

Friday, September 25, 7:00 pm **ON ZOOM**, David Turner – Forgotten Hamlets of Dutchess County,

A pictorial tour with vintage postcards of Dutchess County's forgotten hamlets. Learn about the hamlets of Chelsea on Hudson and Dutchess Junction, whose tide changed with the rise and fall of industry on the river. Or the railroad hamlets of Dover Furnace, Billings, and Mount Ross that disappeared along with the rail traffic. Hear about the fascinating history of Amenia Union that lies on both sides of the New York/Connecticut border and was once part of a land swap between the two states. Included in the talk will be dozens of turn-of-the-century images of little known hamlets that are no more than cross roads today, such as Brinkerhoff, Barrytown, Smithfield, Schultzville, Clinton Hollow, Clove, Glenham, Akert Hook, Bulls Head, Frost Mills and many more.

President's Message

It has been a very difficult 3 months for all of us. As of now New York seems to have control of the virus but it is not clear when the Starr Library will be open for business as usual. And, I do not think that any of us will feel comfortable attending a lecture sitting with 50 people in the Local History Room until there is a cure for the virus.

So we have decided to use technology to have virtual lectures. Initially I thought that we could simply film the programs and put them up on our website. But, we wanted to simulate having a program at Starr with all of you watching live and have a chance for a discussion and Q&A at the end.

So, in July we had a live program at our regular 7pm start time about the History of the Dutchess County Fair. I lectured for half an hour showing 60 old pictures of the fair and then we had a half hour discussion at the end. It worked out very well with 20 people watching live including a member from California. And, as of now nearly 200 people have watched the video of the program on our website.

So, for the programs for the rest of 2020, we will be sending out a program reminder to all members a week before each program asking you to "register" for the program. You will then be sent an "invite" with a 6 digit password. The password prevents outsiders from watching the program because there have been problems with outsiders disturbing programs on Zoom. You then click on the link a few minutes before 7pm and we will let you in to watch. You can watch on a computer with a camera and a mic or on a smartphone. I look forward to seeing you at our next program.

David Miller, President

The 1918 Flu and its Impact on Rhinebeck

by Michael Frazier

The current corona virus epidemic is affecting the lives of all of us. As David Miller points out in his President's Message, we have had to make changes in how we do business, and it doesn't require anything more than a brief walk through the Village of Rhinebeck to see the local impact. Businesses are struggling, some have closed, a few perhaps permanently. Most of us know someone who has tested positive, and a few of us knew someone who has appeared in the obituaries as a result of the virus. We're told there will be a second wave, perhaps even a third. We all hope for the best.

Was it like this in 1918? In 1918 the world population was only 1.8 billion, a quarter of what it is today. Yet the 1918 influenza virus killed somewhere between 50 million and 100 million people. Taking the more conservative estimate, that is still 1 out of 36 of the world's population. John M. Barry, author of *The Great Influenza* (Penguin Books, 2005), points out that it killed more people in 24 weeks than AIDS killed in 24 years, more in a year than the Black Death killed in a century.

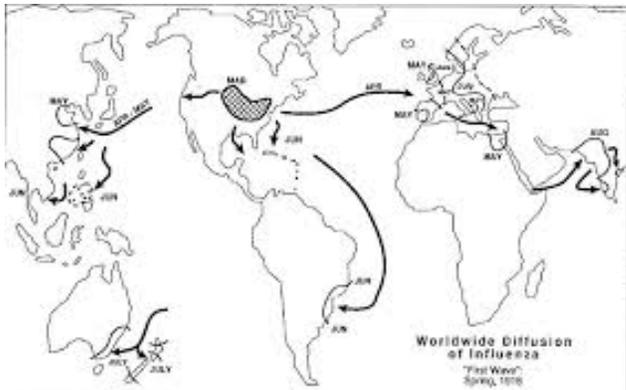
The first cases of the outbreak were recorded in **Haskell County, Kansas**, and Fort Riley, Kansas, where young men were being hospitalized for severe flu-like symptoms. A local doctor sent a report to the Public Health Service, but no one was sent to investigate. On March 4, 1918, an outbreak appeared at

Fort Riley. 500 soldiers were hospitalized within a



From the Kansas Historical Society, a view of the military camp that we would later realize was the source of what the world would call the Spanish flu.

week. Within a month, however, the number of patients dwindled. It seemed the flu had run its course. Many of these soldiers were sent to Europe to help fight in World War I. While in Europe the disease mutated and became deadly. By May many reports of soldiers falling ill were reaching the U.S. It did not take long



The flu originated in Kansas, then spread to the world.

for the disease to spread from the soldiers to the civilian population of Europe, and then around the world. Few areas remained unaffected, and there were recorded outbreaks in Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America, as well as the Arctic and remote Pacific Islands.

