

# **“Boy Scouts of America Community Service During the 1918 Flu Epidemic”**

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**Scouts Deliver Baskets to Flu Victims**

## **ABSTRACT**

The Boy Scouts of America, modeled after the birth of Scouting in Britain in 1908 by Lord Baden-Powell, was established 1910. The founders were Baden-Powell, Ernest Thompson Seton, and Dan Beard. Within eight short years of its founding, American Scouts were performing important community service during World War I and the deadly Spanish Flu Pandemic that ravaged the world for two long years. By 1919-1920, the Great War to end all wars was over, the Spanish Flu was rapidly disappearing, and millions worldwide were dead. More U.S. soldiers died from the flu than were killed in the World War. Thousands of American families lost loved ones, younger ones more than the older ones. Community leadership and public health entities were slow to react but once it was clear that there was a “monster” on the loose, mandated public and community action began to take effect to slow the spread of the deadly flu virus. The Boy Scouts of America were enlisted to help with public health communications, deliver meals to home-bound flu patients, assist local police in preventing people from coughing and spitting on public streets, passing out public health flyers and information, serving on ambulance crews, posting quarantine notifications, and assisting with burial of dead flu victims. Some Scouts lost their lives to the fast-acting virus in serving their community during the epidemic. This thesis chronicles examples of Scouting community service in support of local leadership, public health, medical, and law enforcement efforts during the devastating Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918-1920 in the United States. A brief comparison of the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918 and the current COVID-19 Pandemic is provided in the conclusions and discussion chapter of this thesis. Future analysis of Scouting community service and how Scouts BSA units and councils weathered the COVID-10 Pandemic is needed. New epidemics and pandemics may again call on Scouting to serve communities in the battle for public health and recovery.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction and Background

#### Boy Scouts of America 1910 to 1919

Modeled on the Boy Scout Association established by Baden-Powell in 1908, the Boy Scouts of America was founded (incorporated) with a Congressional Charter on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1910 and grew rapidly to become the largest youth organization in the United States. In 1915, James E. West helped William D. Boyce with competing visions for Scouting along with Daniel Carter Beard and Ernest Thompson Seton. The National Council was formed in the fall of 1910 with Colin H. Livingston as the national president, Seton as Chief Scout, and Beard, Bomus, and Verbeck as National Scout Commissioners. A new BSA office was established at 200 Fifth Avenue in New York in January 1911. That same year, former President Theodore Roosevelt was appointed as honorary Vice President of the Boy Scouts of America. On June 19, 1916, President Wilson signed a bill incorporating the Boy Scouts of America, protecting the movement from exploitation and unauthorized use of the name and emblems.



**Scouting's Founders: Baden-Powell (seated) Seton (left), and Dan (Uncle Dan) Beard (right).**

In June 1917, the Boy Scouts begin to contribute to the war effort and by April 1918 the Scouts were promoting the sale of war bonds. As the Spanish Flu began to ravage the country beginning in 1918, Boy Scouts continued to serve the war effort as well as providing community service in many locations to help fight the flu epidemic. At the Annual Conference for Boy Scouts of America, meritorious work merit badges were awarded to 30 Scouts, and four gold medals to the parents of Scouts who lost their lives in efforts to save others. The Boy Scouts were recognized at the event for obtaining 1,856,906 Liberty Loan subscriptions totaling \$276,095.000. By the early 1920s there were close to 400,000 registered Scouts in the United States (Library of Congress, Research Guides, "Boy Scouts of America 1910-1922"); This Day in History, History Channel, "January 24, 1908, Boy Scouts Movement Begins"; and U.S. Scouting Service Project, "Federal Charter Excerpts" updated May 2, 2013).

