

## A Tale of Two Cities: The 1918 Influenza Epidemic

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"It killed more people in twenty-four weeks than AIDS has killed in twenty-four years, more in a year than the Black Death killed in a century."<sup>1</sup> What could have been responsible for this wave of fatalities? A horrifying pandemic has been erased from America's memory and master narrative for almost a century. Only recently has this topic gained attention due to the swine and avian influenzas and SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). The 1918 influenza pandemic lasted roughly from March 1918 to June 1920 and reached almost every part of the world, including the remote areas of the Pacific Islands and the Arctic. Like all cities in the United States, Mattoon and Charleston, Illinois, experienced the wrath of the influenza. Approximately ten miles apart, one would think Mattoon and Charleston's respective newspapers, the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* and the *Charleston Courier*, would parallel one another in their coverage of the pandemic. However, this is far from the truth. This paper will explore the newspapers' dissimilarities and investigate the causes of the significant differences between the two cities.

The historiography on the 1918 influenza pandemic evolved from two groundbreaking authors, Alfred Crosby and John Barry. Crosby's landmark research covered many aspects of the influenza, from epidemiology to statistics. The current edition of *Epidemic and Peace, 1918*, is a reissue, with a new preface describing the 1976 episode of swine influenza at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Crosby not only recreates the pandemic's destruction and hysteria, but also traces modern medicine's search for the cure. In the 1980s, there was an increased anxiety over the seemingly lesser control of medical science over diseases ranging from cancer to AIDS. Crosby suggests how earlier societies reacted to diseases that baffled science. Influenza is in some ways analogous to cancer and

AIDS, since medical science has been unable to prevent or control it successfully.

Crosby utilizes quantitative data, medical records and journals, and archival collections to assess the United States and the rest of the world's experience with the 1918 pandemic. Despite such devastation, little was written on the pandemic during the following fifty years. By contrast, books on World War I, which claimed roughly ten million lives over four years, continue to fill libraries. Crosby argues that the war itself shadowed the pandemic into obscurity. Nevertheless, Crosby's research would be critiqued and mimicked, but eventually would evolve into new understandings of the influenza pandemic.

John Barry certainly echoed Crosby's research, but with a greater emphasis on the biological aspect of the influenza. Much like Crosby, Barry explores medical records, journals, and archives but does not bore the reader with an endless supply of statistics. After an introduction examining the onset of the pandemic, the book turns to the history of medicine going back to Hippocrates and Galen. The beginning sections on medical history effectively set the stage for the remainder of the book. The heart of the book intertwines the story of the pandemic, mostly in the United States, with insightful details of the basic biology of influenza. Moreover, the influenza virus effectively uses World War I as a backdrop. Barry illustrates how the cramped barracks at army camps and the movement of troops from camp to camp helped to spread the epidemic and, possibly, how the movement of American troops to Europe helped spread it abroad. Likewise, war rallies and Liberty Bond drives helped spread the influenza among the civilian population. Barry explains how the pandemic hit cities like a tidal wave, saying, "On a single day of October 10, the epidemic alone killed 759 people in Philadelphia. Prior to the outbreak, deaths from all causes—all illnesses, all accidents, all suicides, and all murders—averaged 485 a week."<sup>2</sup>

One of the major strengths of Barry's book explains the basic biology and epidemiology of the influenza. During the pandemic the cause of influenza was, and still is, uncertain. Barry explains how an incorrect hypothesis about Pfeiffer's bacillus and ineffective laboratory machines (i.e. electron microscopy) kept the influenza shrouded in mystery. Like Crosby's new preface to his book, Barry correlates the 2003 outbreak of SARS, 2004 outbreak of the avian influenza, and AIDS with the 1918 pandemic. Both authors' vital investigations paved the way for new understandings and literature regarding the 1918 influenza pandemic.

