

Montevallo

Historical Society

Opening the Portals of Our Heritage

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540 Shelby Street
Montevallo, AL 35115



DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN

“Cover up each cough and sneeze, if you don’t you’ll spread disease.” *Centreville Press*, October 17, 1918

Submitted by Marty Everse

An October 1918 ad in the *Montevallo Advertiser* read, “HEAD OFF SPANISH INFLUENZA or get well quickly by increasing your resistance, SULFIRON is the best remedy.” The ad was timely even though the tonic was useless. The plague had reached Montevallo. The public school was closed as were churches. The Alabama Girls’ Technical Institute shut down the beginning of the month and would not reopen until November. R. W. Hall, the editor of the *Advertiser*, seemed to downplay the seriousness of epidemic when he wrote, “All the cases we have heard of in this community have been light, and not many of them.” Two weeks later, he was ill and unable to publish the paper. The coal mine at Aldrich was particularly hard hit. A local druggist, H. E. Latham, noted there were 290 convicts at the mine and 290 cases of influenza there. All through the fall and winter, the neighborhood paper was filled with news of the flu’s handiwork. Wilton had 60 cases including Sam Vest’s entire family and 13 members of the Baker clan. In Montevallo, the Meroneys, Lymans, Browns, and Mulkeys, to name a few, all suffered. Fortunately, there were few fatalities. The first local death mentioned was Alice Eddings, the cook for Henry and Pauline McDill, followed by the young daughter of Sam Vest, Lucile, the end of October. Elisha Daniel Carpenter, Sr., Montevallo’s shoe maker, spent the Civil War dodging Yankee bullets under Stonewall Jackson but succumbed to the disease just before Christmas 1918.

Much like the recently promoted panaceas of hydroxychloroquine, ultraviolet light, and bleach, people were bombarded with therapeutics and preventatives. George’s Sea Food, a Birmingham restaurant, declared the best way to avoid the Spanish Influenza was to eat fresh oysters and fish. S. W. Pearson of Bessemer advocated what he felt was “a dead shot to the germ,” raw onions. Patent medicine companies touted their miracle cures. Grove’s Tasteless Chill Tonic, containing properties of quinine and iron, fortified the system against colds, grip, and influenza by purifying and enriching the blood. Inhal-Odor, fully charged with the odors of the eucalyptus, pine and camphor trees, peppermint plant and vanilla bean, when inhaled brought these healing and influenza preventing smells into direct contact with every inside part of the nose, head, throat and lungs.

The U. S. Public Health Service chimed in and responded the “so-called safe, sure and harmless remedies advertised by patent medicine manufactures” were dangerous and advised the wearing of a simple fold of gauze or mask to guard against breathing in dangerous germs as well as avoiding crowds. The crowd recommendation was a problem for men in the military preparing for service in World War I. More soldiers from the Montevallo area died from the flu than were killed in combat. Two of the first to be sent home in boxes were Lacy Latham, a sailor stationed at Newport, Rhode Island, followed shortly by James Wiley Fancher, a soldier at Camp Gordon, Georgia. Both are buried in the Montevallo cemetery.

By the fall 1919, any allusion to Spanish Influenza, flu, or grip in the *Montevallo Advertiser* ceased. Apparently, the disease would just burn itself out by 1920 but not before killing at least 50 million worldwide and 675,000 souls in the United States. In Alabama, nearly 12,000 people died of the flu in 1918 alone. The total toll will never be known.

Spanish Influenza can
be prevented easier than
it can be cured.

At the first sign of a
shiver or sneeze, take



Not only did Hill’s claim to prevent Spanish Influenza, it relieved nasal stuffiness, any ache or pain and constipation as well.