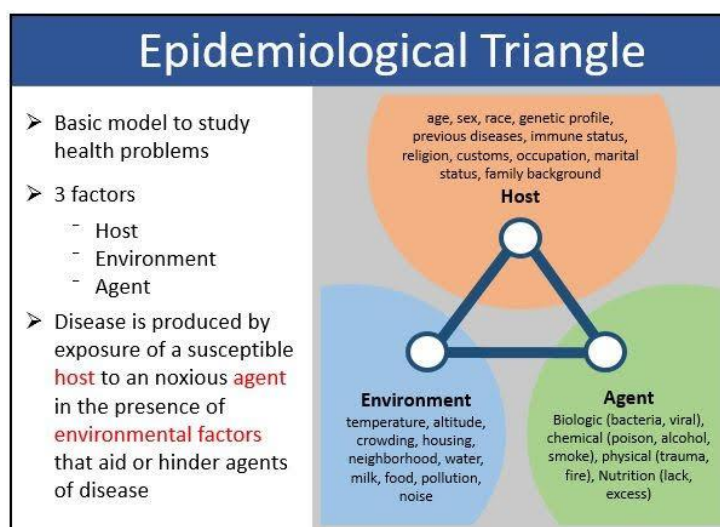


**Troop 1 of Pawhuska, OK, posed for a photo in 1909.  
The troop was formed eight months before the founding of the BSA.**

## Epidemiology and Epidemics

The word epidemiology comes from the Greek words, *epi*, meaning on or upon, *demos*, meaning people, and *logos*, meaning the study of. In other words, the word epidemiology has its roots in the study of what befalls a population. There are many ways to define epidemiology but the following definition hits upon all the basic underlying principles and public intent of epidemiology:

*Epidemiology is the study of distributions and determinants of health-related states or events in specified populations, and the application of this study to the control of health problems* (Last, J.M. Dictionary of Epidemiology. 4<sup>th</sup> ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. P.61.)

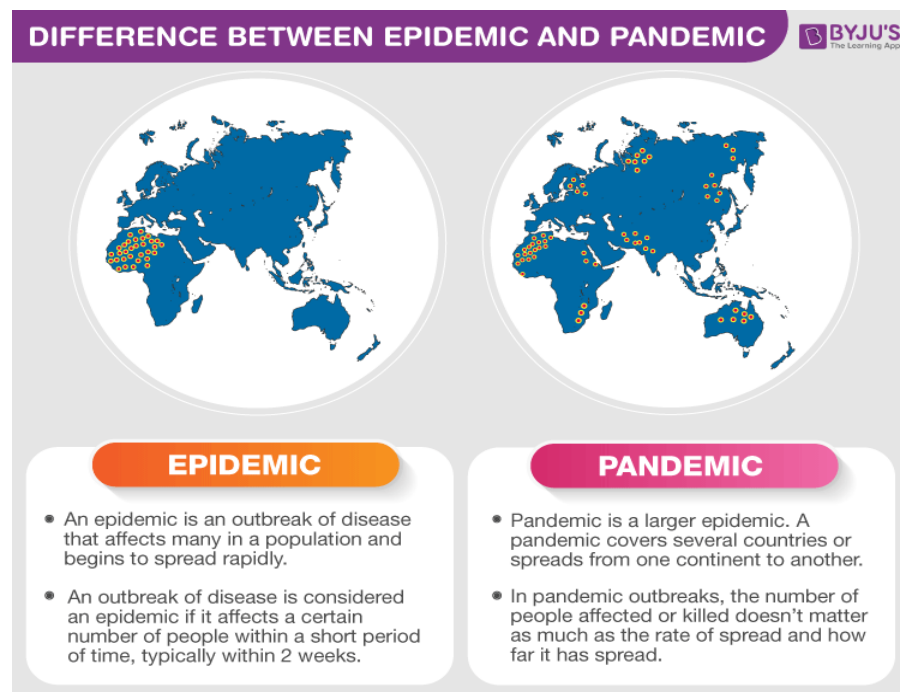


**What is Epidemiology?**

Epidemiology is a scientific discipline that uses scientific inquiry in a systematic, un-biased approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to answer specific research questions and hypotheses. A main goal of epidemiology is to determine if the incidence of a disease or condition differs significantly from what might normally be expected. Epidemiology uses constructs and methods from other scientific disciplines such as biostatistics, informatics, biology, medicine, mathematics, geography, biochemistry, economics, physics, ergonomics, and the social and behavioral sciences.