Focusing on the deadliest waves of the influenza, the second and third waves in the fall and winter, Mattoon and Charleston's newspapers were on the opposite sides of the spectrum when reporting on the pandemic. While the first wave of the influenza had been extremely

<sup>1</sup> John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

contagious, the second and third waves were both contagious and exceedingly deadly, which I will focus on in this paper. Beginning in the New England states, hospital infirmaries became overcrowded with the sick and dying, and the disease eventually reached rural areas of Illinois. By October, the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* began reporting closings of schools, churches, movie theaters, and Red Cross meetings. “Flu’ Stops Meeting” made the front-page news in the *Gazette*. Dr. C. St. Clair Drake, medical director of Illinois, and Governor Frank O. Lowden shut down all political assemblages since overcrowding helped spread the influenza.<sup>3</sup>

The *Mattoon Journal-Gazette’s* obituary section ultimately became overwhelmed with civilian and troop deaths due to the influenza. The editorial, “With the Sick,” sprang up in late October focusing on the sick, dead, and business closings. In the October 17, 1918 issue, Miss Flora Bowman, Mattoon’s school and community nurse, suffered from a nervous breakdown due to overworking since the community was suffering from the influenza, while a Windsor mail carrier, Oran Perry Cox, died in his home due to the virus.<sup>4</sup> This same newspaper reported the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Maud Jay, all victims of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Eight days later, a headline stated “Influenza Takes Well Known Men.” Mattoon lost two significant men—Daniel B. Rinehart, court stenographer, and his brother, Walter E. Rinehart, an attorney.<sup>6</sup> The citizens of Mattoon were well aware of the shocking situations, and certainly portrayed it in their newspaper. Moreover, the *Gazette* published an article explaining the demanding and continuous problems Mattoon was facing, titled, “Two Trained Nurses on their Way to Mattoon.”<sup>7</sup> Two Bloomington, Illinois, nurses were sent to Mattoon “to assist the local health and Red Cross workers in caring for the influenza and pneumonia sufferers.”<sup>8</sup> The hysteria over the influenza began reaching critical conditions by late October.

With the influenza in its second wave, the *Gazette*, on October 28, 1918, printed an article hoping to pass a sanatorium law that would facilitate a medical facility for the sick.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Washington “Urged to Stamp Out Spanish Influenza...by establishing emergency hospitals.”<sup>10</sup> Mattoon never tried to hide or dilute the seriousness of the pandemic. As the influenza continued to seep into the *Gazette*, so did Dr. Ferguson, a practicing doctor in Mattoon. On December 14, 1918, Dr. Ferguson announced, “there are approximately twenty cases reported a day in

<sup>3</sup> *Mattoon Journal-Gazette*, 18 October 1918.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 October 1918.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 October 1918.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 October 1918.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 October 1918.

Mattoon,” and went on to say, “there will probably be successive waves.”<sup>11</sup> The doctor had good reason for his anxiety. Influenza casualties outnumbered all other deaths, however, subsequent waves never devastated Mattoon as predicted. Nevertheless, with the holiday season quickly approaching, the *Gazette* noted, “stores will stay open later to avoid congestion on Christmas Eve shoppers.”<sup>12</sup> The influenza pandemic clearly affected the citizens of Mattoon and reconfigured the way in which they lived, but that was only the beginning.

The most significant difference between the two newspapers, *Charleston Courier* and *Mattoon Journal-Gazette*, were the remedies they publicized. Local businesses began buying up sections in the *Gazette* in order to advertise their elixirs, pills, and ointments. A special honey elixir, by Dr. Baker of Mattoon, claimed to prevent the “flu” from affecting anyone who took this concoction.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Frankein Duane offered his professional advice saying, “The more you fear the disease, the surer you are to get it.”<sup>14</sup> With such reassurance, readers awaited Dr. Duane’s sincere guidance. However, the doctor’s long five paragraphs was only a sales pitch for his product. “Thoroughly loosen the bowels with some such mild and non-irritating physic as Dr. Pierce’s Pleasant Pellets,” Dr. Duane wrote.<sup>15</sup> But what if a person was already severely weakened by the influenza? Well the doctor had another remedy, “Irontic.” The ad claimed that this herbal tonic had been used by thousands, and would certainly provide a fighting edge against the pandemic, so it says. In a related article, on November 1, 1918, Dr. L. W. Bowers also advertised how Dr. Pierce’s Pleasant Pellets would “keep the liver and bowels regular and to carry away the poisons within.”<sup>16</sup> A plethora of Dr. Pierce’s herbal remedies are found throughout the *Gazette*, and this was only one of many.

