



Rensselaer County Tuberculosis Association Poster

During the spread of influenza in 1918–19, public health officials disseminated posters on a large scale, emphasizing the importance of using a mask or handkerchief to reduce the spread of the disease. The public was discouraged from poor hygiene habits associated with the spread, including spitting and coughing, or sneezing without a face covering. Some citizens resisted wearing masks, citing their civil liberties, while health officials attempted to frame proper hygiene as patriotism. Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine.

“The Dread Influenza”: Milford in the Grip of the 1918 Pandemic

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Editor’s Introduction: *During the final year of the “Great War,” a devastating influenza pandemic spread worldwide in 1918–19. The number of deaths is estimated to be at least 50 million (a staggering 3% of the world’s population), with approximately 675,000 deaths in the United States. In a single year, the pandemic claimed more lives than the combined military and civilian death tolls from all four years of World War I. It is estimated that at least one-third of the world’s population became infected (500 million people). Mortality was highest in three distinct age groups: children under five years old; adults aged twenty to forty; and the elderly aged sixty-five years and older. The high mortality rate in healthy people, including those in the twenty to forty age range, was a unique feature of the pandemic. The virus spread easily; rapid and severe lung damage was a key feature of the disease. Victims experienced fluid-filled lungs, as well as severe pneumonia and lung tissue inflammation. It is now known that this lethal strain of influenza was caused by an H1N1 virus.¹*

*“Influenza” is an Italian word for severe seasonal illness; according to one nineteenth-century source, the term went back to 1743, but had not yet caught on in the English-speaking world. The 1918 influenza pandemic changed that. The word itself came from the Medieval Latin word *influentia* (influence) and derived from the fact that epidemics were attributed to the influence of the stars. Its first known use in English comes from a 1743 British magazine: “News from Rome of a contagious Distemper raging there, call’d the Influenza.”²*

By 1918, the terms “grip” or “grippe” were also frequently used as a synonym for influenza. According to etymologists at Merriam-Webster, “grippe” literally means “seizure” in French. The related French verb is *gripper*: “to seize.” The first known use of the word in English comes from a letter written in 1775: “An epidemic cold seems to have spread itself from London to Barcelona. In passing through this kingdom [sc. France], it has obtained the name of ‘grippe’—a term significant enough from the nature of its attack on the throat.”³ The terms “grip” and influenza were used interchangeably in newspaper accounts throughout 1918.

Although there is no consensus regarding from where the virus originated, in the United States it was first identified in military personnel in the spring of 1918. In Massachusetts, 28,870 deaths were attributed to influenza.⁴ Although the virus has recently been synthesized by scientists, the properties that made it so devastating are still not well understood. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that:

With no vaccine to protect against influenza infection and no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections that are frequently associated with influenza infections, control efforts worldwide were limited to non-pharmaceutical interventions such as isolation, quarantine, good personal hygiene, use of disinfectants, and limitations of public gatherings, which were applied unevenly.⁵

However, in Milford, Massachusetts, Catholic Church leaders refused to close their churches in the early weeks.

Intriguingly, the 1918 pandemic, despite its devastating nature, quickly faded from popular memory. No other pandemics have come close to this staggering number of deaths. According to the CDC, since 1918 the world has experienced four global pandemics: in 1957, 1968, 2009, and 2020. The 1957 and the 1968 pandemics each resulted in an estimated one million global deaths; the 2009 H1N1 pandemic resulted in fewer than 0.3 million deaths in its first year. The 2020 pandemic is still raging as this issue of HJM goes to press and its death toll is not yet known.

Although Boston was one of the early epicenters of the 1918 pandemic in the United States, little has been written about the influenza’s deadly impact on other cities and towns. This article focuses on the 1918 pandemic in Milford, Massachusetts. Milford is an industrial town in Worcester County approximately twenty-five miles southeast of the city of Worcester. Incorporated in 1780, Milford was originally a farming community located in the Blackstone River watershed. In fact, the source of the Charles River lies in Milford, which allowed the town

to industrialize relatively early. Various forms of industry, including in shoes and straw, brought immigrants to the town. Italian immigrants had arrived in vast numbers by the time of the influenza epidemic, but the Irish were already living in town before the 1850 census. Milford's pink granite gave the town its wealth and fame and brought even more immigrants to the area, particularly Italian stonecutters.

*In Milford the death rate in 1918 was even higher than the national average (0.8% vs. 0.5%).⁶ Milford's Italian immigrant community suffered disproportionately from the influenza, yet few of their stories are remembered. This article strives to preserve and honor their memories. Author Linda Hixon has combed through newspaper accounts, death certificates, and hospital records to reconstruct a day-by-day description of the unfolding of the pandemic. She provides a detailed and deeply moving account of many deaths. Hixon's family hails from Milford and were Milford residents at the time of the pandemic. Hixon is a Worcester resident and an adjunct professor history at Worcester State University and author of *The Grip: The 1918 Pandemic and a City Under Siege* (2020).*

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On September 19, 1918, tragedy hit Milford, an industrial town in Worcester County near the geographical center of Massachusetts. Two sisters, aged seven months and ten years respectively, died. The local newspaper reported that they "pass[ed] away within 15 minutes of each other" and were buried in a double funeral. Mary and Josephine Mazzone, daughters of Michele (or Michael) and Conchetta Mazzone of 45 Beach Street, brought the total number of victims of the encroaching "grip" epidemic to six.⁷ However, the girls' death certificates list their official causes of death as bronchopneumonia for the infant Maria Louisa and pulmonary tuberculosis for Josephine. According to official records, neither girl died of the influenza pandemic. In fact, the two death certificates are mistakenly dated on two different days: September 18 and September 19.⁸

This problem confronts historians in researching influenza deaths in the fall of 1918. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts did not require towns to report new cases of flu until September 28. Death certificates often didn't reflect (or reveal) that the pneumonia responsible for these deaths often had a precursor: influenza. By the time the town was ordered to report flu deaths a mere eight days later, as many as 600 people were ill and nearly thirty dead.⁹

Milford was a town of just over 14,000, and the epidemic had not yet reached its peak.¹⁰

Authorities at all levels of government knew an influenza outbreak could be on its way. The first story in the local paper, buried inside the September 11, 1918 edition, spoke of influenza then raging in Boston. “A malady—called Spanish influenza by some, old-fashioned grip by others, and there are those who won’t even guess—has Boston in its clutches,” the *Milford Daily News* reported, adding that the Massachusetts Department of Health “believes this outbreak may be most serious.” The illness was not downplayed, but there seemed to have been a degree of victim-blaming for the deaths. The article, likely from a wire service and not written by the paper’s staff, noted that victims would be hit with a “sharp attack” of the disease for about three days, but if they tried to return to normal life too soon they risked death from pneumonia. The other surprise was that state authorities knew that the illness spread easily: “Patients should be kept isolated to protect others. Don’t fail to call in a good doctor. The disease is contagious.”¹¹

Three days later, influenza first hit the front page of the *Milford Daily News*, but again the story was about Boston. Civilians were dying alongside men stationed at the naval yard in the city, and state officials were “somewhat alarmed over the situation” although they felt they had the flu “well in hand.”¹² But by September 16, something was amiss in Milford. The Clafin School, not far from South Main Street, was closed for fumigation after many children became ill. Doctors were calling the malady “Spanish Influenza,” but told the public that the cases were “reported as light,” and that the school’s closing was due to an overabundance of caution.¹³

This was the first sign that something far more insidious was happening in the influenza pandemic, which seemed to be targeting the children of Milford much more so than outbreaks in many other areas. This flu, often mistakenly called the Spanish influenza because a spring bout of the disease was reported in the newspapers of Spain—neutral during World War I and not censoring its media—was killing the children of Milford. Winter cases of influenza usually hit with what medical professionals often refer to as an inverted bell curve, killing mostly children and the elderly and leaving those in the prime-of-life relatively unscathed. But that did not happen in 1918. People in the age range of eighteen to forty-five—those in the prime of their lives—died in the thousands while the elderly and children tended to survive. But not in Milford.