Epidemiology is the basic science of public health that uses frequency and pattern analysis to characterize health events by time, place, and person to identify the determinants of causal associations of disease occurrences in individuals and populations. The desired outcomes of epidemiological research are to help control disease and health problems in populations of humans and animals. Epidemiology is both theoretical and practical in public health (Greenwood, M. Epidemics, and crowd diseases: an introduction to the study of epidemiology. Oxford University Press, 1935).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines pandemics, epidemics, and endemics based on the disease rate of spread or the velocity of disease spread. Therefore, the difference between an epidemic and a pandemic is not in terms of severity but in terms of how far the disease spreads. Pandemics cut across international boundaries, whereas epidemics are regional. The large scale and spread of a pandemic cause significant social disruption, economics losses, and general hardship on whole populations. Epidemics can progress to become pandemics. Epidemics are more predictable in terms of spread and control whereas pandemics are international, more unpredictable, and out of control.



**How Epidemics Differ from Pandemics**



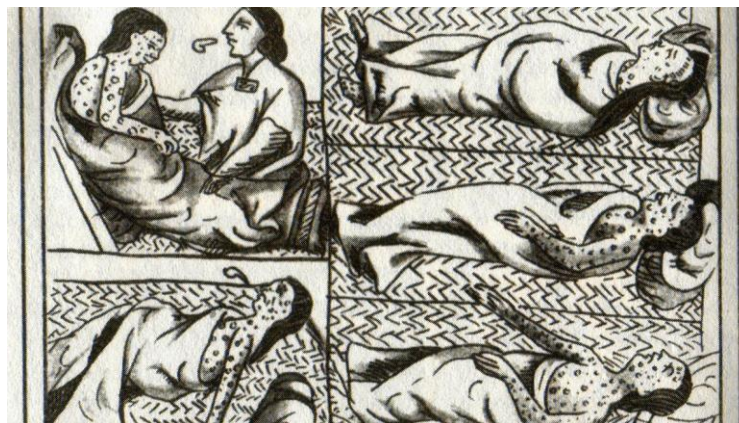
### Past and Current Pandemics

The Black Death (1346-1353) resulted in 25 million deaths worldwide caused by a pathogen *Yersinia pestis*.



**Black Death**

American Plagues (16<sup>th</sup> Century) was a cluster of Eurasian diseases brought to the Americas by European explorers of which smallpox was one of the chief illnesses killing off an estimated 90 percent of the indigenous peoples.



**How Smallpox Devastated the Aztecs**

The Flu Pandemic (1889-1900) was caused by new transportation routes in the United States allowing flu to spread more rapidly and widely. Within a few short months the flu outbreak was global.

Spanish Flu (1918-1920) was a massive outbreak called the Spanish Flu that began immediately following World War I that lasted two years and killed 50 million people.

The Asian Flu (1957-1958) a blend of avian viruses began in China and eventually claimed 1.1 million lives worldwide of which 116,000 were in the United States.



**1950's Public Health Bulletin**

AIDS Pandemic and Epidemic (1981-present) caused by an HIV virus that likely evolved from chimpanzees and transferred to humans in West Africa in the 1920's. The disease spread around the world with no known cure, but in the 1990s medications were developed to allow infected individuals to live a normal life with regular treatment and monitoring.



