

Called to Death: A Case Study on the 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Coles County, Illinois

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The 1918 influenza pandemic brought the issue of public health infrastructures to the attention of both rural and urban communities. Most studies, such as those by Alfred Crosby and John M. Barry, have focused on urban areas with established public health institutions. But in rural localities, a lack of this type of infrastructure required authorities to rely on the resources and institutions at hand. Lynne Curry argues that many urban-based reformers, concerned about the adverse affects rural areas could have on Chicago, attempted to address the sanitation problems in southern Illinois granting specific attention to maternal and child care. Volunteer reform efforts proved most successful in the southern regions because the lack of funding and meager political support made the development of formal public health efforts difficult. The decentralized structure of public health services outside of Chicago allowed for local residents to take health reform into their own hands.¹ This paper examines one rural community's collective response to the 1918 influenza pandemic. This collaboration of public officials, headed by medical authorities, introduced a permanent system of public welfare action in Coles County, Illinois. The 1918 pandemic provides an important look into the early stages of public health infrastructures' development in rural areas.

The historiography on the topic of the 1918 epidemic evolved from one main origin, the work of Alfred Crosby. Crosby's work touched on many aspects of this epidemic from epidemiology to public memory. Various historians have then picked apart this book and expanded on specific topics. Gina Kolata researched thoroughly the medical aspects of the influenza virus including its mutations and the various vaccines. Barry did little to advance discussion of the topic. His argument followed the same analysis as Crosby's, only differing in a more extensive look into the biology of the influenza.

Alfred W. Crosby began his search to uncover the mysteries behind the 1918 flu epidemic with his work, *Epidemic and Peace, 1918* in 1976. He created a narrative that not only recreated the events, but also traced modern medicine's search for the cure. Crosby's utilization of quantitative data helped to report the effect this epidemic had on both the military and

¹ Lynne Curry, *Modern Mothers in the Heartland: Gender, Health, and Progress in Illinois, 1900-1930* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

the civilian populations during all three waves. Crosby employed periodical literature, manuscript collections, medical and actuarial records, and medical journals to write this meticulous book dedicated mostly to the United States' experience of the epidemic, but also including information from across the Atlantic and Pacific. However, the United States' experience revolved around the bustling urban areas, not the rural countryside. Crosby suggested the epidemic facilitated the severity and inequalities of the peace agreement in 1918-1919. The flu affected the negotiators and their staff at Paris enough to leave an impact on the overall outcome. Crosby also offered explanations regarding the lack of public memory in the United States. He suggested that the war was a large distraction. The bodies killed overseas and brought home were the same age as those dying from influenza on the home front. Because a large portion (but certainly not all) of those inflicted with influenza were, in some form, militarily involved with the war, the obituaries of those dying of influenza and those in war were often combined and indistinguishable in the obituaries.

With Crosby's book as the take-off point for many researchers of the medical tragedy of 1918, Gina Kolata explored the mystery surrounding the lethality of the disease in *Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It*. Kolata's work focused primarily on the scientific aspects of the influenza; however, she also discussed the social ramifications. Kolata placed the focus of her book into a historical context by taking from secondary sources such as Crosby and employing the use of contemporary literature and oral histories. Kolata predominantly covered the United States' attempts to cure the incurable, but she also included information from around the world. She covered experiments during both the epidemic and the most recent attempts made to trace the scientific path to the answer.² Unfortunately, this answer still has yet to be uncovered; however she has given a detailed past which both historians and the public can understand.

Crosby's narrative, tracing the path and effects of the influenza along with the subsequent response by both the military and the general public, is followed nicely by Kolata's narrative tracing the scientific response. Kolata offered detailed descriptions of the scientists performing experiments along with stories of those suffering from the deadly disease. In addition, Kolata presented a meticulous look into the pitfalls of the vaccination attempts. The collaboration of the history and genetics of the epidemic, alongside the stories of those involved, produced a scientific narrative of the 1918 pandemic.

With the SARS corona virus outbreak in 2003 and the avian flu outbreak in Hong Kong in 2004, John M. Barry added his insight to the

² Gina Kolata, *Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus that Caused it* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

influenza outbreak among the epidemic hype in 2005. Using World War I as the background, Barry echoed much of what Crosby had to say with greater emphasis on the biology of influenza. Barry extracted information from a variety of sources including medical journals, personal stories, periodicals, and vast secondary information to recreate the medical travesty.