THE PLAINS AND CHILDHOOD DEATHS

These two first childhood deaths set a pattern: the girls lived in the Milford neighborhood known as the Plains. The Plains was a flat area of land near the Charles River, with boundaries loosely defined as “after the railroad tracks on East Main before the Sacred Heart Church and proceeding towards Routes 109 and 16” including the “streets adjacent to East Main.” Traditionally, this was the neighborhood where Italian immigrants settled.¹⁴

Many of Milford’s pediatric flu victims lived in this neighborhood. The Mazzone sisters lived in the heart of the Plains on Beach Street, which intersects Main Street right in front of the Sacred Heart Church. Josephine may have attended the Claffin Street School. Many of the children who died of this flu lived in this neighborhood but, like Maria Louisa, many were under school age.¹⁵ Two other Plains neighborhood children died on the same day as the Mazzone girls: Luigi Iacovelli, age nine; and Antonietta Bibo, age two. Again, the children’s death certificates made no mention of influenza. Luigi of 4 Pond Street was reported to have died of bronchopneumonia, and Antonietta of 103 Depot Street died of dysentery. However, town officials began to take notice. “There are scores of cases of the ailment in town and several of the victims are said to be children younger than school pupils,” the local newspaper reported, adding that schools were to be closed for a week



Sacred Heart Church, 1918

Source: Milford Historical Commission.

and town authorities were threatening to close a favorite hang-out for the young: “moving picture places.”¹⁶

The primarily Italian immigrant Plains neighborhood encircles Sacred Heart Church, one of two Catholic churches in Milford. All four children shared the connection that all of their parents were immigrants from Italy. Milford was a burgeoning center of Italian immigration and is listed in the 1915 state census with the eighth highest Italian immigration rate in the state. Milford was not a city—it still isn't. With a population of 13,684 in 1915, it was thirty-sixth in population in the state.¹⁷

But the town's rate of Italian immigrants that year was 2,188, a number only eclipsed in the state by its major cities—Boston, Lawrence, Springfield, Worcester, Somerville, Cambridge, and Quincy. Milford already had 1,773 Italian immigrants from the 1905 census, so this increase was 23.4% over the decade. Every city listed above Milford in Italian immigration had, in 1905, less Italian immigration than the small town, except for Boston and Lawrence. Although the percentage of Milford's Italian immigration may seem small, the number was in fact relatively high.¹⁸

The Italian population in the Plains neighborhood was literally on the other side of the tracks from the rest of the town and from the Irish population in particular. Milford's other Catholic church, St. Mary's Church on Winter Street, was a half-mile from where the Mazzone girls died but was a world away from these first-generation Americans. In 1918, the chair of the Milford Board of Health, John E. Higgiston, made the Plains the focus of his visits in trying to quell the disease.

On September 23, as the total Milford deaths reached eleven, Higgiston and a nurse, “whom the board was fortunate enough to get, made the rounds of the most seriously afflicted cases yesterday and again this forenoon,” the *Milford Daily News* reported. The rounds centered on the Plains, where Higgiston and the nurse visited the Grillo “tenement” on Depot Street, on the other side of the Charles River but only two-tenths of a mile from the Beach Street home where the Mazzone girls died. Maria Grillo died the day before, and chaos reigned in the building. Five people were ill, “with only an aged and feeble woman as caretaker.”¹⁹

The houses in the area held whole families laid low by the disease. Higgiston visited a home on Central Street where Grazie Ruggiero had miscarried her son and died herself a day later, and found five more ill with flu. He visited Pond, Mt. Pleasant, Hayward, and East Main Streets, and what he saw frightened him: “In one home he found a large gathering of neighbors and many children where a deceased girl lay and others very ill.” He asked the newspaper reporter to “make plain that such gatherings in infected homes

are simply suicide for many little ones.”²⁰ Higgiston also visited Beach Street again, where so many later died, “and found an entire family ill except the father who was trying to care for all.” The Plains residents were overwhelmed; one nurse was not going to be able to handle the situation.²¹

As the pandemic progressed, the *Milford Daily News* looked more closely at conditions in the Plains. A small, front-page story described the scene inside a “Milford Tenement” on October 3. A local undertaker, James B. Edwards, had been called to deal with the body of an infant on Central Street. What he saw chilled him:

When he went there he found such a condition that he was unable to go in at first. He entered a few moments later and found the mother of the newly born child in bed ill with influenza and with her, two other victims. There was no window open and other conditions were extremely unsanitary. In an adjoining room were two others ill. He found the body of the child in a closet in which there was also the food for the family. The mother is now at the emergency hospital.²²

TIMELINE OF A TOWN IN CRISIS

In mid-September, 1918, authorities didn’t yet know that Milford was in crisis, and children became key victims. The first reported influenza death was a man in his prime: Edward F. Fullum, thirty-four and employed by the Draper Corporation in nearby Hopedale. He died the day the Clafin School was closed, September 16: “He was taken to the hospital yesterday morning, and despite the best of care was unable to recover.”²³ However, his death certificate did not indicate influenza. According to Dr. R. Campbell, who signed the certificate, Fullum died of bronchopneumonia with no contributory factors, nor did the doctor indicate that Fullum died in Milford Hospital as the obituary stated. Instead, the certificate states that he died at home at 55 Grove Street. Throughout this epidemic, death certificates and newspaper reports frequently clashed on cause and place of death, leaving the true number of victims and the happenings at Milford Hospital shrouded in mystery.²⁴

Milford’s first local, front-page account of the crisis was about the explosion of influenza. Six people died in three days since Edward Fullum’s death: four Plains children and two adults, both in the prime-of-life age group. Ettore Maietta was a twenty-eight-year-old worker at the Herman Shoe Company, where approximately thirty workers were ill. He lived on

Beach Street, which soon became an epicenter of the disease. The other adult death was the first officially reported victim of “Grippe”: John H. Moore, a clerk who lived on Jefferson Street, about a half-mile from the Beach Street area but on the “other side of the tracks” from the Plains neighborhood.²⁵

By Tuesday, September 23, a mere three days later, the disease was ravaging the town, with five more dead. The *Milford Daily News* report is filled with typographical and factual errors, possibly as staff at the paper became ill and reporters were stretched thin. The paper reported Mrs. Palma Del Castello of Pond Street dead, but the death certificate is for Tomaso Del Castella, thirty-three, who died of “Grippe.” Private Joseph Luchini, twenty-one, a soldier home on furlough from Camp Devens where influenza was raging, also died. His family’s story was reported the week before: six members of the family were ill. Another child—Mary Grillo, age thirteen, of 35 Depot Street, the tenement Board of Health Chair Higgiston had visited—died of the disease on Monday.²⁶

Here a new pattern emerged. Two young women victims are listed in the obituary, but with no mention of their stillborn children. Maria Di Francesca’s daughter was stillborn on September 20, two days before Maria died of influenza. Grace Ruggiero’s son was stillborn on September 21, with his mother dying of “Grippe [in] childbirth” a day later.²⁷ Miscarriage during this pandemic was not uncommon. The symptoms of this flu included the typical ones: the fever, body aches, sore throat, headache, and weakness of a typical bout of influenza. But atypical symptoms were also frequently reported, including spontaneous bleeding in the form of bloody sputum during coughing, and copious nosebleeds. One witness to a naval ship filled with ill soldiers headed to France described floors below deck covered with blood, with no one to clean up the mess. People even bled from their eyes.²⁸

Spontaneous bleeding for pregnant women often meant only one thing—miscarriage. During the worst months of the influenza epidemic, from September to December of 1918, eight babies were stillborn in Milford. Of those, five of their mothers died of influenza, a contributory factor. The *Milford Daily News* did not report that these women had given birth shortly before they died.²⁹

