

RHS: Spring 2011

SAVE THESE DATES

Friday night, February 25th, 7:30 pm at *Rhinebeck Reformed Church*****

(Use South St. Sanctuary Entrance - Moved from Rhinebeck Town Hall)

Bud Rogers will lecture on the history of the Rhinebeck Reformed Church.

As Sexton of the church he has been involved in preserving its history for many years.

Sunday Afternoon, April 3 2:00 pm at the Beekman Arms

The Chancellor Livingston Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution, Museum of Rhinebeck History and Rhinebeck Historical Society proudly present:

Rendezvous with Treason - The Andre/Arnold Conspiracy

(See flyer inside of this newsletter)

President's Message Spring 2011

I want to wish all of our members a Happy New Year. I hope that it will be a great year for all of you once this never ending snow comes to an end. I long to see the bright yellow heads of my daffodils poking up through the snow signaling that Old Man Winter is finished with us.

The holiday season began with the RHS annual Holiday party at the Rhinecliff. Patrick Madden, local artist and author of a new book, 'Hudson River Lighthouses' lectured on the history of our local lighthouses. James Chapman provided us with tasty holiday treats. A great way to kick off the holiday season!

On Friday night, January 28th, Winthrop Aldrich, former NYS Deputy Commissioner of Historic Preservation, spoke on the history of the Astor's. Wint, as usual, entertained us with both the history of his family and many humorous personal stories. We filled Rhinebeck Town Hall with 60 members and friends.

Many other events are planned for this spring. Check them out on the back of the newsletter.

The last program planned for next spring will be our annual picnic on June 18th. It will be at The Locusts in Staatsburgh. We will have a picnic lunch on the grounds with a tour of the historic barns, a presentation of the history of the Locusts, and a tour inside of the mansion. Please save the date and stay tuned for more info.

David Miller, President



The Locusts

*****Please note that Friday's event has been moved from Town Hall to the Reformed Church. We feel that it will be more interesting for Bud Rogers to tell us about the history of the church from the actual sanctuary. I want to thank Pastor Luis Perez for graciously allowing us to have our event at the church.**

The 1918 Flu and its Impact on Rhinebeck

by Michael Frazier

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. It was a devastating disease.

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 Aerodrome, 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 Rhinebeck Gazette
PUBLISHED EVERY SATURDAY
RHINEBECK N. Y., OCTOBER 5, 1918
\$2.00 A YEAR IN ADVANCE

LIBERTY CELEBRATION NEXT FRIDAY
Pupils of Local School to Present Patriotic at Town Hall in Co-operation With Liberty Loan Committee
In celebration of Columbus Day the pupils of the school will present a pantomime at the Town Hall Friday evening, October 11, in co-operation with the Liberty Loan Committee. Speakers for the Fourth Liberty Loan will give addresses also. Arrangements are now being made with Chairman Shear of the Four Minute Men to secure an able speaker from Poughkeepsie.
Every true American is interested at this time in carrying the Fourth Liberty Loan away over the top. In this effort the school children are an

URGENT CALL FOR MASKS TO STOP SPREAD OF SPANISH INFLUENZA
An emergency call has come to Dutchess County Chapter of the American Red Cross for ten thousand contagious ward masks to be completed immediately. These masks are used to prevent the spread of Spanish influenza in the camps. They are simple to make and each day large numbers must be shipped until the total is reached.
An urgent appeal is made to every working member of the Rhinebeck Branch of the Red Cross to come to headquarters, the Starr Institute, and do their share of this very important work. The Red Cross rooms are open every afternoon and evening except Saturday evening until this work is finished.

RHINEBECK BEING FOR FOURTH I
Campaign To Reach Quota of \$196,800 Headquarters in Town Hall A B Canvassers Wou
SAVINGS BANK FIRST TO HAVE BONDS
Rhinebeck's Savings Bank Had Liberty Bonds Ahead of Other County Banks
The Rhinebeck Savings Bank was the first bank in Dutchess county to have bonds of the Fourth Liberty

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.

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 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 as a result of hostile action and not from the flu. The front page of the Oct 12 *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. 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 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, 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.

(My thanks to Alan Coon, veteran, and historian for American Legion Post 429, for the assistance he provided me in researching this material.)

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.

All members are encouraged to submit articles for publication in our newsletter. If you have done some research on a historical subject, visited a historic site or simply have some history about our town that you would like to share, please contact us for information about how to submit an article for inclusion in the newsletter.