Barry spent the first part of the book looking at the history of medicine and its development since Hippocrates, along with the progression of American medicine and medical education. Barry then utilized meticulous data on military troops and distribution from 1917 to begin his story of the influenza in the United States. He stressed the importance of Liberty Bond drives, troop movements, as well as war related congregations to explain the spread of influenza throughout the United States. The shortage of doctors and especially nurses enhanced the medical fields' inability to combat the disease effectively. Barry conflicted with Kolata in the reasoning behind the high mortality rate among the 20-40 year-olds. Kolata concluded that a prior epidemic gave partial immunity to people above a certain age, which accounted for the age differentiation. Barry concluded that the stronger immune response amongst these younger victims led to more fluid in the lungs, which caused death after infection with the disease.³

The First Wave

*When your back is broke and your eyes are blurred,
And your shin bones knock and your tongue is furred,
And your tonsils squeak and your hair gets dry,
And you're doggone sure that you're going to die,
But you're skeered you won't and afraid you will,
Just drag to bed and have your chill,
And pray the Lord to see you through,
For you've got the Flu, boy,
You've got the Flu.⁴*

During the late spring and summer of 1918, the first wave of the influenza pandemic swept across the United States. Unfortunately, the inefficiency of federal, state, and local health departments in gathering and organizing information resulted in an inability to trace this epidemic at the time.⁵ Newspapers hinted at a problem with influenza overseas, but for the most part it was ignored by the general public. However, what the general public overlooked, local authorities did not fail to recognize. Authorities in

³ John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

⁴ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 28 October 1918.

⁵ Alfred Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18-19.

the Coles County cities of Mattoon and Charleston, Illinois feared something approaching the area, and both the county and school board took preemptive measures to combat it.

However blinded the general public was to the increase in deaths, the suspicious nature of the deaths in Coles County did not escape the attention of either the county or school boards. In Coles County, the school board began addressing the increase in deaths immediately by hiring a nurse at the April 1918 meeting. Dr. Bell, a local doctor practicing in Mattoon, attended this meeting and had suggested the addition to the school's health staff. His presence at the meeting signified the first attempts made by the authorities in Coles County to cooperate in combating the "flu" epidemic. The influx of health reformers from Chicago, specifically women's clubs and volunteer nurses, highlights the "maternalist" social welfare path that Illinois had begun to take.⁶ Coles County presented no exception, with a number of Red Cross Ladies present within the area. Specifically, the Ladies began to enter a close relationship with the school board, which, at its May meeting, approved their use of the assembly room of any school.⁷

The county board's minutes also reflected an increase in attention toward the growing health problem. The health fund report for May 1918, which included the spending for April 1918, revealed an increase since the previous month not only in the amount spent, but also on what the money was used for and by whom. The April report listed the health fund expenditures for March at \$40.00, this being the salary paid to the Coles County school nurse. In May, the health fund listed the expenditures at \$202.00; this included not only the school nurse's salary of \$40, but also the salaries of two new employees, quarantine officers, receiving \$81.50 and \$30.00, Dr. Bell also requested supplies totaling \$90.50 for Mattoon.⁸ The cemetery fund paralleled the findings of the Health Fund, its expenditures also increased from March to May respectively from \$304.48 to \$912.80. Much of this increase for the Cemetery Fund reflected the increase in hours for the cemetery laborers.

Though the lack of attention from the public indicates obliviousness toward the invading disease, administrators of the city began to feel the pressure of the disease, prompting preemptive measures aimed at controlling the encroaching problem. Both the school and county boards cooperated and took measures to ensure the safety of the public. Hiring a school nurse and increasing expenditures on things such as health supplies were actions implemented to prevent the spread of the disease throughout Coles County. These measures can be seen as significant given the questions surrounding the appropriate relationship between public and private responsibility with regard to social welfare provision. Though the

⁶ Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992)

⁷ Coles County School Board Minutes, April-May 1918.

⁸ Coles County Board Minutes, April-May 1918.

papers reported a potentially dangerous disease in Europe, doctors in Mattoon and the surrounding area (along with doctors nationwide) did not know what symptoms to look for, or how to diagnose influenza cases. The number of pulmonary-related deaths was insignificant compared to the total deaths. Because of this, the preventative actions themselves speak loudly of these physicians and county officials' awareness of the potential for an outbreak in the area.