Two more deaths occurred in the prime-of-life age group the next day: Josephine Gheller, twenty-nine, of Hayward Street; and Nichola Iadarola, of Sumner Street, who had a wife and several children.³⁰ On Wednesday, September 25, Massachusetts finally called for statewide action. Governor Samuel W. McCall held telephone calls with the heads of the state and local health boards, the state’s surgeon general, and the Massachusetts Public Safety Committee, and urged the closing of all theaters, schools, churches—any

place "where the public congregate in large numbers, until the abatement of the epidemic." Also noted in the proclamation was that many Massachusetts doctors and nurses were working for the war effort—at camps, training facilities, or overseas—leaving local medical staff stretched to the limit.³¹

More deaths were reported in the *Milford Daily News* that same day: Thomas M. Hynes, a straw worker at the Carroll, Hixon and Jones straw shop; and Josephine Grillo, age six, of East Street. And the Mazzone tragedy of a week earlier was compounded when another daughter died. However, both the newspaper and the death certificate were erroneous. The girl's name was Mary in the newspaper and Maria on the death certificate, which stated lobar pneumonia with no contributing cause for the death. However, in St. Mary's Church burial records, the two-year-old's name was Guiseppina.³² The family likely attended Sacred Heart Church, a small building on the curve where Main Street turns into East Main and abuts Beach Street, and right in the heart of the Plains neighborhood. The church was fairly new, founded in 1905 on land donated by Annie J. Miett, and catered mainly to an immigrant, mostly Italian, congregation.³³ By 1918, the church hadn't acquired the land for a dedicated cemetery. While there was a public cemetery in Milford—Vernon Grove—many influenza victims were immigrants and mostly Catholic, leaving only one other consecrated burial site in town: St. Mary's Cemetery off Cedar Street. These cemetery records show Guiseppina's real name and that she was a victim of pneumonia and possibly the flu.³⁴

As the end of September neared and the dead mounted in Milford, the *Milford Daily News* noted that the death toll had begun to fall at Camp Devens in Ayer, Massachusetts near the New Hampshire border.³⁵ With the exception of Boston, the flu had started earlier at Devens than anywhere in the state. The soldiers stationed there were continually on the move, with many of them coming from Boston where influenza had originated in late August, 1918.

The scene at Camp Devens was desperate. Colonel Victor C. Vaughan, former president of the American Medical Association, noted the influx of young soldiers at the hospital on the grounds: "They are placed on the cots until every bed is full yet others crowd in. Their faces soon wear a bluish cast; a distressing cough brings up the blood stained sputum. In the morning the dead bodies area stacked about the morgue like cord wood."³⁶ The next day, September 27, the *Milford Daily News* reported that three local soldiers were ill at the camp: Celeste Mazzochelli, Jeremiah Lawrence Smith, and Earl F. Kempton: "That their condition is deemed serious is evident from the fact of warning being telegraphed by the camp officials." According to their military records, all three men survived the flu.³⁷



Boston Red Cross Volunteers at Camp Devens

Red Cross volunteers from Boston assembled masks from gauze at Camp Devens, Massachusetts. Source: New England Historical Society.



Camp Devens Influenza Victims, 1918

Source: New England Historical Society.

The fall of the number of illnesses and deaths at Camp Devens seemed to bode well for Milford, now struggling at the height of the disease. The number of deaths per day peaked on September 29 with eleven dying; by this point, the *Milford Daily News* was just trying to keep ahead of the obituaries. On September 26 two more died, and the disease traveled to the other side of town. Thirza Plouff, of 164 West Street, almost two miles due west of the Plains neighborhood near state route 140 and the Hopedale town line, was dead and members of her family critically ill. Thirza did not fit all the typical criteria—she was “about 50,” a little above prime-of-life for the time, and she didn’t live in the Plains.³⁸ The battle line had shifted in part to the other side of the tracks, while the two other deaths listed in that day’s paper, Enrico Savelli, thirty, and Beatrice Cenedella, sixteen, both lived in the Plains. The *Milford Daily News* noted many pneumonia cases in town, “of more or less gravity.” There was hope that what was happening at Devens would happen in Milford: “But for the rain today there had been hopes for improvement in



Tending 1918 Camp Devens Influenza Patient

Source: New England Historical Society.

the local situation, but there is no lessening yet of the serious nature of Milford’s affliction.”³⁹

Nearby Hopedale employed many Milford residents in its manufacturing concerns, including the giant Draper Corporation. The town also began to show signs of flu. “Fully 400 of the Draper plant employes [sic] are out on account of illness,” the *Milford Gazette*, the weekly arm of the *Milford Daily News* reported on September 27.⁴⁰ The town’s library was already closed, and by September 26, the Union Church in Hopedale followed

the governor's recommendation and did not hold services, but the Unitarian Church held "services as usual on Sunday, but there will be no session of the Sunday school." Nonetheless, the effect of the flu on Milford's children caught the eye of people in posh Hopedale.⁴¹

On Friday, September 27, Milford was finally promised more nurses, and there was talk of opening an emergency hospital, possibly in Town Hall "or some other central hall." Dr. Francis H. Lally, who himself had been ill with flu, felt this was premature even though Board of Health Chair Higgiston noted at least sixty cases of pneumonia "that need care, that appears impossible to give." Both men appealed to the public "to refrain from attending funerals or any kind of gathering. If these requests are not heeded the board will take drastic action to stop such practices."⁴²

Six more were dead in Milford, with a running toll by the *Milford Daily News* of twenty-five: "Children and adults alike are numbered among the victims, with abatement of the epidemic apparently not yet in sight." But these new deaths were mostly adults, several of them near the Beach Street epicenter: Stone cutters Angelo Mancini, twenty-six, of 55 Beach Street; Leo Parante, thirty-one, of 65 East Street; and "well-known" Huckins & Temple shoe cutter James A. Nugent, thirty-five, of 6 Myrtle Street. The only child on the list was three-year-old John C. Tusoni of 71 Hayward. His home was



Milford YMCA Building Converted into Emergency Hospital

Source: Milford Historical Commission.

so close he and the Mazzone girls might have played in the park on Beach Street.⁴³

But the shift was now unarguable. Mary Elliott Miett, the twenty-two-year-old wife of Sergeant Hervie Miett who was serving in France, was dead, and she lived at 22 Purchase Street, not quite the other side of town but certainly not in the Plains. Antonio Diaz, forty-three, of 15 Prospect Heights was the first Portuguese immigrant to die of flu. He lived near Milford Hospital and the Hopedale town line, not far from the Plouff home on West Street and about two miles from the Plains.⁴⁴

What was happening at Milford Hospital is impossible to say. The death certificates rarely note a death at the hospital even though the *Milford Daily News* records several people dying there. By Monday, September 28, the town had over 500 flu cases out of almost 14,000 residents, a 3.5% illness rate. Nine "active" doctors and two nurses worked in town, and it was decided to create an emergency hospital in the Y.M.C.A. building on Exchange Street, probably the biggest clue that things were not going well at Milford Hospital. Town authorities stated the need for five more doctors, ten more nurses, and at least five nurses' aides. Bristow Draper of the Draper family in Hopedale loaned Milford equipment to run the hospital, including beds and medical supplies: "Mr. Draper several days ago gave the Milford committee assurances of ample aid from him, if needed, to check the epidemic here." Perhaps Hopedale hoped to stop influenza from crossing the town line by helping the victims in Milford.⁴⁵

