up. Factories needed to keep operating, civilians needed to continue having loan drives, soldiers needed to continue being shipped to Europe. Despite the Health Department insisting on shutting down public gatherings, the country was in tunnel vision and focused solely on the war. At that time, the war was a more important issue.

Some officials in big cities refused to acknowledge the threat insisting there was nothing to worry about and that the virus would take its course. At a Liberty Loan parade in Philadelphia, civilians linked arms and sang patriotic songs, all the while breathing on each other. In the days that followed, the influenza ripped through Philly like a hot knife.

The Spanish Flu was so vicious that patients would see the doctor and within twelve hours they would already be dead. This strain spread fast and killed quickly. In September alone, 12,000 Americans died from influenza.

Nurses were needed as desperately on the home front as they were in Europe. The nurses who remained in the States were some of the most fearless people in American history. Despite the likelihood of themselves contracting the virus and dying, they took care of the sick to the best of their abilities. Alongside soldiers, nurses were another group of people who were heavily affected.

The Health Department thought that face masks would help contain the germs and act as protection, so it became mandatory to wear them in public spaces. However, the masks proved to be insufficient against the microbes.

It was insisted upon that all public gatherings be banned and all public places like, schools, churches and stores be shut down to help prevent the spread of the virus. If an establishment failed to close despite the warnings, they were listed in the newspaper and forcibly shut down by the Health Department. Theaters were one of the worst offenders in that many refused to shut down for fear of losing money, yet the atmosphere of a theater was ideal for the virus to spread.

At this point in history, science and medicine had progressed enough to where they had vaccines for diseases like smallpox, anthrax, rabies, diphtheria and meningitis. Because of



these advancements, people felt a sense of invincibility, and therefore did not heed the precautions that the U.S. Health Department advised, which exacerbated things.

Despite the monetary investment in the war, the United States government gave the Health Department one million dollars to help fight the flu. Biochemists developed a potential vaccine to combat the influenza. However, the vaccine they created was meant to fight bacteria, not viruses. Since influenza was a virus, the vaccine was useless. Very little was known about viruses at this time, and because microscope technology was not advanced enough, they physically could not see the virus microbe.

When October came, it became apparent that seemingly nothing was available to fight and stop the influenza. There was a nightmarish

paranoia and hysteria that gripped people everywhere. Where was safe? Who was safe? Nowhere and no one. People were living in fear of each other. It drove some people mad to the point of suicide. People truly believed that the end of the world had arrived.

Hospitals overflowed with patients. Many public spaces like schools, parks, and playgrounds became emergency relief centers. Some people attempted concocting their own medicines, which did nothing except prove even more harmful.

In large cities, carts would go around collecting bodies from homes, and mass graves were dug because there was a coffin shortage. In October 1918 alone, in just *thirty-one days*, 195,000 Americans died from influenza. It remains the deadliest month in American history.

By early November, as the war came to an end, there was a sudden drop in influenza cases. Out of nowhere, the death toll began to decline. It was generally accepted that the virus died out because it ran out of susceptible victims. People celebrated both the war's end and the

finale of the epidemic.

By December 4, 1918, 350,000 Americans had died since September 15. In ten months, 600,000 Americans died. To this day, scientists, medical scholars and historians still do not know what exactly caused the virus, nor why it died out so suddenly.

How did Mount Prospect and the surrounding areas fare?

Join Historical Society Executive Director Lindsay Rice on Wednesday, Oct. 24th at 7 p.m. at the Mount Prospect Public Library to take a closer look at the impact the influenza of 1918 had on Mount Prospect and the surrounding area. To register, call 847/253-5675.



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31ST ANNUAL HOLIDAY HOUSEWALK ON FRIDAY, NOV. 30

This year's 31st annual Holiday Housewalk, will be held from 3:30 to 9 p.m., Friday, Nov. 30. It will highlight the eastern edge of Mount Prospect's historic Triangle neighborhood (originally known as Busse's Eastern Addition) along South Albert and South Edward Streets.

Tickets go on sale for \$28 each (\$26 for members at the



museum only) on Nov. 1. Tickets on the day of the event will be sold for \$30 each – only at the headquarters tent.

The interiors of five private homes, built between 1928 and 1953, will be featured and posted signs will talk about the people for whom Albert, George and Edward Streets were named.

The homes featured this year are:

- 107 S. Edward St., owned by John and Ellen Dini
- 111 S. Edward St., owned by Joel and Julie Michalik (pictured left)
- 222 S. Edward St., owned by Tom and Barb Meier
- 222 S. Albert St., owned by Seth and Jenny Horvath
- 320 S. Albert St., owned by Jeff and Sue Eyles

The tour will begin in a tent located on Milburn Avenue between Edward and George Streets, where tickets will be sold; refreshments will be offered; and watercolors of the featured houses displayed. Museum store items will also be sold.

We hope to see you there!

HOLIDAY HOUSEWALK VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We are seeking volunteers to help with the Holiday Housewalk on Friday, Nov. 30 from 3:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Volunteers get to tour the Housewalk using their nametag!

If you are interested, call us at 847/392-9006.