The Second Wave

*When your toes curl up and your belt goes flat,
And you're twice as mean as Thomas cat,
And life is a long and dismal curse,
And your food all tastes like a hard boiled hearse;
When your lattice aches and your head's a-buzz,
And nothing is as it ever was,
Here are my sad regrets to you-
You've got the Flu, boy,
You've got the Flu.⁹*

The second wave of the flu epidemic presented itself with much more lethality than did the previous wave. Beginning in Boston, the first few cases again went under the radar of the medical profession, but as the bodies began to accumulate and hospital infirmaries became crowded with infected people, the situation could no longer be overlooked. However, even though the disease grabbed the attention of the medical world, detection could not prevent the spread of the disease. Railroads, troop movements, and civilians traveling allowed the influenza to devastate the nation.¹⁰ Just as quickly as the influenza began its journey throughout the United States, urban areas began to report the debilitating illness. Newspapers and city officials filled their publications with influenza-related topics; smaller towns would then eventually begin to adapt to this trend.

By October, the height of public disruption occurred with the closings for Coles County rapidly accumulating; schools, beauty shops, churches, movie theaters, and Red Cross meetings were not spared. On October 10th, 1918 local news announced that, "No Jury Trials at Circuit Court" until later in the year because of influenza.¹¹ Obituaries accrued not only for the troops, but for the civilians as well. The civilian obituaries recounted the lives of the deceased and did not fail to include the cause of death, specifically naming "Spanish influenza," if it were the case. Advertisements began requesting the aid of middle-aged farm hands, due to

⁹ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 28 October 1918.

¹⁰ Alfred Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

¹¹ *Charleston Courier*, 10 October 1918, p. 1.

the debilitating toll this disease took on those aged 20 to 40. This socially neutral disease called to death farm hands, doctors, sheriffs, scholars, and housewives.

As the influenza crept into the Mattoon and Charleston newspapers, many local businesses began to fill the pages with advertisements for prevention and new medical cures. Local area doctors began to create special concoctions said to hinder the spread of influenza. Dr. Baker of Mattoon created a special honey elixir which would prevent the “flu” from affecting the person who took it no matter his age.¹² Stuarts Drug Store of Charleston advertised an antiseptic oil spray stating, “To stop influenza use preventatives.”¹³

The local newspapers began adding new articles, at the request of the county board, and adjusted the content of already existing pieces. The editorial “With the Sick” reached the community with a more personal connection to the sick than did the more populated cities. This section sprang to existence in late October amid the obituaries and personal sections of the *Mattoon Journal Gazette*. It focused on influenza related illnesses giving information on who was sick, businesses closings due to illness, and the conditions, whether better or worse, of those infected. The personals sections of both papers adjusted their content to respond to the epidemic. Both papers’ personal sections previously contained information on the comings and goings of residents and visitors, but they now included health reports on the local residents. Instead of reporting “Mr. Jones vacationed to Chicago to visit relatives”, it read “Mr. Jones had traveled to Chicago for the funeral of a relative.” The epidemic infiltrated the newspapers, lives, and even the vacation time of the residents. These measures indicate the collective measures undertaken by the local authorities and newspapers to bring awareness to the community.

Among the “With the Sick” columns and the personal sections, the obituaries revealed the truth concerning the severity of the epidemic. The civilian obituaries not only noted the passing of a member of the community, but also warned citizens of the growing toll the influenza was taking on their neighborhoods. They contained information on the condition of the remaining members of the family, including whether any of the children were also infected and how long a member of the family had been ill with the “flu.”

Influenza had moved from infecting the public’s health to contaminating the *Charleston Courier* and *Mattoon Journal Gazette*. The *Charleston Courier* ran a section called “The Old Rounder” which contained puns, jokes, poems, and contemporary sayings. In the October 10, 1918 issue, influenza dominated this section with jokes and sayings such as, “Why is the city library closed? Because they found influenza in the

¹² *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 17 October 1918, p. 3.