By this time, the state had required all towns to make flu data available, and Milford was determined to follow the regulations to stop this epidemic: "In accordance with the state committee's desires, the committee will take measures to have church services suspended tomorrow, as well as Sunday school sessions already agreed upon." But the two Catholic churches in town refused to comply, even after being approached by Chair Higgiston about "omitting the usual services." Both the leaders of the Irish St. Mary's and the Italian Sacred Heart churches were reluctant to keep the faithful from having a place of refuge. "Rev. Fr. McGrath said, in substance, that the services at St. Mary's church could not be omitted, but that so far as possible due regard would be given the wishes of the board of health," the *Milford Daily News* reported, adding that "Fr. Lona was not averse to suspending services at the Sacred Heart church, but felt he had no authority, but would at once bring the matter to the attention of Bishop Beaven, head of the diocese."⁴⁶ "Services will be held in both these churches substantially as usual," the newspaper reported. Nearly thirty people were dead from influenza, with three children officially due to flu and another eight from pneumonia, yet the

churches refused to close. State officials could see Milford was in crisis—the town was required to update the Massachusetts Public Health Committee daily with the number of new cases and active medical staff.⁴⁷

The same day that Milford was dealing with state officials and fighting Catholic priests about closing churches, Antoine, twenty-three, son of Thirza Plouff who had succumbed to flu days earlier, died. The family were Canadian immigrants and the town was concerned about the condition of the surviving family members. “The father is also very sick at home, and the circumstances in this family are among the most severe reported by the health board,” the *Milford Daily News* reported. A double funeral was held at St. Mary’s Church for the pair.⁴⁸ “Conditions here are serious. About 500 to 600 cases here. Many are bad pneumonia cases, with no attendants,” town officials wired the state on September 28.⁴⁹

A NEW NEIGHBORHOOD: PROSPECT HEIGHTS

Antonio Diaz’s death marked a shift. Influenza deaths did not stop in other areas of town, and a new neighborhood and new immigrant group were afflicted. Diaz was one of many immigrant employees of Hopedale’s colossal Draper textile machinery factory. The small adjacent Hopedale lacked sufficient housing—most of the duplex homes, and the large apartment building Hopedale House on Dutcher Street, were owned by Draper, but housing was scarce, particularly for the lowest rung of workers. Thus the Draper family bought land on Prospect Street in Milford right over the town line. Brick row houses, along with large Draper duplexes, were built to house only Draper workers and their families, including immigrants from Ireland, Portugal, Armenia, Greece, and Poland.⁵⁰

Similar to the Plains area about two miles away, the diverse and integrated immigrant neighborhood of Prospect Heights was ravaged by flu. The *Milford Daily News* reported nine fatalities in less than two weeks in the neighborhood, and knew the area was being hit hard, noting on October 10 that “three babies were brought to the hospital from the Prospect Heights section, and with these the total number of patients there reached 19.”⁵¹

But that was not the whole story. By October 15, ten people from the Heights had died, including Hopedale workers Diaz, Domingos Cardosa, Thomas Rubery, and Patrick G. Curley. Whole houses had the flu, such as unmarried victims Guilosia Chaves (a woman) and Antonio Desilva of 7 Prospect Heights. Like Giovanni Sebastiano, called “John Sebastian” in his *Milford Daily News* obituary, and Albino Consalves Rua of 10 Prospect Heights who died on October 15, Chaves and Desilva were sharing a

crowded brick row house, probably with many other people. Clementina Rosa Mendes, wife of a Draper worker, also died.⁵² Those of Portuguese and Irish descent were not the only losses in the neighborhood. Draper foundry laborer Hengo Bederosian was the first victim from Armenia to die in the Heights on October 10, but he was not the last.

Hopedale, with a population of just over 2,500, had many influenza victims who worked at Draper Corporation, which employed approximately 3,000 men, many whom commuted from Milford on the trolley. The first Hopedale death, Draper’s fireman Walter James Morton, occurred on September 27, eleven days after the *Milford Daily News* began reporting influenza deaths in Milford.⁵³ Milford’s first official “Grippe” death did not come until September 19, but Draper’s machinist Edward Fullum died at his Milford home of bronchopneumonia on September 16.⁵⁴

On September 21, the Drapers reported that a “large number” of their employees were ill. Since pneumonia was reported as the cause of fireman Morton’s death despite his official death certificate listing “Grippe” as the cause, Hopedale’s first official death reported in the *Milford Daily News* was John J. Grady, thirty, of 6 Union Street. Grady had been reported as improving on the same day that Morton died, but he succumbed the next day. Grady left a wife and three children.⁵⁵

Many of Hopedale’s official “grip” or influenza deaths were men and most worked at Draper. Of the fourteen who died of influenza or “grip” in 1918, seven were Draper employees and one worked at the Westcott Mill in Spindleville, a part of Hopedale on the other side of state route 16. Two



Brick Row Houses in Prospect Heights

This was an early epicenter of the pandemic. Source: Milford Historical Commission.

others worked in jobs that put them in contact with the public—a butcher, and the town’s highway department’s foreman—and the remainder were women or men with no occupation listed.⁵⁶ Unlike Milford, Hopedale did not lose children at a high rate, which may have been in part due to the fact that the town closed schools on September 24 “on account of the prevailing “grip” epidemic.”⁵⁷ No school-aged children died of flu—only five-month-old Frederick Kempton, whose family lived in worker housing in Bancroft Park, succumbed. But one mother, Assunta Santilli, died of flu after giving birth to a stillborn child. Hazel Barbour Davenport also died after her stillborn son, but her cause of death is listed as pneumonia. A governess from Switzerland also died of flu at Milford Hospital.⁵⁸

THE CRISIS PEAKS

Sunday, September 29 marked the peak number of deaths occurring in a single day in Milford—eleven people. The next day, the newspaper reported fourteen deaths over the weekend and the preparation of the emergency hospital by the Red Cross. “There still remains in Milford a most serious grip condition,” the *Milford Daily News* stated, listing the nurses who had come from as far as Halifax, Nova Scotia, to help. Doctors were run ragged, making sixty-five calls to patients every morning. People of some prominence were also dying: Anthony Burke, a “well known and liked” newsagent, and John Edward Murphy, nephew of police Chief J.T. Murphy. No one of real social stature in Milford died of influenza, but immigrants, particularly children from the Plains neighborhood, were still dying.⁵⁹

On October 4, the *Milford Daily News* gave a running total of fifty-eight deaths since the epidemic started, but only five deaths that day—all adults—and the story was run on the inside pages of the paper. There was a cautious sigh of relief. “The reports at the hospital and general indications about town point to a slight falling off of cases of the epidemic,” the paper reported. The Y.M.C.A. emergency hospital was treating two babies and eleven adults, including the husband of one of its nurses, Mrs. Naughton.⁶⁰ The next day, Governor McCall requested churches in Boston to close and urged all Massachusetts churches to shut their doors immediately: “All doctors agree that there is great danger in gatherings, therefore it is the plain duty of everybody to avoid gatherings and to do everything they can to lessen the danger.” The Milford Board of Health appears to have used this decree to finally require the town’s churches to close. In fact, all schools, churches, theaters, bowling alleys, ice cream parlors, bar rooms, saloons, and dance halls closed, club meetings were put on hold, and “[p]ublic funerals are also

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BROOKLINE, MASS., SATURDAY, C

INFLUENZA TOLL INCREASES AS EPIDEMIC CONTINUES TO SPREAD

25 More Residents Fall Victims of Malady With More Than 150 New Cases This Week.

Schools and Churches Closed, All Meetings Suspended and No Public Funeral Without Permit.