**The AIDS Pandemic**

The current COVID-19 Pandemic emerged in 2020 and rapidly spread globally causing millions of deaths. RNA vaccines developed on a rapid scale are now available for protection. Variants are emerging that could challenge the protection of the current vaccines. Resistance to vaccination remains an important problem in the United States, while vaccine non-availability remains a problem in the large populations of in some underdeveloped countries (Public Health Education, Global Health, Infectious Disease. February 19, 2021).

#### The Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 and World War I

The Spanish flu pandemic infected approximately 500 million people globally or about one third of the total world population at that time. It killed an estimated 50 million people of which 675,000 were Americans. The flu was first recorded in Europe, the U.S., and other parts of Asia before engulfing the rest of the world. There were no drugs or vaccines that could be used against flu at that time. People were ordered to wear masks; and schools, theatres, and places of business were closed. Bodies piled up and temporary morgues were used before the flu's end.



Flu is highly contagious, and the respiratory aerosol is spread from one person to the next when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or sings. Anyone near the infected person inhales the virus may become infected. In addition to aerosol transmission, flu virus can be picked up from surfaces a person touches, it then enters the body when that same person touches his or her mouth, eyes, or nose. Flu outbreaks occur every year and vary in severity and timing. Flu viruses can mutate rapidly making it difficult to predict what type of vaccine will be effective during the annual flu season.

The first wave of the Spanish flu pandemic occurred in the spring of 1918 and at first was generally mild in symptoms and severity. Infected persons exhibited typical flu symptoms like chills, fever, and fatigue. Recovery was usually in several days and reported deaths very low. A second extremely contagious wave of the Spanish flu began to appear in the fall of 1918 and spread rapidly. This time, flu victims became symptomatic and, within a few hours or several days, died. Their skin turned blue, their lungs rapidly filled with fluid and essentially, they drowned or suffocated to death. In just one year, 1918, the average life expectancy in America dropped by 12 years.

The exact strain of flu that caused the Spanish flu pandemic is not known nor is where it came from; but it was first reported in Europe, America, and some areas of Asia, then spread to every area worldwide in a few short months. The flu strain was hardest on young people, and at that time servicemen from World War I were hit hard. More U.S. soldiers died of the Spanish flu than were killed in the war. Crowded ships and trains packed with soldiers and sailors were fast breeding grounds for the killer flu. President Woodrow Wilson contracted the flu in early 1919 as he was negotiating the Treaty of Versailles and the end of World War I. After World War I there was a shortage of doctors and other health care professional available to help treat flu patients. Many came down with the flu and some died. Hospitals were overloaded with flu patients, and in some locations schools and private homes were used to house and treat flu patients. Masks, quarantines, public place closures, library book lending stopped, and the banning of spitting were the basic public health and community government mandates to help stem the tide of the deadly disease. During the pandemic, the New York Times reported that Boy Scouts in New York City approached people on the street they had seen spitting and gave them cards that read: "You are in violation of the Sanitary Code."



**Spitting in Public Banned in New York City**

Physicians advised flu patients to take up to 30 grams of aspirin daily to alleviate symptoms which resulted in many deaths from aspirin toxicity (today we know doses above 4 grams per day are unsafe). Symptoms of aspirin poisoning include hyperventilation and pulmonary edema or the build up of fluid in the lungs. It

is now believed that many of the October 1918 flu deaths were caused, or at least hastened by, aspirin poisoning.

The Spanish flu devastated many families, leaving behind countless widows and orphans in its deadly wake. Funeral parlors and morgues were totally overwhelmed. Bodies piled up everywhere and some families had to dig graves for their own family members. The flu devastated the economy in the United States. Mail delivery and garbage collection was greatly hindered due to workers stricken with the flu and unable to work. In some rural areas, there were not enough farmers to do the harvesting. State and local health departments even closed for lack of public health employees, and this hindered the ability of these agencies to track the flu epidemic, communicate public health information and to respond to the public's many questions and their needs (History Channel "Spanish Flu", History.com editors; updated May 14, 2020; "The Spanish Flu Outbreak: The Enemy Within", April 2006 by Christine M. Kreiser; and "1918 Pandemic Influenza Historic Timeline". Center for Disease Control-CDC, March 20, 2018).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Problem Statement and Approach**