What was its impact on Rhinebeck? We were far from

any army or navy bases, which had served as the incubators of the disease, and from which the flu leaked into the civilian population—from Camp Devens in Massachusetts to the urban areas of that state, from the Great Lakes Naval Training Station into Chicago, from Camp Lee and Camp Humphreys to Washington, DC, from Camp Dix to New York City.

For Rhinebeck, because we were still largely a farming community, with families living far apart from each other and rarely travelling to NYC, the disease found little opportunity to spread rapidly from one person to another.

One of the impacts it did have shows up in the advertising pages of *The Rhinebeck Gazette* on October 19, 1918: “When danger of Influenza or LaGrippe is past, you will look for some form of recreation which will rest your mind and help you to forget for a little while these trying times. The Starr Institute Moving Pictures will be just what you will want. The pictures will be the best that can be secured and you should plan to see them every week.” Poughkeepsie’s Stratford Theatre, another advertiser with many Rhinebeck patrons, tells us more succinctly that “we will be closed until the danger of contagion is passed.” After months of silence from the US government, Surgeon General finally warned the nation in late September to “avoid needless overcrowding” as one of the ways to fight the spread of the disease, and by mid-October, after an order by the NYS Health Dept, all theaters had closed.

The flu was a serious blow to anyone who ran a theater, and to the public who had been coming in increasing numbers to the moving pictures, and now had to seek alternate forms of recreation. And while the Starr and the Stratford continued to advertise, despite being closed, the *Gazette* faced a loss of advertising revenue since the Opera House, the Liberty Theatre, the Rhinebeck Aerodome, and the Lyceum in Red Hook all just stopped advertising.

Another impact was the demand for nurses. The June 18, 1918 *Gazette* reports that “the Dutchess County Chapter of the American Red Cross has been officially

notified that it is expected to provide 14 Red Cross nurses and that they must be produced immediately.” The Red Cross served as the principal recruiter for the Army and Navy Nurse Corps. One of their goals was “to conserve nurses by discouraging unnecessary private use of those who remain.” The newspaper goes on to inform us that “The general public will be asked to help conserve nursing skill by not employing individual nurses unnecessarily and by utilizing hospitals and visiting nurses wherever possible.” Women from Rhinebeck were among those who volunteered, and later in the war, the *Gazette* does share letters from a Ms. Baker from Rhinebeck serving as a nurse in an Army field hospital in France, and from Ethel Douglas Merritt of Rhinebeck, who had served in a French army hospital even before the US entered the war. It’s unlikely the voluntary curtailing of the private use of nurses had any noticeable impact on anyone in Rhinebeck, but from their description in letters home about the volume of work they were doing to care for soldiers in France, it’s clear these nurses had quite an impact there.

The Rhinebeck Branch of the Red Cross also put out an urgent appeal on October 5, 1918, for contagious ward masks “to stop the spread of Spanish influenza” in the military camps. The Red Cross headquarters at the Starr Institute announced that they would be open every afternoon and evening except Saturday until the county goal of 10,000 masks was reached.

The greatest impact of the flu was on the men of Rhinebeck who had gone off to fight the war. Little had been communicated to the public about the presence of the disease in the military bases or the fact that the troops were carrying it with them overseas. In fact, it wasn’t until years after the war ended that the public learned to what great lengths the military went to minimize the impact the disease was having on their ability to wage war. This was true not only of our own military, but of the French, British, and German military. Each believed that theirs was the only military suffering such overwhelming devastation from disease and feared the possibility the enemy would capitalize on such knowledge.

The families of the soldiers, meanwhile, believed that what they most needed to worry about was the possible impact of a bullet or artillery shell, when in fact there was an increasingly larger chance they would lose someone to disease. Here at home, of course, there was concern about the spread of the flu. People did wear masks, and although I’ve been unable to find images in *The Rhinebeck Gazette* of any of our local citizens wearing masks, there are ample—even amusing—examples from elsewhere. This couple, below, understood the importance of being fashionable, and while one has to admire the rest of their costumes, those nose guards are not going to do much to protect anyone they come into contact with.



On the other hand, this next image of two ladies walking down a city street demonstrates that it was indeed possible to be just as fashionable as the couple above and to be safe at the same time. If you went out in public in 1918, you were of course expected to be wearing a hat, but especially for the lady on the right, it had to be a bit of a challenge to get that mask just right, and one had to hope it wouldn’t become a windy day.