“Look out for the Spanish Influenza,” a patent medicine advertisement, *Cascara Quinine*, states.<sup>17</sup> This supposed influenza remedy advertisement was plastered across the pages of nearly every issue of the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette*. In addition, other medicines that began springing up in the *Gazette* were Vick’s VapoRub, Dr. Bell’s Pine Tar Honey, Schenck’s Mandrake Pills, Beecham’s Pills, and, one of the more exotic products, Miller’s Antiseptic Snake Oil. Page after page, day after day, the *Gazette* was flooded with influenza remedies. These remedy advertisements are one of the elements unique to the *Gazette*. Unlike the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette*, the *Charleston Courier* seldom published influenza remedy ads. Stuart’s Drug Store advertisements were only one of about two remedies

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 December 1918.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 December 1918.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 December 1918, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 November 1918.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 November 1918.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 October 1918.

found in the *Charleston Courier*. Unlike snake oil, pine tar honey, and pills, Stuart offered a nose and throat spray—interestingly traditional compared to the bizarre concoctions found in the *Gazette*.

The most intriguing influenza remedy was Vick's VapoRub. Claiming, "When VapoRub is applied over throat and chest the medicated vapors loosen the phlegm, open the air passages and stimulates the mucus membrane to throw off the germs," was an impressive scientific approach to curing the virus.<sup>18</sup> However, Vick's VapoRub did not stop there. This piece was dissected into several topics. First was the history behind the "Spanish Influenza," while the subsequent topics explored the symptoms, treatment, external applications, how to avoid the disease, and where Vick's VapoRub was founded. This advertisement was so influential that days later headlines erupted saying, "Druggists! Please Note Vick's VapoRub Oversold Due to Present Epidemic," and went on to say, "Tremendous demand last few days has wiped out excess stocks that we had estimated would last until next January."<sup>19</sup> Last week's orders called for one and three quarter million jars—today's orders alone amount to 932,459 jars."<sup>20</sup> In this lengthy advertisement, Vick's VapoRub explains the dangers of shortage if supplies are not conserved and properly distributed, while new ways to use VapoRub were also mentioned in the advertisement. On November 8, 1918, Vick's VapoRub offered another plea, saying, "Druggists Still Asked to Conserve Stocks of VapoRub Needed in 'Flu' Districts."<sup>21</sup> Once again, the advertisement explains the origins of the "flu," but also provides more information on how VapoRub works.

The *Gazette's* comic strips even began poking fun at the influenza. "Doings of the Duffs" depicts Tom, the main character, waiting to step into a telephone booth. Meanwhile, a large man steps out of the booth and "KA CHOO," Tom gets sneezed on. The last frame reveals Tom standing in the booth wiping his nose, saying, "And in flew enza!" (Figure 1).<sup>22</sup> On October 31, 1918, "Doings of the Duffs" poked fun at the influenza once more. However, this time Tom's baby yanks on a tablecloth and releases a cloud of pepper. Tom, his wife, and baby begin sneezing uncontrollably. The last frame shows Tom on the phone saying, "Oh, Doc. Come right over—we've all got it!" (Figure 2).<sup>23</sup>

The *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* certainly did not hide the influenza's devastating path. Headlines like "Influenza Cause of 18,000 deaths" and "Flu Toll is 22,563 in State" were found throughout the newspaper in 1918.<sup>24</sup> Besides the press publicizing the influenza's wrath, the *Gazette*

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 18 October 1918.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 21 October 1918.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 8 November 1918.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 24 October 1918.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 31 October 1918.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9 November 1918 and 30 November 1918

advertised unique remedies. Elixirs, pills, and ointments flooded Mattoon's newspaper from late 1918 to early 1919. In addition, although light-hearted, the comic strips depicted the influenza in a comedic way. This is quite unique since the *Charleston Courier* rarely commented on the influenza and seldom advertised remedies.

