

# Lesser-known epidemic

■ In 1919, flu killed  
4,000 S. Carolinians.

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The influenza epidemic of 1918, the most deadly epidemic of modern times, killed 10 million people worldwide.

Two hundred thousand South Carolinians came down with the flu, with 2,625 dying from the flu and 11,625 dying from pneumonia, a complication of the flu. In three months' time, South Carolina lost three times the number of citizens it lost due to military action in World War I, which was going on at the same time.



## Nearby history

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Less well remembered is the second influenza epidemic which struck during unusually cold weather in January of 1919.

The State Board of Health repeated its recommendations that towns "first close the theaters and moving picture shows, next the prevention of overcrowding in the stores, next the closing of churches, and finally the closing of schools. . . ."

Reactions of the towns varied. Most quarantined homes with active flu cases. Fort Mill had a bad situation, but did nothing. Rock Hill closed the movie houses, restricted the churches to one service while keeping the church well-ventilated, and allowed the children to attend school, but ordered that their temperatures be taken twice daily.

Rock Hill's Board of Health ordered the restaurants and soda fountains to use paper cups and paper napkins "or fresh laundered napkins." (Were there restaurants whose patrons customarily shared napkins?) All dishes and silverware were to be sterilized. Special police officers were deputized to patrol the downtown area on Saturdays to see that no crowds congregated.

By mid-January there were 150,000 flu cases in the state and over 4,000 deaths. The disease took an odd course. The hardest hit were generally those between the ages of 15 and 40; rarely were the elderly struck. Often the victims were the strongest and healthiest. One minute they were normal and the next day they were drenched with sweat. Often they could not talk. Many turned blue and spat blood.

One out of three victims were permanently damaged with deafness, emphysema or cardiac disorders. Baldness was a temporary consequence.

Doctors were helpless. Some of them advised their patients to wrap up in blankets to "sweat it off." Others advised bringing down the body temperature by wrapping in wet sheets. People were probably better off if they ignored the advice.

Will Rodgers, an Indian Land storekeeper, successfully nursed a wife and nine children who were all in bed at the same time by giving them plenty of liquids. As for himself, he escaped the flu entirely.

The situation at the Church Home Orphanage in York was described as "distressing." Of a population of 120, there were 76, including five members of the working staff who had the flu at the same time. A special call went out for financial help.

York County auditor Love came down with the flu and could not canvass the county for tax returns as was normally done in January.

The Rock Hill motion picture operators resented being singled out. They sought an injunction against the Rock Hill Board of Health. The case went to Judge Ernest Moore of Lancaster who promptly granted an order for the board of health to show cause, but in the meantime refused to restrain the board of health.

On Feb. 10, the Rock Hill Board of Health lifted Rock Hill's quarantine completely. The same day Judge Moore ruled that the board of health had the right to regulate any business for the benefit of the health and welfare of the citizenry.

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