- The focus of this thesis project was to find out what kinds of community activities and service the Boy Scouts of America did related to the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918 in the United States.
- The approach to this problem was investigative information gathering aimed at producing a descriptive summary of the information found.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methods**

#### Research Design

This Doctor of Commissioner Science thesis used the descriptive research method at an elementary level to chronicle the topic of inquiry. The main activity with this method was to locate and collect information readily available in public and research data bases that describes what the Boy Scouts did in terms of community service during the 1918-1919 Spanish Flu Epidemic in the United States. Then, using the information found, provide a simple summary of Scouting community service activities and experiences during the flu epidemic primarily by city or geographic region.

#### Objectives

1. Locate databases and search engine tools that can be used to find descriptions and information on Boy Scout Spanish Flu Epidemic related community service during the period of 1918 to 1920 in the United States.

2. Collect and review all articles identified from the database searches, separate, and highlight those articles and information sources that describe Boy Scout Spanish Flu Epidemic related activities and experiences.
3. Carefully read pertinent articles and sources and summarize the information in the main body of the thesis in an organized sequence.
4. Provide an overall summary of the information found in the discussion section at the end of the thesis with some basic comparisons to the present COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

#### Information Search and Retrieval

On-line information searches were conducted using Google Search, the University of Nebraska College of Engineering Reference Library on-line search engines, and the on-line search resources of Love Memorial Library, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Reference librarian assistance was obtained from Mr. Ted Naylor, Head Reference Librarian, College of Engineering, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Dr. Elizabeth M. Lorang, Interim Associate Dean and Associate Professor & Humanities Librarian, Love Memorial Library, University of Nebraska Libraries, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Results**

#### Boy Scouts of America and Spanish Flu Epidemic Community Service Examples

##### ***(1) New York City Flu Outbreak, Scouting Community Service and Assistance to the Police***

At the time of the Spanish Flu Epidemic Scouting was only 8 years old and the New York Times reported that Boy Scouts in New York City approached people they had seen spitting on the street and gave them cards reading “You are in violation of the Sanitary Code.” This is a common example of how the Boy Scouts in New York City responded to the flu epidemic crisis (Troop 242, June 2020).



**Young Flu Victims, New York City, 1918**

The 1918 flu virus literally traveled around the world moving from one person to the next via coughs and sneezes leaving in its wake 50 to 100 million bodies in a relatively short period of time. Some still debate whether New York city botched the 1918 Flu Epidemic, and the debate continues to this very day even during a world-wide COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, the current COVID-19 pandemic killed more people in one year than AIDS killed in 40 years. Notwithstanding, there were 33,000 flu deaths in New York City and this mortality count has for many years been considered a relative success in battling the epidemic. New York City's mortality rate was 4.5 per thousand and the lowest of the large cities on the east coast, and surprisingly on the low end nationwide. For comparison, Boston's mortality rate was 6.5 per thousand and Philadelphia 7.3 per thousand.



**Children Gargling**

Royal S. Copeland, then the president of New York City's Board of Health underplayed the seriousness of the flu outbreak even though violently ill patients were entering hospitals at an increasing rate. His initial statement to the public was: "There is no cause for alarm." In the end, Copland was credited with many innovations that helped slow the velocity of the flu virus. One innovation was a public information campaign that interspersed health tips through movie house newsreels in addition to posters hung around town that read: "Spit Spreads Death." The Boy Scouts at that time without hesitation came up to people on the street who were coughing and gave them cards that read: "Stop! You're in violation of the sanitary code" (WYNC News, J. O'Grady, September 2018; and S. Dominus, April 2018).