SHORTAGE OF NURSES AND DOCTORS DEVELOPS

DRAFT MACHINE IS BROUGHT TO HALT BY GRIP EPIDEMIC

Sudden Orders Result In Indefinite Suspension Of Activities For Inducting First Of Late Registrants

FIXING OF ORDER NUMBERS ALSO DELAYED

Pursuant to orders received from

Surrender of Bulgaria Heralded in Brookline

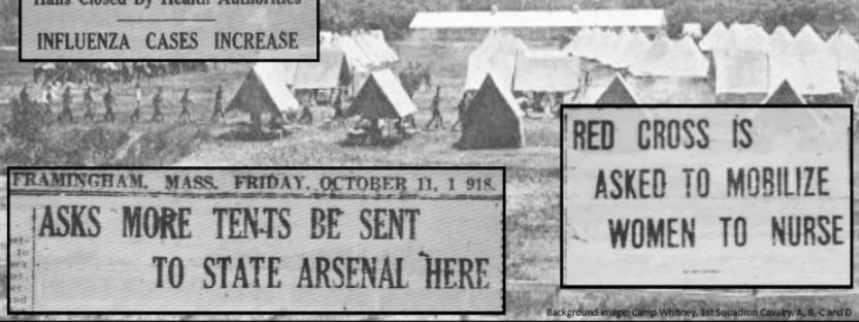
The surrender of Bulgaria was heralded in Brookline Monday noon by ringing the church and fire alarm bells and sounding the gongs and siren whistles on the fire-trucks. The din continued for fully five minutes and marked a public demonstration never before equaled here. For several seconds residents were ignorant of the cause of the outburst but the news quickly spread and cheers by men, women and children followed. "Wait until Germany surrenders," has been the expression heard on all sides during the week.

Oct. 5, 1918 *Brookline Townsman*

FRAMINGHAM & THE FLU: 1918 PANDEMIC

PUBLIC GATHERINGS PLACED UNDER BAN
Schools, Churches, Theatres and Dance Halls Closed By Health Authorities
INFLUENZA CASES INCREASE

THE EVENING NEWS, FRAMINGHAM, MASS., S.
INFLUENZA SPREADS RAPIDLY, MANY DEATHS



FRAMINGHAM, MASS. FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1918.
ASKS MORE TENTS BE SENT TO STATE ARSENAL HERE

RED CROSS IS ASKED TO MOBILIZE WOMEN TO NURSE

Background image: Camp Whitney, 3rd Squadron Cavalry, U.S. Cavalry.

1918 Framingham Newspaper Headlines
Source: Framingham History Center.

under the ban.”⁶¹ The Baptist Church in town had suspended its services on September 28. But the latest ban was too little, too late.

The worst was over, but residents and authorities didn't know it yet. On October 7, the *Milford Daily News* reported seven deaths in forty-eight hours, including mother Nellie Yuknas, who had miscarried a baby girl four days earlier.⁶² The next day, nine deaths in twenty-four hours were reported: “the largest number from this disease since the epidemic started.” But the paper seemed to predict the light at the end of the epidemic tunnel: “Fewer cases are being reported, and many of the patients who have been ill with the disease are thought to be improving satisfactorily.” However, more children continued to succumb.⁶³

The newspaper also offered advice on how to help during this crisis, although it may have been out of desperation to quell the fear: “The nurses and officials there today were of the opinion that the general public could do much good by giving broth or jellies to their neighbors wherever there was any sickness.” Doctors and nurses made the rounds of the hard-hit Plains neighborhood and found homes with windows “closed tight, against the orders of the doctors.”⁶⁴

The next day, October 9, the paper reported something disturbing that may confirm a decades-old rumor that a mass grave had been dug to handle all of the bodies:

Undertaker Antonio DePasquale late yesterday started men, employed by the Town Highway department, and any others he could secure, to dig graves for the victims who have died of this disease the past few days, and long ditches like trenches were dug, the caskets holding the bodies being placed therein, one after the other.

The story doesn't name the site, but information on death certificates indicates the vast majority of Milford's dead were buried in St. Mary's Cemetery. The newspaper praised those who took on the dangerous task of grave digging: “The members of the highway department, who aided in grave digging that bodies in the cemetery tomb might be interred, did so at the suggestion of the board of health and the public safety committee, to relieve a serious situation. They were practically volunteers.”⁶⁵

According to death certificates, of the 105 Milford influenza or “grip” deaths between September and December, 1918, ninety-one persons—a full 86%—were buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.⁶⁶ But a random search for twenty-five victims and their lots in the cemetery reveals only six in the files today.

It is not known whether the names are missing due to the overwhelming number of burials during the epidemic, or if the bodies were removed and reinterred in other cemeteries, particularly Sacred Heart's cemetery.

Prophetically, Dr. W.H. Wolfram, in charge of Milford's emergency hospital, gave an address the next day at a dinner—probably not the wisest move for a medical professional during this crisis—that spoke of the present and predicted the future. According to the *Milford Daily News* on October 10:

He vividly pointed out the necessity of immediate action to put certain sections of Milford, which he said, were very bad in a sanitary condition, and prophesied that if this was not done, the next epidemic, which would surely come, would be more fatal than the present one. He also advocated the federalization of the medical profession if the best results were to be obtained for the benefit of the human family.⁶⁷

The same day, the front page of the paper reported that Rev. James A. Dunphy of St. Mary's Church spoke of the "abatement of the grip epidemic to a considerable degree." Dunphy cited "cool weather" as the reason, and also showed foresight: "He is of the belief that soon as practicable the town health board should direct its energies to the cleaning out of the well defined congested disease centers, a measure that will eliminate later dangers from similar epidemics."⁶⁸ The stories flanked a piece on the latest victims of the pandemic.

INFLUENZA WINDS DOWN

Early October 1918 showed the first sign of a light at the end of the influenza tunnel. The *Milford Daily News* reported fifty-eight dead, including the first death at the emergency hospital.⁶⁹ The paper also mentioned that one emergency hospital nurse was ill but that two new nurses were coming to town to take up the slack, and "[t]here is some talk of having the drug stores alternate in remaining open all night."⁷⁰ "Nurse Hill," survived her bout with the flu; George Channing Wankell of Utica, New York, working in Milford, did not. Dr. Wankell became ill at the emergency hospital and was taken to Deaconess Hospital in Boston for treatment, but died. His obituary was in the *Milford Daily News* on October 15, and he was referred to as a "martyr."⁷¹

By October 9, town authorities knew the epidemic was abating. "Only three deaths occurred from influenza in the past 24 hours, a decided decrease

over yesterday's record of nine . . . but there are still very many sick people in the town," the *Milford Daily News* reported.⁷² The death toll, at least according to the newspaper, stood at eighty.

Many cases in Milford were particularly sad ones. An Italian moulder at the Milford Iron Foundry, Enrico Savelli of 41 Meade Street, died at the height of the disease, along with his one-year-old daughter Nella. Another Italian moulder, Andreano Sabatucci, died at the same address, possibly a tenement house. Fifteen-year-old school girl Lillian Marino, died October 7; her brother, Donato, died three days later. These deaths continued until the end of the year: Harold Rizzi, just under a year old, died on December 15; his baby brother Joseph died a little over a week later. The children lived less than a mile from the Plains neighborhood epicenter.⁷³

But town officials were relieved. A little less than a month after the first reported influenza deaths, authorities felt they were finally in control of the situation. "There is a decidedly more hopeful feeling as to the local situation, and with care on the part of the people generally, and especially for the afflicted not to risk too early work after attacks, the situation will mend rapidly," the *Milford Daily News* reported on October 11.⁷⁴ This was followed by a statement by Dr. W.H. Wolfram, who came to Milford from Cincinnati to help, noting that "the situation is clearing up very nicely, and apparently the local crisis is well past," on October 14.⁷⁵

This disease attacked the poor and immigrants in numbers far above those of the successful and wealthy. But as the epidemic appeared to be winding down, a couple of better-known names fell victim. Stable-keeper "and popular citizen" Martin W. Casey died,⁷⁶ as did Archer Rubber Company superintendent Frank L. Sullivan. It was reported that "Mr. Sullivan made a brave fight for life, but for the past few days his family had realized that he could not recover." Frank Sullivan was the highest rung on Milford's social ladder to die of the disease.⁷⁷

By October 18, Milford had called off its "Epidemic Ban." The Board of Health decided public gatherings and church services could resume but "with the suggestion, however, that they be made brief." Theaters also reopened the following Monday, with those under age eighteen still barred. Authorities remained concerned about pediatric deaths in town: "Owing to the fact that the disease has had an unusual effect on children, it was decided not to reopen the schools as yet, and for a similar reason juveniles are barred from the theatres."⁷⁸