Although World War I and post-war reconstruction dominated newspaper headlines, the *Gazette* and *Courier* continued to publish articles regarding the influenza. With only ten miles between the two towns, their newspapers differed significantly. Although the *Courier* published several articles pertaining to the virus, it could not come close to the level of alarm reached by the *Gazette*. Mattoon's newspaper published numerous articles focusing on local people and businesses that were affected by the pandemic. However, Charleston's newspaper covered issues concerning Chicago and the larger cities in the United States. For example, on November 27, 1918, the *Courier* stated, "Flu Never Closed New York Schools."<sup>25</sup> There was even an article that talked about an influenza serum for Chicagoans. On rare occasions, the *Courier* would mention the growing problem with headlines such as "22,566 Deaths from Influenza."<sup>26</sup> This was certainly a rarity. Most headlines read, "Influenza Situation Greatly Improved" and "No New Outbreak of Influenza."<sup>27</sup> The *Courier* seemed to leave the influenza by the wayside. Other articles such as, "Della Ashmore Had No Fear of Influenza" and "Oldest Influenza Victim Recovering" revealed Charleston's amount of concern—slim to none.<sup>28</sup>

When the *Courier* did focus on the influenza, the newspaper took a scientific approach. The superintendent of the Public Health Nursing Association stated that spitting is a "filthy, dangerous, and unnecessary habit," and went on to say, "Terre Haute is most decidedly leading in this campaign to prevent the spread of this disease."<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, the *Courier* published an article focusing on Cleveland, Ohio, saying, "It is a known fault of men that they like to spit into dark corners...the General Electric Company, in promoting an anti-spitting campaign in an effort to check the influenza, has hit upon a scheme that is said to be working extremely well in checking spitting in corners."<sup>30</sup> On November 20, 1918, also focusing on Ohio, the *Courier* looked for scientific answers to solve the pandemic crisis by explaining that the spread of the influenza was due to the chilly conditions in homes and offices. As the differences between the newspapers continued to grow, the *Courier* published a section called "The Old Rounder" which contained jokes and poems regarding the virus. In the October 10, 1918 issue, the *Courier* joked about the pandemic, saying, "Why

<sup>25</sup> *Charleston Courier* 27 November 1918.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 3 November 1918.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 16 October 1918 and 22 December 4 1918.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21 November 1918 and 30 October 1918.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 16 October 1918.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 20 November 1918.

is the city library closed? Because they found influenza in the dictionary.”<sup>31</sup> The *Courier* seemed annoyed by all the hype the influenza produced. This can be seen in the October 21, 1918 edition, from an anonymous man portraying his feelings, saying:

Last night as I lay trying to go to sleep the words “Spanish Flu” drifted up to my ear from the conversation of passerby. And the last I remembered was my mind was working double shifts on Spanish Flu. This morning I woke up an hour late, and my first thought was “I wonder if that’s a symptom of Spanish Flu. The toothpaste didn’t taste right—Spanish Flu. The bath soap burned my eyes—Spanish Flu. My beard seemed to have grown pretty fast and tough overnight—Spanish Flu. Breakfast didn’t seem to have its regular taste—Spanish Flu. On the way to work I heard coughs and sneezes of other people—Spanish Flu. I felt like coughing and sneezing—Spanish Flu. All day at work I thought—Spanish Flu—and here I finish the day with type chirping about Spanish Flu!<sup>32</sup>

Unlike the *Gazette*, the *Courier* seldom published influenza remedies. While the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* sold snake oil, Vick’s VapoRub, pine tar honey, and pills, the *Charleston Courier* offered few remedies—not the bizarre concoctions found in the *Gazette*. However, both newspapers showed high number of flu-related deaths in their obituaries. Besides news pertaining to the war and post-war reconstruction, these two newspapers were considerably different from one another. While the *Gazette* focused on local influenza issues, the *Courier* focused on Chicago and other larger cities’ influenza problems. When the *Gazette* published comic strips, the *Courier* took a scientific approach to solve the influenza troubles. Most people, including local historians, agree that the difference lies in class conflict—Mattoon is blue-collar while Charleston is a white-collar city. So why are these two towns, which are a mere ten miles apart, so different? Archival research significantly points to a few key issues. First was the difference between the two newspapers. Secondly, the industrial rise of Mattoon and its railroads rendered it a blue-collar city. Thirdly, and most importantly, was the founding of Eastern Illinois State Normal School.