And not only were children expected to follow their parents' lead, but in the family seen below, the cat (in Dad's right hand) was also expected to wear a mask.



These are amusing images, but wearing masks became deadly serious business in 1918, especially as we became more aware of how the flu spread and how it could kill.

One of the earliest Rhinebeck volunteers to be affected was Marine Private Alfred W. Lane. In a letter from St. Sulpice, France, to the deceased soldier's father, the military chaplain explains that "he was sick only a few days. He was attended here in the Camp hospital and had good attention, the hospital having a good corps of doctors and nurses, but pneumonia was fatal and he died on March 5 [1918] at 7 A.M." (Influenza is a viral disease. It kills either quickly and directly with a violent viral pneumonia so damaging that it has been compared to burning the lungs; or more slowly and indirectly by stripping the body of defenses, allowing

bacteria to invade the lungs and cause a more common and slower-killing bacterial pneumonia.) In another letter to the family, acknowledging Lane's service, an officer writes that Lane had arrived in France "at the beginning of the influenza and pneumonia epidemic, which was brought by the troops from the US."

Harry R Asher of Rhinebeck had served in the 306th Field Artillery of the 86th Division in the Meuse-Argonne Forest. "In April 1918, I had the flu," he wrote in a letter home. "I came through it all right, but over half my battery had it."

The June 15, 1918 *Gazette* headlined "Roy Crucius First Local Soldier Death." The newspaper reported "his death occurred from measles, which he first contracted in camp and which later developed into pleura-pneumonia." Roy had been the valedictorian of the graduating class of the Rhinebeck High school in 1916 and at the graduation exercises, he was awarded a first prize of five dollars in gold for the best delivery of essays.

There were soldiers, among them Edward Fitzpatrick of Rhinebeck, killed on his 29th birthday, Sept 10, 1918, who died from hostile action and not from the flu. The front page of the Oct 12, 1918, *Gazette* features a picture of Edward in dress uniform and reprints his two most recent letters to his mother (the newspaper would continue to do this through the end of the war—most of the soldiers were frequent correspondents, and their families, when approached by the press, were often willing to share these letters, many of them full of very personal details; they add a quality to the individual's death that would never be found in an obituary). Lower on the same page, we read about the first Red Hook soldier to lose his life in the conflict, Charles Brizzie—"he died September 26th of pneumonia, according to a telegram which his parents received this Friday morning from the War Department in Washington."

On September 19, 1918, the acting US Surgeon General, Charles Richard, had written to General Peyton March, the commander of the army, urging him

that “organizations known to be infected, or exposed to the disease, be not permitted to embark for overseas service until the disease has run its course within the organization.” Because President Wilson was pressing for total victory in the war, there was to be no delay. Troop ships continued to embark, despite the likelihood that the virus would quickly surface among the apparently healthy young men.

In the last half of October 1918, during the Meuse-Argonne offensive, America’s largest of the war, and an offensive in which several soldiers from Rhinebeck served, more Third Division troops were evacuated from the front with influenza than with wounds.

One wonders whether the report, appearing on the front page of the August 10, 1918 *Gazette*, “Rhinebeck Soldier Died in France...Pneumonia caused death,” about the loss of Rhinebeck’s Corporal Edward J Bell, was in fact accurately reported—that earlier newspaper account does note that “He was taken ill while in the trenches and died soon after being removed to a hospital.” Five weeks later, in their September 21, 1918 edition, the *Gazette* prints his last letter, “written three days before receiving wounds from which he died. He was first reported to have died of pneumonia.” Why the newspaper made such a mistake in the first place is not explained, nor why it took so long to correct. It was very likely just a very embarrassing error, even though the editor, Jacob Strong, was known to be exceptionally careful about his facts. But it’s also the case that there was increasing pressure on the military and the press to put the best face forward to the American public and to the families of the soldiers about how well the troops were taken care of and how the American people were doing all they could to support the soldiers.

Corporal Arthur Cozine wrote numerous letters directly to the *Gazette*, most of them trying quite hard to be upbeat about circumstances that must have been quite grim. In a letter from France dated July 15, 1918, he doesn’t refer to influenza by name, but that seems to be what he’s talking about: “There has been a great deal of talk about the American Army being ravished by

disease and dissipation. I wish to brand as false all such stories. The U. S. Government sees to all that before our troops are landed. Our clothing and sanitation and food facilities are the best that can be obtained. The boys are appreciative of what you are doing for them at home.”