¹³ *Charleston Courier*, 7 October 1918, p. 3.

dictionary,” and puns like “Calsimine opened the door and – influenza.”¹⁴ Cartoons such as the “Doings of the Duffs” depicted the main characters Pete and Tom struggling to not catch the flu. One cartoon in this series, “Tom steps into the ‘Spanish Flu’” illustrated Tom hesitating to use the phone booth after a man comes out sneezing. After waiting a moment, Tom goes in to use the phone booth covering his mouth. The last frame shows him sneezing and frustrated because he caught influenza.¹⁵ The fact that the general public found humor in these jokes reflected the casual nature applied to the severity of this disease. A later cartoon in the “Doings of the Duffs” series, printed on October 31, mocked the public for being hypochondriacs. Tom’s baby, while alone in the kitchen, pulled down the table cloth and unleashed a flurry of pepper. Tom and his wife entered the kitchen to find the baby sneezing. Simultaneously they both began to sneeze and Tom dashed to the phone. He is illustrated in the last frame on the telephone saying, “Oh, Doc. Come right over – we’ve all got it.”¹⁶ However, not everyone found humor in sneezing, whether real or pepper-induced, and many authorities felt the need to act hastily to prevent the situation from worsening.

The State Board of Health also began to work with the authorities in rural areas within Illinois. Alongside the closings of numerous organizations and public functions, Coles County implemented regulations on behalf of the Board of Health. One of the first precautions taken by the Board of Health required that all funerals be held in open air.¹⁷ (Prior to this regulation, many families would keep the body of the deceased in their homes until burial.) This regulation extended not only to influenza victims but to all the dead. Due to the mystery surrounding the origin and cause(s) of the disease, authorities administered regulations without question, with no factual evidence of their effectiveness. The State Department of Public Health, on October 10th, ordered that, “the public cannot visit ‘flu’ patients confined in the hospital.”¹⁸ The family members of the ill, regardless of wanting to support their loved ones, could no longer be in the same vicinity. The illness now seemed to be at its peak, the epidemic appeared to have reached a crisis.

With the crisis at its believed peak, the newspapers saw a promising outlook on the horizon: “now that people realize the severity, they will be more observant of instructions.” Authorities believed this would cause the end of the emergency.¹⁹ Over the next few days this prediction seemed to be confirmed. On October 15th, the *Charleston Courier*

¹⁴ *Charleston Courier*, 10 October 1918, p. 5.

¹⁵ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 24 October 1918.

¹⁶ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 31 October 1918.

¹⁷ *Charleston Courier*, 9 October 1918, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Charleston Courier*, 10 October 1918, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Charleston Courier*, 11 October 1918, p. 1.

ran an article titled, “Flu Epidemic Now Abating.”²⁰ It reported that since 5 a.m. Monday morning Dr. Ferguson, practicing in Mattoon, had reported only one death. Finally the end of the disaster seemed in sight. Unfortunately, journalists reported this glorious news too hastily. The next day an article from Springfield, Illinois reported on the severity and increase of influenza statewide. Dr. Ferguson replied, attributing the decreasing conditions to “women [who] are not responding as readily as they should.”²¹ With many of the male health officials in Europe, women’s services were heavily relied upon. Dr. Ferguson also called on the public for help, “Miss Bowman the school and community nurse is without transportation. She is in need of a vehicle to allow her to quickly get to the ill. As of now she is walking from visit to visit.”²² While there may have been a shortage of nurses nationwide due to the need in Europe, it is no wonder the ill went untreated for long amounts of time given the poor transportation provided for the volunteer nurses. It was these private sector doctors who contributed greatly to take the responsibility of the epidemic from an individual to a public or communal level.

During the following week the newspapers reported more stringent controls to be placed throughout the county. The State Department of Public Health issued an emergency order relevant to funerals stating that, “only immediate relatives and close friends of the deceased can attend the funeral.”²³ Due to the public’s failure to adhere to this rule, the police were instructed to keep watch and maintain that only immediate family and invited friends attend the funerals.²⁴ The City Council also issued regulations, proposing a street cleaning order which instructed the fire department to wash the paved streets around the public square of Charleston biweekly.²⁵ Each organization of the community contributed its part in prevention with the lack of a public health infrastructure to fund and direct the activities.