At the same time, Hopedale was erring on the side of caution because of reports of new cases of influenza. The Board of Health in the town decided the ban on "public meetings or amusement places" would remain in place,

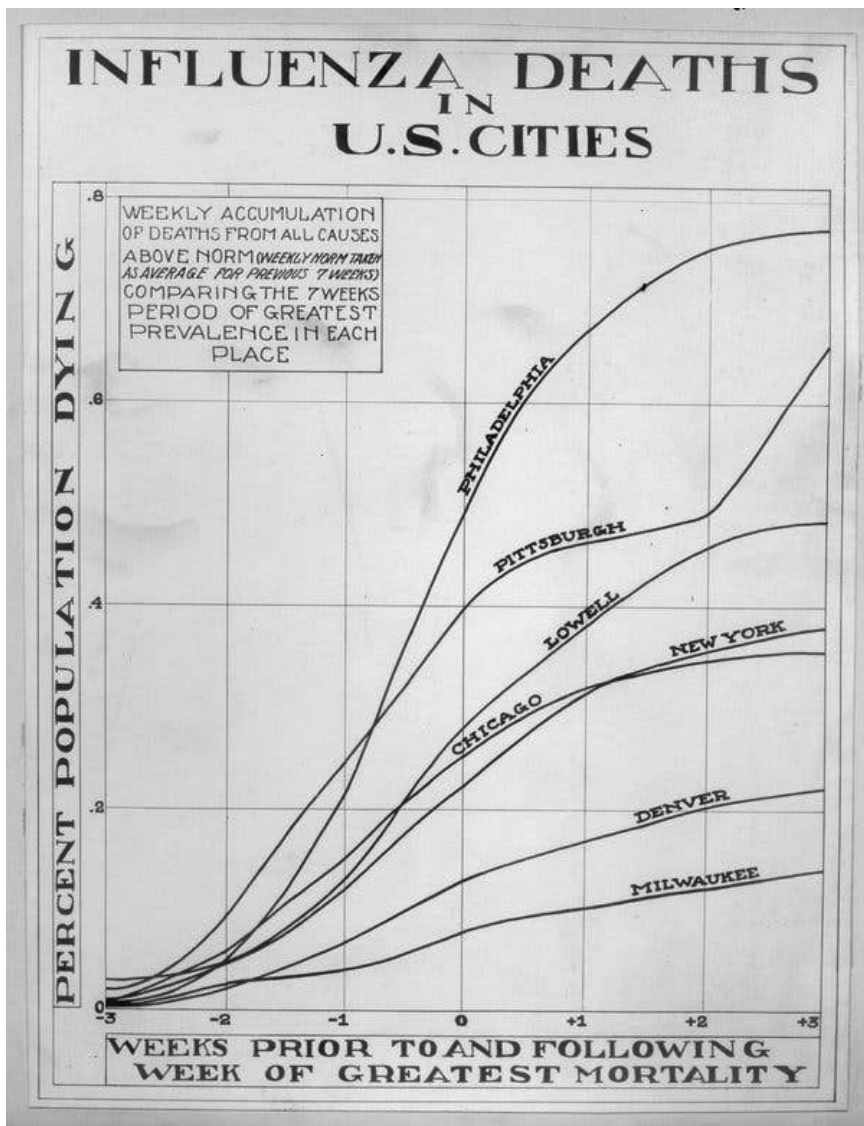


Chart Showing the Climbing Death Toll in Several U.S. Cities, c. 1919

Source: National Museum of Health and Medicine.

and that churches and schools would remain closed until the end of the month.⁷⁹ Milford schools also remained closed even after the overall ban was lifted. At the end of October, janitors opened all school buildings' doors and windows "that all possible fresh air and sunlight may enter," the *Milford Daily News* reported on November 2. Even though viral theory was still in its infancy—scientists would not be able to view a virus until the electron microscope was invented in 1931—it was deemed that "the buildings have been properly fumigated."⁸⁰ However, Milford refused to take chances with its children:

The teachers have been instructed to take especial care as to pupils coming from homes where there have been recent cases of the influenza and to require from each pupil in such cases notes from the family doctors endorsed by the secretary of the board of health as to the danger of contagion being absent in such cases.

This must have been a difficult set of criteria to explain to an immigrant family.⁸¹

On October 24, an odd story appeared in the *Milford Daily News* reassuring the public that the disease was brought to the country through "natural channels of affected seamen, travelers or imports, and not by malicious methods." Because World War I was still raging on the fields of France, including the use of poisonous gas, Americans were nervous that the speed and strength of the illness was a German attack. The story, which originated out of Washington, D.C. and not through the *Milford Daily News* itself, tried to quell those fears: "Reports that the influenza germs may have been brought to the United States and spread by enemy agents, possibly landed on American shores from submarines, have been investigated by government agents, but no basis for them has been found."⁸²

By mid-November, Milford had moved on. The war ended, and the town celebrated. A man was beaten in a barroom brawl during that celebration, making the front pages when he succumbed to his injuries around Thanksgiving.⁸³ The holidays approached and a minstrel show was coming to town.⁸⁴

Influenza continued through year's end with ten more deaths by New Year's Eve. The epidemic resurged in 1919, and the *Milford Daily News* noted that Armenian immigrants in Prospect Heights were hit hard as winter wore on; so many were ill in 1919 that an emergency hospital was set up at 114 Prospect Heights. On January 27, the *Milford Daily News* reported the second neighborhood death of the new year—Magar Derbadrosian's death followed

that of Marderos Minasian on January 9. Eventually two more Armenian immigrants from the Heights died: Anreck Monidian Maghidehian, a housewife, and Ruork Cabanian.⁸⁵

Another ten people died, including several Armenian immigrants living in Prospect Heights, through May 1919. Husband and wife Susie G. and John E. Savage also died, but only John officially died of influenza. Susie's death certificate only states bronchopneumonia as the cause, and she died at Framingham Hospital. The town barely noticed their deaths. The final tally of Milford influenza deaths was 121, with an additional forty-one dead of pneumonia, by the time the virus burned itself out in the spring of 1919.⁸⁶

BY THE NUMBERS: ADAMS, CLINTON, AND WEYMOUTH

Comparing Milford to similarly sized mill towns is revealing. Milford suffered more than others. Adams, a mill town in Berkshire County in western Massachusetts, had a population in 1915 of 13,218, only about 500 people fewer than Milford. Like most Massachusetts mill towns, Adams was diverse, with 4,713 foreign-born residents in 1915. The vast majority came from Canada and Poland, followed by Germany, Great Britain, and Ireland.⁸⁷ Adams' death toll during the height of the influenza pandemic—those listed as dying of influenza or "grip" on their death certificates—was only fifty-eight, the smallest of the towns sampled. That is a 0.4% death rate, below the national average.⁸⁸

Compared to Milford, Clinton was a fairly new town, incorporated in 1850. Located northeast of Worcester, Clinton was geographically smaller than many of its neighbors, but like Milford it was a larger town population-wise.⁸⁹ The 1915 Census counted 4,728 foreign-born residents out of a population of 13,192, with the Irish dominating the census numbers. A large number of additional immigrants came from Poland, Germany, Italy, and Canada.⁹⁰

Like Milford, Clinton had a hospital, founded in 1889. Clinton Hospital handled many influenza victims during the pandemic. Five non-residents died of influenza at the hospital; the remaining twenty-six hospital deaths were Clinton residents. Excluding Milford, Clinton had the largest death rate of the sample towns, in part because of its hospital. A total of seventy-four influenza or "grip" deaths were from the town itself, including Clinton residents who died in the hospital. Three Clinton residents died at hospitals in other towns, including Worcester, but are counted among the deaths since their death certificates are part of the town's records. Clinton meets the national average at 0.5%.⁹¹