In their issue of December 7, 1918, the *Gazette* reported the death of Rhinecliff native Guy Pindar. Struck by influenza, he had died in France on October 24, 1918. On March 20, 1920, the hamlet of Rhinecliff held a memorial service in his memory at the Riverside Methodist Church, (today a private home), where a stained glass window was unveiled in his memory.

The 1918 flu epidemic had a very significant impact on Rhinebeck. The Starr Institute survived its temporary closing, the *Gazette* survived the loss of advertising revenue, and the town and village managed to escape without any epidemic reaching the local citizenry by the time the virus fizzled in 1920. The real impact was on Alfred W. Lane, Roy Crucius, Ed Bell, and Guy Pindar—they were among Rhinebeck’s most promising and energetic citizens, willing to defend their country from an overseas enemy, only to be cut down by a virus that came from our own military training camps.

I need to note that a more abbreviated version of this article appeared in one of our Rhinebeck Historical Society newsletters ten years ago. At that time, my research was helped enormously by Alan Coon, veteran and historian for American Legion Post 429. Like many of the WWI vets whose stories he knew so well, Alan’s passing was a great loss to Rhinebeck.



A final bit of humor: the welcoming crew at a local railroad station. (Dare we try this in Rhinecliff?)

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The RHS is looking for volunteers to help in the local history room at the

Starr Library. The room is open to the public on Thursdays from 10 am to 4 pm. Scholars and researchers come in looking for help with their work, and others send in research requests via email. Volunteers could either assist them directly or do so indirectly by working with the collections in our archives. No prior research skills are necessary. However, attention to detail, interest in history, delight in working with other people, and joy at solving puzzles are all most desirable. It is a great opportunity to learn about our town while helping others. For information call Mike Frazier at 845.876.7462 or e-mail michaelfrazier@earthlink.net.

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Doing Local History Research? We regret the local history room remains closed to the public as we go to press. We hope to reopen before too long. If you need assistance on a topic related to local history or if you need access to material in our collection, it's quite possible it has been scanned and we may be able to share it with you despite the pandemic.

Email michaelfrazier@earthlink.net with your query.

[Check out our website:](http://www.rhinebeckhistoricalsociety.org)

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THE RHINEBECK HISTORICAL SOCIETY - UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Friday, September 25, 7:00 pm on ZOOM, at the Starr Library, David Turner – Forgotten Hamlets of Dutchess County,

A pictorial tour with vintage postcards of Dutchess County's forgotten hamlets. Learn about the hamlets of Chelsea on Hudson and Dutchess Junction, whose tide changed with the rise and fall of industry on the river. Or the railroad hamlets of Dover Furnace, Billings, and Mount Ross that disappeared along with the rail traffic. Hear about the fascinating history of Amenia Union that lies on both sides of the New York/Connecticut border and was once part of a land swap between the two states. Included in the talk will be dozens of turn-of-the-century images of little known hamlets that are no more than cross roads today, such as Brinkerhoff, Barrytown, Smithfield, Schultzville, Clinton Hollow, Clove, Glenham, Akert Hook, Bulls Head, Frost Mills and many more.

Friday, October 30, 7:00 pm on ZOOM, at the Starr Library, Connie Lown - Gravestone Cleaning in Rhinebeck Cemetery

Hear about some of the oldest gravestones in Rhinebeck Cemetery that have recently been cleaned and repaired. Learn about the proper methods of gravestone cleaning without damaging the stone and how to reset small stones. Through the Friends of Rhinebeck Cemetery, Connie attended an Association for Gravestone Studies conservation workshop at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn and their annual conference in Danbury, CT to learn about the safe cleaning of historic and fragile gravestones before assisting with a Gravestone Restoration & Preservation Workshop and later Gravestone Cleaning Day at Rhinebeck Cemetery last year.

Friday, November 20, 7:00 pm on ZOOM David Miller – The History of Boarding Houses in Rhinebeck

Friends are always complaining to me about the "City" folk who are coming to Rhinebeck in droves during the summer, making the Village especially very crowded. What my friends do not realize is that Rhinebeck has been a favorite spot for city dwellers to visit for over a century. In fact, 100 years ago Rhinebeck had a great many boarding houses that catered to city folk who came to visit for the weekend, by the week, or even staying for the entire summer. Last year, I scanned a 1927 brochure, prepared by the Rhinebeck Businessmen's Association, describing several dozen boarding houses. Intrigued by this aspect of Rhinebeck's history with city dwellers, I decided to research the history of these boarding houses and uncovered many pictures and stories to share about city folks summering in Rhinebeck a hundred years ago.

SAVE THESE DATES