



Historically Speaking

*with Eastchester Town Historian
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The Deadliest of Times

What was the deadliest time in the history of Eastchester? Was it during the American Revolution when every house in the present town except for one was destroyed and roving bands of criminals, militia, and regular soldiers wrecked havoc over the landscape? Was it during the Civil War when over 620,000 Americans perished? Could it have been during the Great Depression when unemployment in Tuckahoe reached 33 percent? Or could it have been during World War II when over 100 families lost their sons to the conflict? If you guessed any of the above, you are wrong.

The deadliest time in the history of this town took place between March 1918 and June of 1920. The newspapers mistakenly called it the Spanish flu but this was no influenza outbreak. This plague or pandemic was 25 times more deadly than any flu. The disease afflicted the young and the healthy. It hit three

age groups. The first and most tragic were infants from birth to age 5. The Associated Charities that ran the day nurseries for the working poor had to shut down the baby welfare station.

But this was no ordinary flu. Most flu epidemic outbreaks predominantly hit juveniles, weakened patients, and the elderly. But this pandemic hit healthy young adults between the ages of 20 and 40 in the prime of their lives. The symptoms were ghastly, quick, and deadly.

First a person might notice a dull headache. Their eyes would start to burn. Chills would cause a person to shiver and they would take to curling up in a ball. But no amount of blankets could keep you warm. A high fever would ravage your body. Then the horror struck.

A person's face would turn a dark, brownish purple, almost black. A similar discoloration takes place with their feet. Their lungs would fill up with blood as

they frantically gasped for air. Death might come in a few hours or a few days. As the end drew near, a blood-tinged saliva bubbled out of their mouth.

The Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 was so deadly that it killed more people than died in battle in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam. Put another way, this plague was so deadly that if a similar virus were to strike today, it would kill more people in a single year than heart disease, cancers, stroke, heart attacks, AIDS, and Alzheimer's disease combined. Estimates hold that 3 to 6 percent of the world's population succumbed to this disease. Twenty eight percent of Americans had this flu and conservative estimates show that over half a million died.

In the next article the impact of the Spanish Flu on the town of Eastchester will be described.