Weymouth, located on the coast in Norfolk County, is the second oldest township in Massachusetts. Founded in 1622 as Wessagusset and renamed Weymouth in 1635, the town grew slowly over the years. By the mid-1800s, the town boasted over 6,000 residents and was more than a fishing village—it had the Weymouth Iron Works Company and was moving from agriculture and fishing to manufacturing and trade. As the iron industry declined, the shoe industry grew, employing at times 75% of the population. Immigration followed, including from many English-speaking countries like Great Britain, Ireland, and Canada, but also from Italy and Finland.⁹² Weymouth was the largest of the towns sampled at 13,969, with almost 300 people more than Milford, but had the smallest number of foreign-born residents at 2,593. The largest immigrant population came from Canada and Ireland, followed by Italy, Russia, and Sweden.⁹³ Regardless of its size, Weymouth had a relatively small influenza and “grip” death rate at sixty-one—below the national average at 0.4%.⁹⁴

More interesting than the overall influenza and “grip” deaths in the four towns is the number of children who died during the pandemic. This flu was atypical because it killed more in their prime of life than children and the elderly, the latter a population that typically had the greatest number of victims during a normal bout of winter influenza. That was not the case in Milford. What the newspaper and town authorities thought they perceived in the number of pediatric deaths turns out to be correct: Milford officially lost twenty-six individuals under the age of eighteen to influenza. In contrast, Adams and Clinton each lost twelve children, and Weymouth, an even larger town, lost only nine children. Milford also lost seventeen children unofficially to pneumonia, many of whom were reported in the *Milford Daily News* as influenza victims, but because the death certificates do not indicate flu as a primary or secondary cause of death, these children are not counted in these figures.⁹⁵

The figure of twenty-six pediatric deaths is significant—a quarter of the official “grip” or influenza deaths in Milford from September to December 1918 were pediatric deaths. Adams’ rate was high at 20%, while Clinton and Weymouth were lower at 15%. Even Worcester, a city filled with immigrants, had a lower pediatric death rate. Just over 32% of its residents were foreign-born, but the death rate for children in the city was only 17%.⁹⁶

Compared to the county seat of Worcester, also within the Blackstone River watershed, Milford is about 8% the size of the city, which had a population of 162,697 in 1915.⁹⁷ Worcester’s official influenza and “grip” death number from September to December 1918, was 757; 128 deaths were children from babies to seventeen years. Worcester also had ten

stillbirths attributable to influenza—their mothers died of flu after the births. Statistically, it is impossible to compare a town the size of Milford with Worcester, but several comparisons can be made. Worcester's death rate through the end of 1918 seems to be average compared to the other towns researched in Massachusetts, with a 0.5% death rate compared to the overall population. The death rate for children under eighteen was 17% of that figure. Milford, on the other hand, had a death rate of 0.8%—a total of 105 deaths for a population of 13,684. Children also died at an almost frighteningly higher percentage in Milford: nearly 25% of the number of flu fatalities. Also, five babies were stillborn to mothers who later died of influenza, while half of the ten stillbirths of Worcester were attributable to flu. Only two mothers in Adams and Weymouth miscarried babies and died of influenza, and Clinton had one.⁹⁸ There remains another revealing detail concerning the stillborn deaths—of the five women who died, three were immigrants. In fact, immigration status played a huge role in the death toll from this illness in Milford.

THE 1918 PANDEMIC AND IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS

The persisting mythology of the 1918 influenza pandemic is that it was a democratic disease, hitting all within the prime-of-life age range, regardless of social status. But that was not the case. Statistical data compiled in 1931 showed that this pandemic hit immigrant communities with a vengeance. The U.S. Public Health Service collected data from several urban areas including Boston, New York City, and San Francisco, and found that the lower classes succumbed at a much higher rate than the wealthy. "Although the wealthy as well as the poor succumbed, they did not die in proportionate numbers," statistician Edgar Sydenstricker wrote in his report, noting that the poor died at almost three times the rate of the wealthy. The report also seemed to indicate that industrialization contributed to the death rates, with agricultural towns having a much lower morbidity than nearby mill towns.⁹⁹

This is shown starkly in the Milford area. Nearby Mendon, an agricultural town barely three miles from Milford center, had a population of 933 in 1915. Yet the town only suffered three confirmed influenza deaths in the fall of 1918, a 0.3% death rate. Two of the men who died were young—George Jackson was eighteen and Emile Thiebault was fourteen—and both worked as farmers. Robert James Hoggarth, thirty-six, was a machinist originally from England. Although no employer is listed on his death certificate, he could have been a worker at Drapers, an easy commute by trolley.¹⁰⁰

An earlier study, completed in Connecticut in 1920 while the pandemic was still fresh in local memory, points at Italian immigrants as having been harder hit than other immigrant groups. The study noted, “The Italian race stock contributed nearly double its normal proportion to the state death roll during the epidemic period.” Italians in Milford were certainly hardest hit, and in particular their children.¹⁰¹

In Adams, twenty-two of the fifty-eight who died of flu were immigrants to the country—almost 40% of the total. Nine of the seventeen children had parents born in other countries, a figure of over 50%; one of the children was born outside the United States. Clinton’s figures are very similar: out of seventy-four from Clinton who died, thirty-one were victims of flu—almost 42%. Eleven of the thirteen children (92%) were immigrants or first-generation Americans.¹⁰²

In Weymouth, a town with a much lower immigration rate, only twelve of the sixty-one flu deaths were immigrants, a 19% rate. The childhood rate was also lower—of the nine children, five had immigrant parents and one had an immigrant father and an American mother. Yet the total is still 66%.¹⁰³

Milford’s overall immigrant influenza death rate from September to December, 1918 was fifty-one of 105—48% total. The town also had high numbers of children of immigrants dying of influenza. Nineteen of twenty-six pediatric deaths were first-generation American children, or 73%, and three of the five mothers who delivered stillborn babies before succumbing to influenza were immigrants. One girl, Gertrude Valentino, a fourteen-year-old shoe worker at Herman Shoe Company, was the only child born outside of the country. She died on October 12.¹⁰⁴

The immigrants themselves cannot be held responsible for their high death rate. Many were new to the country, dealing with language barriers and cultural differences while living in abject poverty. As Board of Health Chair Higgiston experienced with families in the Plains neighborhood, people didn’t understand the severity of the epidemic. He fought the two Catholic churches in town to stop services and urged immigrants to keep windows open and family members away from the sick room. But still they died.

In Milford, the two neighborhoods most impacted by this epidemic—the smaller Prospect Heights and the larger Plains neighborhoods—look largely the same today as they did in 1918. There are new houses in the Plains, and some of the homes in Prospect Heights, particularly the Draper duplexes, are freshly sided. Yet many of the addresses where victims perished are relatively untouched.¹⁰⁵ Milford’s immigrant population and their children—that first generation of Americans, the hope of their parents, and the reason they made

the difficult journey to the United States—suffered disproportionately from influenza and its impact. Yet so few of their stories are remembered. This article strives to preserve and honor their memories.