The county board’s funding for October also reflected the threat posed by the influenza epidemic. The board allotted \$211.75 to fund health measures throughout the city of Mattoon alone. Fumigators from Central City Chem Company required \$84.00 to disinfect the city. The Board also granted \$45.00 to be paid to a part-time nurse for the schools when they were reopened. The October allowance also included salary for a quarantine officer and supplies again requested by Dr. Bell.²⁶ In addition, the December meeting minutes revealed tactics used by the county to prevent the further spread of influenza. For the month of November, the printing

²⁰ *Charleston Courier*, 15 October 1918, p. 1.

²¹ *Charleston Courier*, 16 October 1918, p. 8.

²² *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 16 October 1918.

²³ *Charleston Courier*, 17 October 1918, p. 1.

²⁴ *Charleston Courier*, 19 October 1918, p. 1.

²⁵ Coles County Board Minutes, 15 October 1918.

²⁶ Coles County Board Minutes, 15 October 1918.

fund required \$27.04 for pamphlets and proclamations. The county dispersed publications titled “Volunteer Women for Nurses” and “Proclamation of Mayor Swan on Influenza” were dispersed throughout the community.²⁷ By the end of October the threat of this lethal disease could not have been overlooked. The authorities increased the budget to afford preventative measures and treatment for the community, the responsibility had left the private realm and entered the public arena.

The school board, though not as active as the county officials, did produce some changes during the threatening times. During the January 1919 meeting, members motioned and seconded that, “a vote of thanks be given to Mrs. Gerrule for helping out in the emergency.” Mrs. Gerrule assisted the teachers during the closings in attending to the children and assuring they were practicing preventative measures. At this same meeting, another motion was granted to “instruct Mr. Elwood to hire a new teacher on account of congestion at Lincoln School.”²⁸ Though the school board seemed inactive during the height of the damage, it was well aware of the actions that should be made after the destruction to help prevent a reoccurrence of the epidemic.

With national and local authorities implementing changes, by the end of October the devastation seemed to be waning. On Monday October 28, 1918, local authorities lifted the influenza ban from Charleston, ten days later Mattoon also lifted its ban.²⁹ Life in small Coles County, Illinois appeared to be on the upward track to normality and the residents forgot about the influenza’s destruction. Dr. Ferguson writing to the Mattoon newspaper on Monday November 4th said, “There was no epidemic in Mattoon, but there might have been one if the restrictions had not been imposed. The people of Mattoon co-operated in this instance better than at any time since I have been a resident of Mattoon.”³⁰ A comment like this is surprising considering just a month prior the authorities compared the spread of the influenza to that of the plague.³¹ So how can the very doctors fighting and advocating for its prevention dismiss such a devastating pandemic, once being compared to the plague? A look into the actual statistics of the death toll in Mattoon will be helpful for answering this question.

During the height of the second wave, the month of October, the number of influenza deaths almost equaled those from other causes. Doctors determining the causes of death had to be well aware of the devastation being wreaked by this deadly disease. Dr. Ferguson’s comment that “there was no epidemic in Mattoon,” is far from true. The influenza did not in fact spare Mattoon. For the months of October through

²⁷ Coles County Board Minutes, 3 December 1918.

²⁸ Coles County School Board Minutes, 2 January 1919.

²⁹ *Charleston Courier*, 28 October 1918 and *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 4 November 1918.

³⁰ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 4 November 1918.

³¹ *Charleston Courier*, 7 October 1918, p. 4.

December, the deaths reflected the ‘W’ so often seen in national figures. The young and middle-age residents fell victim the “enza” at much higher rates than the very young or the old, which confirms that what struck Mattoon was the same mysterious disease attacking the rest of the nation. Mattoon’s figures mirrored those of the nation in terms of age and number of deaths, but the national figures do not provide information on males and females in the population. An interesting side note, females contributed alarmingly high numbers to the total number of deaths attributed to influenza in Mattoon. The many calls made to women for volunteer civilian nurses might have contributed to their increased exposure and subsequently high numbers of deaths. However, Dr. Ferguson placed the blame for the spread of influenza on women’s failure to respond to the call which might negate this theory. This posits an interesting topic for further research.

After the raising of the ban for Coles County, completed by November 7th, many of the articles and advertisements that the newspapers printed the previous months began to disappear. The next day “With the Sick” vanished from the *Mattoon Journal Gazette* and “Hospital Notes,” replaced them, which was dedicated to all the sick, not just those affected by influenza.³² Advertisements continued to sprinkle the local news with preventative options. However, the majority came from national companies and even those were rare. No longer did the locals attempt to take advantage of the influenza epidemic. Thus, the second wave of the influenza epidemic subsided in Coles County; it would be mid December, before talks reemerged about the enduring influenza.

