

Visitations of death and disease

No sooner had the plague of war receded than a pandemic of a particularly virulent strain of influenza swept through the United States and Europe, claiming millions of victims. The disease was thought to have come from Spain and so was known as the Spanish influenza, but in fact it originated in the western United States, was carried to army camps by draftees, where it spread rapidly, then carried to Europe by American troops, where it quickly infected millions of people, whose health had been compromised by the war. While doctors did not know how to treat the disease, they understood that it was spread by person-to-person contact, so isolation and quarantine became effective, if limited, weapons.

The epidemic struck Washburn in October 1918, with about 50 cases reported by the Times on the 10th. The Board of Health immediately ordered all schools, churches, and theaters closed and prohibited all public meetings or gatherings. A week later the Times reported that "There are indications" that the disease was receding, but this optimism was misplaced for during the next two weeks the disease claimed seven victims. In November the quarantine was made stricter and an emergency hospital was opened in Garfield School. In mid-November, probably due to the complete loss of quarantine control during the

CS 5/6/10
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armistice celebration, more than one 100 cases were reported in the city with several additional deaths. By the end of November the Times reported that the "flu epidemic is improving." In mid-December the emergency hospital was closed and the "flu ban" was lifted, and on December 30 schools were reopened. But in mid-January 1919 influenza returned with a vengeance with nearly 50 cases in the city.

Since the earlier total quarantine had been unpopular among the people, a house quarantine was ordered, under which everyone living in a house with an influenza case was prohibited from leaving, except for the wage earner. Despite the threat of arrest and prosecution some people, to avoid having their homes quarantined, did not report a sick person, thereby endangering the entire community. But the disease disappeared almost as quickly as it appeared, and by summer of 1919 reports about it no longer appeared in the Times.

Those who might have thought that Washburn's pub-

lic health problems were over when the flu epidemic faded in the summer of 1919 were soon disabused of that notion, for in early February 1920 the Times reported that there were several cases of the "dreaded Spanish influenza" in the city. Indeed, during the 1920s the people of Washburn suffered, not only from influenza, but from several other pestilences. In June 1921 the Times reported "small pox prevalent" in the city; in October 1922 that "an epidemic of whooping cough" was "spreading over the city;" in February 1923 the flu epidemic worsened and the state board of health issued warnings regarding the closing of public places and gatherings; in February and March 1924 an epidemic of scarlet fever struck the city, in November 1925 numerous cases of chicken pox were discovered among school children; in March 1927 cases of a new and virulent form of the flu appeared in the city; in March 1928 schools were closed because of another outbreak of scarlet fever. A month later there were several cases of flu in the city and although the situation appeared to be improving, by December there were still a large number of flu cases reported; and in May and October 1929 scarlet fever once again appeared among Washburn's children. There was no cure for many of these diseases, so they simply had to run their course while the victims endured and

hopefully survived.

The greatest disease threat to public health continued to be pulmonary tuberculosis. However, the long campaign to bring this highly communicative disease under control was succeeding, with death rates gradually being reduced by 1919. An important goal of this campaign was achieved in 1911, when the legislature authorized counties to construct and operate sanatoria. In 1917, Ashland, Bayfield, and Iron Counties approved the construction of a joint sanatorium. Bayfield County donated a site on the lakeshore south of Bayfield, and construction of the Tri-County Pureair Sanatorium began in September 1919 (closed in 1975).

Steps were occasionally taken to try to improve Washburn's public health situation, however. Health education programs were offered by the Red Cross and the Parent-Teachers Association, children were given physical examinations, and there were occasional free medical and dental clinics. Washburn's need for a hospital was met in early 1921, when Dr. Albert Axeley purchased the Haskell Club building from the DuPont Company for that purpose. The building was remodeled to provide accommodations for 20 patients in 10 rooms with space for other medical facilities. It is now an apartment building.