**Royal S. Copeland**

In New York City, schools were not closed nor were movie theatres. Many temporary hospitals were set up and quickly filled. Large numbers of healthcare professionals were mobilized along an elaborate system of quarantine. Staggered schedules for opening businesses were common to reduce subway rush hour crowds. The police ticketed and fined New Yorkers who were not covering their mouths when coughing on city streets. While the cops ticketed and fined people, the Boy Scouts handed out cards stating that spitting and coughing endangered the health and lives of their fellow citizens. Police action was punitive, Boy Scout action was informative (B. Yakas, March-April 2019).



**Board of Health Notice, NYC**

The Upper Westside of New York City, in the Bloomingdale neighborhood, local life was greatly impacted by the 1918 epidemic, even affecting the jump rope rhymes the children of Bloomingdale chanted at play, "*I had a little bird, its name was Enza, I opened the window, and in-flu-enza.*" Public health information and enforcement actions increased in the Bloomingdale neighborhood. The City's anti-spitting campaign from 20 years before the 1918 flu epidemic was quickly brought forward and enforced by the local police. Neighborhood Boy Scouts became involved handing out cards to people on the street and in public places when they saw spitting, to remind the public that spitting was illegal. Local newspapers printed case notices of spitting arrests and the fines imposed (S. Embree, March-April 2019, Upper Westside History).





Public Health Placard, NYC

**Sources:**

1. "Quarantine Post #4" – Troop 242 (June 18, 24, 2020).
2. "Did New York City Botch the 1918 Flu Epidemic? The Debate Still Rages." (WYNC News, September 13, 2018, by Jim O'Grady).
3. "In the 1918 Flu Outbreak, a Cool Head Prevailed." (The New York Times, April 30, 2009, by Susan Dominus).
4. "Cops Ticketed New Yorkers for Not Covering Coughs During Past Epidemic." (Arts & Entertainment, March 5, 2020, by Ben Yakas).
5. "Spanish Flu in Bloomingdale: A Search for How Our Neighborhood Coped in 1918." (Upper Westside History, 2020, by S. Embree).

***(2) Scout Community Service in the Dallas, Texas Flu Epidemic***

On Wednesday, October 18, 1918, The Dallas Morning News reported that local Boy Scouts have been helping to clean up the city during the flu epidemic. Streets were flushed with water and antiseptic was sprayed in hopes of reducing the spread of the flu virus. It was hoped that his public health effort aided by the Boy Scouts would hasten the stamping out the disease, improve public sanitation, and allow for the lifting of the quarantine (The Dallas Morning News, October 18, 1918).

**Source:** "Scouts to Take Lead in Cleaning up City". (The Dallas Morning News, October 18, 1918).

***(3) Houston Texas Scout Troop Disbands in the 1918 Flu Epidemic***

In Texas, one of the oldest Boy Scout Troops is Troop 11 was originally founded in 1914 as the eleventh Scout troop in the Houston area. Troop 11 produced the first Eagle Scout in 1918 but the troop was forced

to disband after a few years as a result to the Spanish flu epidemic. The troop disbanded in reaction to the City of Houston mandate to halt public gathering. When the flu epidemic past, in 1920, Troop 11 was rechartered by First Presbyterian Church in Houston. More than a century later, during the COVID-10 pandemic, Troop 11 is more than 100 years old and conducting virtual meetings, surviving, and finding new ways to keep giving back to the community.

