

1918 Spanish Influenza

By Marian Ruhland Burmester



I was told Louisa Fell
Schott is on the right

Since 1918 was the terrible year of the cyclone, we will continue with another big event of the year, the Spanish Flu. "I had a little bird, and her name was Enza. One day I opened up the window, and in-flu-enza." This children's rhyme could be heard all over the country during the time of when the "Spanish" Lady had hit our country head on. Between 1918 and 1919 the influenza killed more humans than any other disease in a similar period in the history of the world. In the United States a quarter of the population contacted the flu and 550,000 died. It was worse than the Bubonic plagues that hit the world during the middle Ages. It is estimated that the Bubonic Plague killed about 137 million in three eruptions during the sixth, fourteenth, and seventeenth centuries. The Spanish Influenza killed 25 million in a single year. It is thought that this pandemic originated in China,

just like most of the flu virus of today. It spread to the United States with our troops returning from Europe during WW I. The first case was at

Camp Funston, Kansas on March 11, 1918. Within seven days this fast moving air borne disease was in every state of the Union. Casualties caused by the influenza were ten times greater than all the casualties of WW I.

Most victims of this virus were between the ages of 20-40 and were healthy, active adults. This is very uncommon because most diseases affect more of the older and younger because of their weaker immunity. Symptoms were headache, high temp, low pulse rates, coughing up of blood like fluids from the lungs, and other things you might relate to the flu we see today. Many people would die 1-3 days after the onset. Their lungs would fill with blood or fluid, without much inflammation, simply drowning the people inside themselves.

Years ago in researching my dad's family I came across a note in an obituary from the Sauk City Pioneer Press, Jan. 10, 1929 for my great great-grandmother Catherine Nunn Fell Balzer. "This marriage was blessed with 9 children of which 4 preceded her in death, 3 in early childhood and Mrs. Louisa Schott who died during the flu epidemic in 1918." This sparked my interest in doing research on the Spanish Flu and is what made it possible for me to write this article.

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