Charleston’s first newspaper was established by William Harr and William Workman in 1863. The *Courier* was later sold to Eli Chittendon who, in 1863, changed the name to *Plaindealer*. After years of purchasing and name changing, Charleston, in 1880, eventually had three newspapers—*Courier*, *Plaindealer*, and *Saturday Evening Herald*. In 1923,

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 10 October 1918.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 21 October 1918.

James K. Rardin, an Irish pioneer and founder of the *Saturday Evening Herald*, merged his newspaper company with the *Plaindealer*, making *Plaindealer-Herald*. The Rardins, the new owners of the newspaper, were early Charleston settlers, who were opinionated and ambitious Democrats. After several more years of merging, purchasing, and name changing, Charleston had one Democratic newspaper, the *Charleston-Courier*.<sup>33</sup>

Contradictory to Charleston, Mattoon’s newspapers stood on the opposite side of the political spectrum. On June 7, 1856, a pioneer citizen, R.W. Houghton, started printing the *Weekly Independent Gazette*—a four page publication.<sup>34</sup> Like Charleston, Mattoon saw its fair share of newspaper changes—*Weekly Independent Gazette* (1856), *Mattoon Daily Journal* (1865), *Radical Republican* (1867), *Mattoon Commercial* (1871), *Mattoon Morning Star* (1888), and *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* (1905).<sup>35</sup> However, Mattoon catered toward a republican readership—obviously with a newspaper called *Radical Republican*. But why were these two newspapers catering to two different crowds? First, Charleston’s newspapers were mostly owned by Democrats, while Mattoon were Republicans. Secondly, there was a blue-collar versus white-collar separation between the two cities. Mattoon’s industrial roots began with water in 1865. H.W. Clark founded the first privately owned water system, thus creating the first industry in Mattoon.<sup>36</sup> Industries seemed to flourish after 1865, and brought not only money to the community but also fame. Such was the case of the Chuse Engine and Manufacturing Company. The company’s claim to fame came in 1894 when Chuse agreed to build a high-speed steam engine, using electrical generators, for the Somerville & Merks electric light plant.<sup>37</sup> Since 1855, Mattoon was also “a railroad town.”<sup>38</sup> Life revolved around the rail yards. Hotels and restaurants were built closely to Mattoon’s railroads, while the rail yard employed hundreds of workers. As a result, Mattoon’s industrial blue-collar society favored Republican views, thus paving a way for Republican oriented newspapers.

While Mattoon began taking shape as an industrial city, Charleston transformed from a farm community to a white-collar teacher-producing city. Certainly the major rift between the two cities was the bid for a state normal school in eastern Illinois. In 1857, the first state normal school was established in Bloomington that became Illinois State Normal University. The second was established in Carbondale in 1869, which became Southern

<sup>33</sup> *Coles County Illinois 1876-1976: The Charleston and Mattoon Bicentennial* (Texas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1976), 254–255.

<sup>34</sup> *Mattoon Memories: Mattoon Centennial, 1855-1955*. Unknown author and publisher. Circa 1955. Found at Coles County Historical Society.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Coles County Illinois 1876-1976: The Charleston and Mattoon Bicentennial* (Texas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1976), 356–357.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *Coles County Illinois 1876-1976*, 356.

