

## Rowan County & the 1918 Spanish Influenza

### Slide 1 & 2. Title & Timeline

At the time of the 1918 Influenza Epidemic, the world was still at war. Soldiers returning from overseas were the first to contract the flu and the virus initially spread through military bases and camps. From September through November 1918, about 20-40 percent of military personnel were sick with flu or pneumonia from flu.

**Slide 3.** On Sept. 23, Salisbury papers announced that South Carolina's Camp Sevier was quarantined. However, many soldiers traveled through the Salisbury train depot on their way home or to their next camp. The Red Cross had a hospitality canteen at the depot, where they provided soldiers with cigarettes, magazines and books to read.

**Slide 4.** September 30, there were newspaper reports that two men who had been ill with flu had spent the day at the Salisbury Depot. People were sick in East Spencer and Landis, including the Landis pharmacist.

**Slide 5.** The Red Cross hospitality canteen eventually closed in order not to spread influenza.

**Slide 6.** The public had taken little notice of Camp Sevier's quarantine or the few reported flu cases. Generally, focus was still on the war.

**Slide 7.** By Oct. 3, Raleigh reported 300 cases, an increase of 103 in just a day. Students at the two schools for the blind and the state college totaled another 265 cases. Raleigh took steps to close down all public gatherings.

**Slides 8 & 9.** The Red Cross war effort, including making masks and linens, was still ongoing and easily mobilized an **Influenza Emergency Committee** made up of female volunteers from the canteen, volunteers who nursed the sick and made meals, and the motor corps who transported the meals and the volunteer nurses. Initially, food was prepared for 60-80 people a day, eventually increasing to 130-180 daily. The kitchen was open 10-15 hours a day until November when need decreased.

Although appeals were made to Senator Lee Overman to help provide trained nurses or doctors, only volunteer nursing was available to Rowan at the time. Care was largely provided in Salisbury, though nurses and food were also sent to Spencer and other towns.

**Slides 10 & 11.** The Board of Health [there was no Health Department at that time] enacted restrictions according to the mandates from Raleigh. People had to limit contact, close businesses early, open all the trolley car windows, and close schools, churches, theaters, pool halls and other places where people congregated. Federal Court was cancelled. Drug stores and restaurants were allowed to remain open.

By Oct. 12 the closings of churches, schools, and more affected the entire county. The health officer [Dr. A.J. Warren] and, later, quarantine officers helped monitor. Any household that had flu had to have a placard in the window or at the entrance so people knew not to enter. Coughing or spreading the virus was likened to warfare.

Around the third week of October, the flu peaked and then began to taper off. Households with flu, public assemblies, schools and churches, etc., were still restricted.

**Slide 12.** When the war ended on November 11, there was some celebrating and a parade, and a few days later court was held despite Health Officer Warren's objections.

**Slide 13.** Though some restrictions (or at least their enforcement) appeared to ease and some bans were rescinded, on Nov. 21, *Rules Governing Management of Flu* were published in the newspaper and pamphlets widely distributed.

**Slide 14.** By mid-December there was an up-tick in flu cases. Students had returned to school for only a short while before schools were closed again. Other public places were closed, including churches, etc.

**Slide 15 – 16.** By December 26, the Board of Health lifted the restrictions, and new cases of influenza were on the decline. However, unnecessary public gatherings were still discouraged, and homes with influenza victims remained under quarantine.

**Slide 17.** On January 6, 1919, schools reopened.

Additional Info not included on the slideshow:

A Nov. 26 newspaper listed that

- around 5,000 people had died in NC by the end of October
- there were 63 total deaths in Rowan
- Forsyth & Gaston counties had the most flu cases at 210 each

Note:

This information was prepared by Paul Birkhead, David Lamanno, Anne Morgan, and Gretchen Witt on April 1, 2020.