The Third Wave

What is it like, this Spanish Flu?

Ask me brother, for I’ve been through.

It is by Misery out of Despair;

It pulls your teeth and curls your hair;

It thins your blood and brays your bones,

And fills your craw with moans and groans,

And sometimes, maybe, you get well,

Some call it Flu-I call it hell!³³

By December of 1919, the worst of the “Spanish Influenza” epidemic had finished administering its devastating blows to the United States. However, for some parts of the country a subsequent third wave would have its shot at havoc. Beginning in the early part of 1919, reports of unusually high death numbers attributed to influenza reappeared. Unfortunately, because health officials praised the preventative effects of

³² *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 8 November 1918.

³³ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 28 October 1918.

the masks, vaccines, and regulations they had imposed during the second wave, the destruction that remained unhindered by these measures left many people thinking, “what’s the use?”³⁴ Coles County remained concerned with the influenza problem and when the “flu” announced its presence in December, discussions reemerged.

In the local news section, influenza again reappeared. Dr. Ferguson, on December 14th, announced that, “there are approximately twenty cases reported a day in Mattoon.”³⁵ Ferguson also stated that, “there will probably be successive waves.”³⁶ Dr. Ferguson had reason for alarm during the month of December. The number of influenza-related deaths did outnumber the “other” causes of death; fortunately however, his prediction of subsequent waves proved wrong. Coles County would not be exposed to mass devastation at these levels again. With the holiday season quickly approaching, stores also did their part to help prevent a reoccurrence of the mandatory closings instated in October. To avoid the influenza, “stores will stay open later to avoid congestion on Christmas Eve for shoppers.”³⁷ Everyone seemed to be giving more credit to the incapacitating power of the influenza they had witnessed during October, and with that an increasing community effort aimed at prevention was visible.

Activity and preventative measures also occupied the school board and county boards once again. At the April meeting, members confirmed the building of an open playground to prevent the contagion among children during recess hours. Members also confirmed the retention of the part-time nurse, Miss Bates, “for another month and if necessary for the balance of the season.”³⁸ The school board’s preparations verified their fear of a subsequent outbreak. The textbook committee showed its interest in the matter with a proposal to add two new textbooks for the 1919-1920 academic years, *Community Hygiene* and *A Handbook of Health*.³⁹ The school board planned to make additions to the faculty with Nurse Bowman, the faculty by adding an outdoor playground, and the curriculum which would hopefully better prepare the children to avoid a repeat performance of the influenza epidemic. County board members also increased budget expenditures for the health fund and requested the presence of a local area doctor at the future meetings.⁴⁰ Residents of Coles County prepared for the worst and hoped for the best. Luckily the unexplained epidemic left just as quickly as it came and the deadly “enza” spared Coles County of any further damage.

³⁴ Alfred Crosby, *America’s Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 109.

³⁵ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 14 December 1918.

³⁶ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 14 December 1918.

³⁷ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, 18 December 1918.

³⁸ Coles County School Board Minutes, 3 April 1919.

³⁹ Coles County School Board Minutes, 5 June 1919.

⁴⁰ Coles County Board Minutes, 10 April 1919.

This socially blind disease ripped through the nation taking the healthy, young, rich, and poor alike. The newspapers, death records, and public activities of Coles County demonstrate the level of awareness, preemptive measures, and involvement of local residents and their leaders. The school board formed a relationship with the Ladies of the Red Cross, increased the nursing staff, and updated the curriculum to include courses on hygiene. The county board's health fund increased dramatically to accommodate the many expenditures requested by local doctors for supplies and distribution materials. Local medical authorities placed immediate attention on the matter calling for volunteer nurses, distributing pamphlets, as well as inventing their own medicinal concoctions. The newspapers, working with leading authorities, generated new articles dedicated to influenza and kept the public up-to-date with the mysterious illness. Like the rest of the nation, Coles County experienced the devastation of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic, but as a small community, lacking a developed public health infrastructure, was forced to rely on the resources and institutions at hand. The area authorities employed those organizations and resources available and made the permanent transition from private to public responsibility in regards to the social welfare of the community.