**Source:** “Scouts BSA Troop 11’s 100-year History Started After Pandemic”. (KTRK, Houston, Texas, May 20, 2020).

#### ***(4) The 1918 Spanish Flu Impact on Memphis, Tennessee***

The head of the Memphis Health Department confirmed on September 25, 1918, that the Spanish flu had made its way to Memphis. Only a few cases were initially recorded but by October 3, 1918, The Commercial Appeal reported “Influenza Crippling Memphis Industries”. By mid-October there were more than 20 flu fatalities and hundreds were deadly ill with the fast-moving virus. Things got worse fast. The Memphis Health Department closed schools and placed of public amusement including movie theatres, dance halls, and churches. Public announcements stated that these closings and restrictions were the only way to prevent the wave of flu spreading in the city. Closings and restrictions were not sufficient. Army sentries were posted around the area that is now the University of Memphis and only students with special passes could enter and leave the campus. All church and lodge meetings were called off. The police department installed emergency phone lines, manned by Boy Scouts, so that anyone could more easily report new cases of flu. Homes and places of residence were strictly quarantined, and warning sign posting indicated areas that were off limits to the public. Quack remedies abounded. By the third week in October 1918 there were thousands of flu cases in Memphis. The Commercial Appeal asked people to pray. The flu death toll continued to mount and there were hundreds of funeral notices. Memphis became a ghost town as the death toll climbed. It was many months and many deaths later when the Spanish flu finally showed some abatement.

**Source:** “Looking Back at the 1918 Spanish Flu’s Impact on Memphis – Part Two”. (Memphis Magazine, 2020, by Michael Finger).

#### ***(5) Granite Falls, Minnesota Flu Epidemic, and the Boy Scouts***

Spanish flu was first reported in Minnesota in late September 1918. The Minnesota Board of Public Health received an urgent telegram from Dr. H.M. Braken warning them about a serious influenza outbreak in Faribault County Wells Village. One hundred new cases were reported traced to a soldier returning from containment. By October 1, there were 42 confirmed cases reported at Fort Snelling, and other metro locations were also reporting their first infection cases. Then on October 15, 1918, the Granite Falls Tribune reported the grim news about the pandemic underway and advising people to call for medical treatment. The headlines read “200 Flu Cases in Granite Falls” with an article reporting that three physicians, Dr. Berg, Dr. Hart, and Dr. Kerns, had been taken down by the flu. Emergency action was taken by the mayor of Granite Falls closing businesses and transportation and limiting public gatherings. One of the creative steps taken by local Granite Falls officials was to issue an order for the Boy Scouts to keep

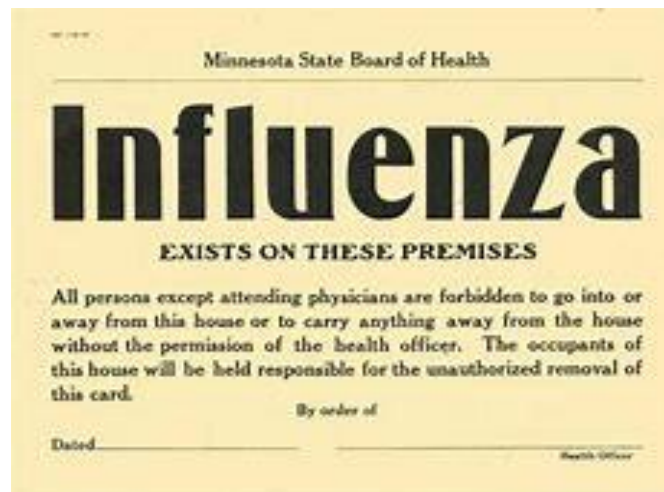
people and boys off the streets in addition to having the Scouts deliver medicine but not to enter any homes.

**Source:** “How Granite Falls Overcame the Last Global Pandemic.” (Advocate Tribune, August 27, 2020, by Kyle Klausing).