Illinois Normal College. A committee report regarding the Illinois Senate in 1887 recognized the value of state normal schools and the state's obligation to support them in order to meet the demand for qualified teachers. School officials and teachers claimed that two normal schools were insufficient to meet the critical need for qualified teachers. In December 1892, the Illinois State Teachers' Association meeting in Springfield acknowledged a need for more normal schools, thus creating a normal-school committee of seven. The following year some of these members expressed the opinion, at a state meeting, that Illinois would benefit from the establishment of three to five more normal schools within the state.<sup>39</sup>

A few months later, a movement for establishing a state normal school in eastern Illinois began. Mattoon, Charleston, Paris, Danville, Shelbyville, Effingham, Kansas, Olney, Oakland, Palestine, Lawrenceville, and Tuscola all strived for future economic and cultural opportunities that accompany a state normal school. Mattoon had every reason to believe that it would become the seat of the normal school, instead of its nearest opponent, Charleston. Since Mattoon had a population of approximately 9,622 (compared to Charleston's 5,488), rail lines running both north and south and east and west (while Charleston's only ran east and west), and thriving industries, Mattoon was clearly the best city for a state normal school.<sup>40</sup> Mattoon was so confident it would receive the normal school that the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* claimed, "there is every opportunity of winning."<sup>41</sup>

Charleston stepped up to the plate by presenting a comprehensive proposal to the board of trustees. If Charleston established the normal school within two miles of the Coles County courthouse in Charleston, the city would provide forty acres of land and roughly \$40,000 to the school. The city would also run water lines to the site, provide fire hydrants, and supply the school with water for fifty years at \$5.00 a year. In addition, the city would pave or gravel a street from the courthouse to the edge of campus and provide sidewalks, furnish incandescent lights for twenty-five years at the rate of ten cents per thousand watts, and provide up to \$5,000 worth of freight to the school on any of the rail lines of the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, & St. Louis Railroad Company.<sup>42</sup> This offer surpassed

<sup>39</sup> Smith and W.E.C. Clifford, *Senate Committee Report on the Normal Colleges State of Illinois* (Dekalb: Industrial Arts Press, Industrial Arts Department, Northern Illinois State Teachers College, 1936), 12.

<sup>40</sup> The population of Mattoon in 1890 was 6,833 and Charleston, 4,135 (*Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Population [Washington, D.C.: United States Census Office, 1901]*), 116.

<sup>41</sup> *Mattoon Journal-Gazette*, 8 February 1895.

<sup>42</sup> R.S. Hodgen, Geo. R. Chambers, and Isaiah H. Johnson, "To the Board of Trustees of the Eastern Illinois State Normal School," University Archives, Booth Library.

all other bids, and on September 7, 1895, Charleston was selected to receive the normal school—Eastern Illinois State Normal School.

The citizens of Charleston received the news in a telegram from George Jeffries, who lobbied at the statehouse in Springfield, saying, "To the People of Charleston: Charleston wins on the twelfth ballot. Hard fought battle. Be home tonight."<sup>43</sup> Obviously the citizens of Charleston rejoiced after receiving the news. However, the reaction in Mattoon was quite different. Eight days after Charleston was chosen to be the site for the normal school, the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* proclaimed, "Charleston Gets It. The New Reform School Located at Catfishville." According to the *Charleston Courier*, Mattoon was anticipating a joyful celebration, but was quickly stunned. "[Mattoon's] newspapers had it all written up for the occasion, with spread eagles, roosters, and flags lavishly displayed, great headlines heralding the many qualities of the coming [new] Chicago." Instead, "they had better been engaged in making a monster coffin in which to bury their wrath." According to the *Gazette*, the announcement that Charleston won the bid for the school "caused more real, genuine, heartfelt profanity" in Mattoon than any previous incident in the city's history. "Such was the ending of a once beautiful dream—a dream which had pictured our streets filled with ten thousand sunny-faced, neatly-dressed, happy-hearted sons, daughters and Charlestoners on their way to learn to be teachers!...The question of the Eastern Illinois normal originated in this city, its citizens fought the opposition to a successful termination and the law creating it was passed; in all decency it should have been ours."<sup>44</sup>

In the wake of Mattoon's frustration, allegations began circulating regarding bribery. The disgruntled citizens of Mattoon were certain that the trustees had received money from Charleston.<sup>45</sup> The *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* pressed this issue, reporting that the people of Charleston openly bragged about "the purchase of the trustees."<sup>46</sup> Seven days later, the newspaper stated that "every man, woman and child in Charleston has been taught to believe that the trustees were bought up body and soul and have talked openly on the streets to that effect."<sup>47</sup> Countering these rumors, the *Charleston Courier* believed the bribery accusation was a personal insult to Charleston, saying C.G. Peck, editor of the *Gazette*, was "a dirty cur."<sup>48</sup> Losing the bid to Charleston certainly irritated the citizens of Mattoon, declaring, "every brick going into that edifice will be considered marked with boodle and every drop of mortar with which they are cemented with

<sup>43</sup> George H. Jeffries, Telegram, "To the People of Charleston," 7 September 1895.