HJM

Notes

1. Center for Disease Control website www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html, accessed Apr. 4, 2020. This CDC website has a fascinating account of how the actual 1918 virus was retrieved in 1997 from the frozen lung tissue of an Inuit woman whose body had been buried in a mass grave which had been frozen for decades in the Alaskan permafrost. The genetic code of the virus was successfully deciphered.
2. See *Merriam-Webster Online Unabridged Dictionary*; 1743 quote is from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
3. Joanne Despres, Senior Editor at Merriam-Webster, Inc., email dated Apr.16, 2020. In 1895 publisher John C. Francis pointed to the 1837 *Stanford Dictionary* which quoted from the diary of “H. Greville.” It stated, “I have been laid up with the *grippe* for a week, and a more painful and depressing malady I was never acquainted with.” John C. Francis, *Notes and Queries: A Medium of Intercommunication for Literary Men, General Readers, Etc.*, Volume 7, Jan.–June 1895 (London: John C. Francis, 1895), 416. See also *Merriam-Webster Online Unabridged Dictionary*; 1775 quote is from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
4. Lois R. Shea, “Sudden, Swift, Silent, and Deadly: 80 Years Ago Flu Ravaged New England,” *Boston Globe*, Nov. 1, 1998, B1.
5. Center for Disease Control website, op. cit.
6. No records were kept of how many in the town, or in the country, contracted the illness, although it has been estimated that between 25% and 50% of the population may have been infected.
7. “Grip Epidemic Takes Six Milford Lives; Schools are Closed,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 20, 1918.
8. Death Certificates from the Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918, found online via *Family Search*.
9. “Milford Fights Grip; Pub. Safety Committee and Health Board Take Charge; State Will Aid,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 28, 1918.
10. “The Decennial Census, 1915,” Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics (Boston: Wright & Potter Print. Co., 1918).
11. “Grip Seizes Boston; State Board Uneasy,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 11, 1918.
12. “Influenza Menaces Civilians and Navy,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 14, 1918.
13. “Claffin School Closed; Several Scholars Ill,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 16, 1918.

14. Joe Arcudi, "The Plains," unpublished copy from the Milford Public Library, 2009.
15. Author tour of the Plains in Milford, Massachusetts, Oct. 2018.
16. "Grip Epidemic," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 20, 1918.
17. Massachusetts State Census figures, 1915.
18. Ibid.
19. "Five More Influenza Deaths Bring Total to 11 in this Town," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 23, 1918.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. "Conditions in One Milford Tenement," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 3, 1918. The passage likely described the home of Nellie Yuknas at 39 Central Street. Her child, a little girl, died on Oct. 1 but was not otherwise mentioned in the *Milford Daily News*. Nellie died four days later, but her death certificate did not indicate that she was in the emergency hospital.
23. "Edward Fullum Dies After Short Illness," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 17, 1918.
24. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.
25. "Grip Epidemic," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 20, 1918. The paper spelled his name "Maiaetto".
26. "Five More Influenza Deaths Bring Total to 11 in this Town," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 23, 1918.
27. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.
28. Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World* (NY: Hachette Book Group, 2017), 276.
29. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.
30. "Grip Victims Total in Milford Now 13," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 24, 1918.
31. "Gov. Proclaims Grave Grip Peril in the State," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 25, 1918.
32. "Three More Deaths by Influenza in Milford," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 25, 1918.
33. Milford Historical Commission photograph collection at the Milford Museum at Memorial Hall.
34. Records of St. Mary's Cemetery, Milford, Massachusetts.
35. "Fewer Influenza Cases at Devens," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 26, 1918.
36. Gina Kolata, *Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 16.
37. "Local Soldiers at Devens Subjects of Pneumonia; Serious," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 27, 1918.
38. "Two More Deaths in Town From Influenza," *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 26, 1918.
39. Ibid.
40. Hopedale Social Pages, *Milford Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1918.
41. Hopedale Social Pages, *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 26, 1918.

42. “Milford Promised Additional Nurses,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 27, 1918.
43. “Six More Victims of Grip are Dead; Total Reaches 25,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 27, 1918.
44. *Ibid.*
45. “Milford Fights Grip; Pub. Safety Committee and Health Board Take Charge; State Will Aid,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 28, 1918.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. “One More Influenza Fatality in Milford,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 28, 1918.
49. “Milford Fights Grip,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 28, 1918.
50. Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory Form for National Register designation, recorded by Marilyn Lovell, Milford Historical Commission, 1985.
51. “Four Deaths Latest Toll from Influenza,” *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 10, 1918.
52. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.
53. “Hopedale Man Died of Double Pneumonia,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 28, 1918.
54. “Edward Fullum,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 17, 1918.
55. “Milford Has 14 More Deaths From Influenza; Hopedale Has Victim,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 30, 1918.
56. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.
57. Hopedale Social Pages, *Milford Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1918.
58. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.
59. “Milford Has 14 More Deaths,” *Milford Daily News*, Sept. 30, 1918. For example, Luigina Sostillo, a two-year-old from East Main Street; eight-month-old Antonio Niro of Beach Street; Mary DiPaolo, two, of East Street; and two-year-old Josephine Arata and Pasquale Tusoni, four, who lived next to each other on Hayward Street. Pasquale’s two-year-old brother John had died four days earlier.
60. “Influenza Deaths Reach Total of 58,” *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 4, 1918.
61. “Gov. S.W. M’Call and H.B. Endicott Issue Health Order,” *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 5, 1918.
62. “Seven Deaths Reported from Grip in 48 Hours,” *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 7, 1918. The newspaper gave more detail than the death certificate, as it noted Nellie’s death was truly a family tragedy—her brother had died of influenza in Brockton, Massachusetts, just before Nellie’s husband called to tell the family of his wife’s death. Interestingly, the newspaper doesn’t mention the loss of Nellie’s baby, and her death certificate doesn’t mention that she died in the emergency hospital.
63. “Nine Influenza Deaths Bring Total Up to 77,” *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 8, 1918. William Malloy, age sixteen, died and the paper reported other members of the family were ill; two unnamed babies from the Plains section died, which appear from the death certificates to be Alfredo Iarossa, three months; and Ricco Santoni, a little over one year old.
64. *Ibid.*

65. "Grip Conditions Grow Better Daily; 3 Deaths," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 9, 1918.
66. Worcester also had an overwhelming amount of Catholic victims of influenza that fall. Of the 757 who died between September and December, 383 were buried in the city's two Catholic cemeteries, St. John's and Notre Dame. But this is only a 50% Catholic death rate, relatively small compared to Milford's numbers.
67. "Dr. Wolfram Gives Dinner and Makes Interesting Address," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 10, 1918.
68. "Fr. Dunphy Thinks Worst May be Over," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 10, 1918.
69. "Influenza Deaths Reach Total of 58," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 4, 1918. Albert Iadarola, twenty-eight, left a wife and two children. There was another death in Prospect Heights: Clementina Rosa Mendes, twenty-three; and a death in the Plains, Carmella Tessicini, thirty-seven. The paper also reported the death of a mail carrier, David J. Costello, twenty-five, who lived at 234 Congress Street, almost three miles from the Plains. This article is one of the few without mention of a childhood death, a trend which was broken the next day. The adult deaths—Thomas H. Powers, twenty-seven, a worker at Draper; and Luigi DeMatteis, thirty, a barber on Main Street—are followed by Frank Ferdenzi, a two-year-old boy who lived on Mt. Pleasant Street in the heart of the Plains.
70. *Ibid.*
71. "Dr. Geo. C. Wankell A Martyr for Milford," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 15, 1918.
72. "Grip Situation in Milford Improving," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 9, 1918.
73. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.
74. "Patients Doing Nicely at Emergency Hospital," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 11, 1918.
75. "Grip in Town on the Decline; Fine Hospital Showing," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 14, 1918.
76. "Martin W. Casey, Well-Known Stable Keeper, Passes Away," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 15, 1918.
77. "Frank L. Sullivan Dies of Pneumonia," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 15, 1918.
78. "Milford Calls off its Epidemic Ban," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 18, 1918.
79. Hopedale Social Pages, *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 19, 1918.
80. "Milford Schools to Reopen Monday," *Milford Daily News*, Nov. 2, 1918.
81. *Ibid.*
82. "Influenza Attack not German Spread," *Milford Daily News*, Oct. 24, 1918.
83. "Local Victim of Victory Celebration," *Milford Daily News*, Nov. 23, 1918.
84. "Minstrel Show and Dance," *Milford Daily News*, December 31, 1918.
85. "Second Flu Victim at Prospect Heights," *Milford Daily News*, January 27, 1919.
86. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.
87. "The Decennial Census, 1915," Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics (Boston: Wright & Potter Print. Co., 1918).
88. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1918.