



1918: Year of Armistice, flu pandemic

Garland had no answer for virus attack

By James Barnes

In November 1918, two world-wide events that had claimed millions of deaths drew to a close — World War I with 8.5 million dead in four years, and the great influenza pandemic that claimed more than 50 million lives in a year and a half.

Some contemporary sources estimate total influenza deaths up to 100 million, or 9 per cent of the world population. Of the 25 per cent of the U. S. population that suffered the disease, 675,000 people died, about five times the number of American war deaths. Death rates in some areas were extreme — 10 to 20 per cent of those infected. The highest rates occurred in a 2-to-3-month period ending in November 1918.

These data justify an estimate that Garland had more than 250 sick and at least 25 deaths. Other than supportive care, no reasonable treatment for Spanish flu existed here or anywhere.



Peter Handley

In those plague months, Peter Handley — and other Garland druggists — were faced with an overwhelming demand for relief by ailing residents, but were largely helpless, for the pharmaceutical industry had advanced only a little since Handley opened his drug store on the Square almost 20 years earlier. There was little or nothing in any physician's bag or on any druggist's shelf that could make a difference. The inadequate and faulty National Formulary of 1896 was still a widely used guide.

The 1918 U. S. medical climate demonstrated a lower acceptance of scientific principles than Western Europe. The momentum created by years of unregulated quackery, patent medicines, unpleasant treatment, poor outcomes, distrust of "aristocratic" physicians, religiosity, and persistent dogma was difficult to overcome.

(See CALOMEL on Page 3)



Garland Landmark Society Photos.

Handley Drug Store (red star) c. 1926, on west side of the Square. It is now the location of Generator coffee shop.

Calomel, commonly prescribed, was ineffective

(Continued from Page One)

In a 1995 *Dallas Morning News* article, Michael Hayslip (now president of Garland Landmark Society) wrote that doctors in 1918 often prescribed calomel for Garland residents suffering from influenza.

In the early 20th Century, calomel (Mercury[I] chloride), a powerful purgative, was still wholesaled to Garland pharmacies for about \$2 per pound. A leftover treatment from mostly worthless, often dangerous, and usually unpleasant attempts to “balance the humors,” a philosophy called “heroic medicine,” calomel had no therapeutic benefits for flu or the respiratory distress it produced.

Calomel, once called *panacea mecurialis* was used for almost every known illness, including treatment for syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases, where it had a minor therapeutic effect. It was common in teething powders, responsible for numerous infant deaths from the “pink disease” and mercury poisoning it produced.

According to the National Association of Retail Druggists, only three Garland druggists had registered pharmacists in 1915: Handley Drugs (Peter Handley), Weir’s Drugs (S. R. Weir), and the Rexall pharmacy (M. L. Zacha). Armstrong Drug Co. (a Penslar pharmacy), Payne’s Drugs, and Gully’s Drugs did not.

Unfortunately, numbers of pharmacies or registered pharmacists made no real difference to Garland influenza sufferers in 1918. The calomel they dispensed was toxic and

ineffective, assumed to work only by anecdote and dogma.

Along with calomel, Garland pharmacies in 1918 carried homeopathic “remedies.” Homeopathy, invented in 1796, is a philosophy of “healing” arising from a belief that “like cures like.” To confront a disease or symptom, a homeopath concocts a highly diluted remedy from some substance that might cause a “like”

symptom. The dilution is so extreme that the remedy could not have a single molecule of the “active” substance left in it. Homeopaths contend that the more extreme dilutions are the “most powerful,” and, in a violation of the laws of physics, the water “remembers” the original substance diluted out.

Homeopathy began in a time of medical ignorance and was sometimes utilized by mainstream medical practitioners. It enjoyed a certain

patient acceptance only because it did not produce the physical unpleasantness of the equally ineffective “heroic medicine.”

Homeopathy was worthless and unscientific quackery, dangerous to those who believed that a remedy with nothing in it could treat disease. It still exists, imaginary therapy outliving the “heroic medicine” that spawned it.

Dr. James Barnes, a Garland periodontist, is a member of the Garland Landmark Society.



Garland Landmark Society

This large, ornate cash register, on permanent exhibit at the Depot Museum, was once the pride of Handley’s Drugs.

Garland Landmark Society

P.O. Box 462232 (Mail)

Garland TX 75046-2232

303 N. Sixth Street

Garland TX 75040

www.garlandhistorical.org

President: Michael Hayslip

hayslip@onlinetoday.com

Vice President (Development/Museum Affairs)

John Swanson

jlswany@hotmail.com

Secretary-Treasurer

Janice Black

jfblack@yahoo.com

Vice President (Membership)

Bill Dickson

edickson@sbcglobal.net

Curator

Claude Doane

claude.Doane@hcahealthcare.com

Directors

Bob Compton (Editor, ON TRACK), Jay Jones, Larry Kriv, Joann Nelson, Pete Nelson

Chuck Cabaniss (emeritus)

Wylene Taft (emeritus)



Garland Landmark Society

P.O. Box 462232

Garland TX 75046