<sup>44</sup> *Mattoon Journal-Gazette*, 13 September 1895.

<sup>45</sup> *Charleston Courier*, 12 September 1895.

<sup>46</sup> *Mattoon Journal-Gazette*, 13 September 1895.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 September 1895.

<sup>48</sup> *Charleston Courier*, 12 September 1895.

fraud.”<sup>49</sup> The Charleston-Mattoon rivalry began well before the bid for a normal school and would continue for other reasons, as local rivalries do. Nevertheless, the fact that Mattoon spearheaded the movement for a normal school in Coles County, only to have it taken away by Charleston, ensured that their rivalry would continue.

It should be noted that the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* has a history of reporting on local hysteria. In 1944, the best known case of mass hysteria was the “Mad Gasser” of Mattoon. Known as the Anesthetic Prowler, Mad Anesthetist, and, eventually, Mad Gasser, several local families reported being attacked by an unidentified person. This inevitably created panic throughout the small town. Rumors began circulating, from Nazis invading Mattoon to a high school chemistry student playing a prank. However, if Nazis invading Mattoon was not absurd enough, a Mattoon fortuneteller, Edna James, began circulating claims that the Mad Gasser was actually an “ape man.” Nevertheless, State Attorney William E. Kidwell, branded the hysteria as “ridiculous” and said that the police let the situation needlessly escalate out of control.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, the State Police Captain, Harry Curtis, believed most reported gassings were false alarms.<sup>51</sup> Within a few weeks, gassing reports stopped, but not Mattoon’s newly founded fame. The *Decatur Herald* made fun of the imaginative Mattoonites, saying, “At this season of the year odors are sniffed not merely by individuals but by entire communities. Our neighbors in Mattoon sniffed their town into newspaper headlines from coast to coast.”<sup>52</sup> Consequently, all mad gasser reports stopped, but Mattoon’s image of being a backward town was ingrained in the minds of Americans everywhere. Mentioning this incident certainly helps prove the differences between Mattoon and Charleston’s newspapers. Like the gasser, the influenza created a mass hysteria, and rightfully so, while Charleston was aware of but calm about the situation.<sup>53</sup>

Charleston and Mattoon, obviously, have a long history well before the influenza ravished the two towns. Their respective newspapers and social structures divided the towns significantly. While Charleston’s newspapers were owned and catered to a liberal town, Mattoon was the complete opposite. When Mattoon created an industrial foothold in eastern Illinois, Charleston won the bid for a normal school in Coles County. As the bid for the normal school movement intensified, Charleston and Mattoon continued to drift farther apart. A few years later, the destructive wrath of the influenza swept over the two towns, like it did everywhere else in the

<sup>49</sup> *Mattoon Journal-Gazette*, 13 September 1895.

<sup>50</sup> Ballenger, C. “Assail Police for Calling Gas Scare a Hoax,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 September 1944.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Daily Journal-Gazette*, 20 September 1944.

<sup>53</sup> Robert E. Bartholomew, *Little Green Men, Meowing Nuns and Head-Hunting Panics: A Study of Mass Psychogenic Illness and Social Delusion* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001), 95–111.

world. The *Charleston Courier* and *Mattoon Journal-Gazette’s* coverage of the pandemic differed so significantly that it cannot be ignored. While Mattoon’s newspaper displayed a certain amount of hysteria, with remedies and continuous local coverage of the influenza, Charleston focused on larger cities that were affected by the pandemic. However, when the *Courier* did mention the influenza, it took an intellectual approach to solving the problem—for example the anti-spitting campaign. In order to understand the differences between the two towns, it required an investigation of their past. Now as we look back at the *Courier* and *Gazette’s* coverage of the 1918 influenza, we will better understand why these two towns covered this issue so differently.

The fact that the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919, although seldom recalled in collective memories, is less well recorded by historians in no way reduces the historical significance of the disease and its influence. The impact of the influenza pandemic is almost impossible to conceive. Financially, millions, if not hundreds of millions of dollars were lost across the country as a result of factory shutdowns, store closings, and temporary layoffs. Life insurance claims numbering in the tens of thousands overwhelmed many insurance companies. Across the country, schools closed, public gatherings were banned and special restrictions were placed on restaurants. In addition, many cities reported shortages of nurses, doctors, caskets, bedding, and food for those who were victims of the influenza.<sup>54</sup> Vaccines were tested in cities and rural towns, as well as many new unproven methods of treatment—Mattoon is a prime example of these new methods. American journalist and political commentator, Henry Louis Mencken, explained it best, saying, “The [influenza] epidemic is seldom mentioned, and most Americans have apparently forgotten it. This is not surprising. The human mind always tries to expunge the intolerable from memory, just as it tries to conceal it while current.”<sup>55</sup> The 1918 pandemic is an incredible example of how collective memory can sometimes become selective. The influenza has taken a backseat in the twentieth century’s master narrative, since wars and protests engulfed most of this century, but this trend seems to be turning. While the swine and avian influenzas and SARS continue to make current headlines, more scholars are taking an interest in the 1918 influenza pandemic.

<sup>54</sup> Bryan Robinson, “All fall down,” *Nursing Times* 93, no. 45 (1997): 65–66.

<sup>55</sup> Howard Phillips and David Killingray. *The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918–19: New Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 230.

Illustrations



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

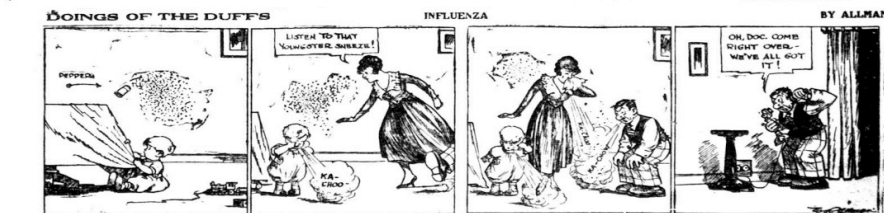


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

Prohibition in America: A Case Study of Small-Town America

Michael Weatherford

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Come, friends and brethren, all unite  
 In songs of hardy cheer; Our song speeds onward in its might-  
 Away with doubt and fear, we'll give the pledge, we'll join our hands  
 Resolved on victory; We are a bold, determined band,  
 And strike for victory.  
 The cup of death no more we'll take  
 The cup no more we'll give; It makes the head, bosom ache-  
 Ah! Who can drink and live? We give the pledge, we'll join our hands,  
 Resolved on victory; We are a bold, determined band,  
 And strike for victory. <sup>1</sup>

This song represents the changing philosophy in Illinois as prohibition became a central issue in the state and the country in the early twentieth century. The issue of prohibition was pushed particularly by the Illinois Intercollegiate Prohibition Association (ICPA) and the Anti-Saloon League. These groups helped to spread the messages of the evils of alcohol and urged that alcohol be banished from the towns of Illinois. The ICPA did their part by spreading anti-alcohol messages and circulating petitions throughout the colleges of Illinois. Participation in the ICPA grew to sixteen institutions; eleven were private liberal arts colleges including Augustana, Aurora, Creenville, Hedding, Illinois Holiness, McKendree, Millikin, Mt. Morris, Monmouth, North Central, and Wheaton, five of them were universities or theological schools; University of Illinois, University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and Garrett and McCormick theological seminaries.<sup>2</sup> The message being spread at these institutions could be summed up by the words of Mamie White of Wheaton College when he states in 1904: "Strike the rum demon Down! The date of his dethronement is at hand. Clearer than thunder at summer's first shower,

<sup>1</sup> Clarence Roberts, "The Illinois Intercollegiate Prohibition Association, 1873-1920," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 70, 2 (1977): 140-148.

<sup>2</sup> Clarence Thomas, 142.