#### ***(6) Scout Community Service in Minnesota in the 1918 Flu Epidemic***

The first flu case was reported in Wells, Minnesota the last week of September 1918 brought to the community by a returning soldier coming home on leave using train travel. Train travel at that time was a very effective means of spreading the flu virus. Statewide cases quickly increased. There were high death rates in children younger than 5 years old, adults 65 years and older, with a few cases in individuals between 20 and 40 years old. Fort Snelling reported its first case on September 27, 1918, and within 10 days, 850 patients had been admitted to the infirmary. The flu epidemic peaked in the Fort Snelling area by October 15, 1918. The epidemic affected many areas in Minnesota and communities and their community life. In St. Paul, elevators of seven stories were prohibited to limit human contact. Street cars kept their window open, and the number of riders limited. Retail stores could not advertise sales and their hours were regulated. Postal carriers and the Boy Scouts delivered influenza information to homes, stores, and offices. Compliance with the information delivered was variable. The monetary loss risk was deemed by many residents to be higher than flu infection risk, and the rules and guidelines were blatantly ignored.

The situation was further exacerbated by inconsistent communication and managing the epidemic in many Minnesota cities.



**Minnesota Public Health Placard**

#### ***(7) Scout Community Service in Richmond, Virginia in the 1918 Flu Epidemic***

John (Jack) Williams was a 15-year-old boy living in Richmond, Virginia attending school there when he faced death of tragic magnitude. Williams was an outstanding student, captain of his boarding school's military training group, president of the Jackson Literary Society, and an active member of the Boy Scouts.

He was a young man of limitless possibilities and totally dedicated to service. Jack's willingness to serve his community ultimately led to his death during the 1918 flu epidemic in his community. Against his parents' wishes, Jack volunteered with his Boy Scout troop to help transport sick patients from their homes to a newly established emergency hospital located in the John Marshall High School. Jack's close contact to patients with flu proved fatal. Jack Williams came down with the flu virus on October 11, 1918, and he died just five days later October 16, 1918.

**Source:** "The 1918 Influenza Outbreak in Richmond, Virginia, USA." (Series: Influenza Epidemics, Past and Present, University of Virginia, February 13, 2020, by Meredith Christian).

**Scout Influenza Fighters Are Sticking.**  
We are glad to report at this writing that the influenza epidemic in Richmond has much abated. However, the Scouts are still on the job night and day, as they have been for nearly three weeks. Through their department has passed more than 700 ambulance patients, to say nothing of the homeward transfer of the convalescents. The Scouts have answered every call for messenger service, and have, through the courtesy of their friends with automobiles, been able to transport a great many of the nurses, and especially the night force to and from their homes.

Scouts, I wish you could hear the splendid words of praise and read the letters which reach the Scout executive relative to this service. You know what real service is. Your Scout training is standing you well.

**Miscellaneous.**  
Don't open up your troop room for meetings until Dr. Flannagan permits the schools to open.

This is a splendid time of the year for hiking, and the "Old Scout Camp" is for use.

Reports have reached the Scout office that Scout Master Smith, of Troop 64, who has been ill with influenza, is improving. Scout Master Pyper, of Troop 51, is also a convalescent.

Dr. H. C. Rucker, of the local court of honor, recently suffered a nervous breakdown, and has been sent to the country.

Dr. Paul W. Howle, of the court of honor, we are glad to state is again out after a severe attack of influenza.

Assistant Scout Master, Frank Parater, who worked for several days at the emergency hospital, as a Scout suffered a slight attack, but is rapidly improving. Scouts Hedley and Loving are both improving.

President John Stewart Bryan and Commissioner D. W. Durrett, each served a turn on the Scout ambulance last week.

Court of honor meets next Friday, November 1, 4:30 P. M.

Troops due to reregister: 1, 2, 6, 8, 14, 16, 22, 28, 29, 51 and 58.

#### **Newspaper Article Richmond, VA Scouts Drive Ambulances**

#### ***(8) Fort Worth's Great Plague of 1918***

The Fort Worth Texas of 1918 was very much not like the Fort Worth of today. Motor vehicles were a hobby novelty, and the population was just beginning to reach 100,000. Like 2020, the citizens of Fort Worth in 1918 were totally unaware of the magnitude and upheaval that was coming and the Herculean efforts that would be required to try to contain these deadly epidemics. Camp Bowie, in 1918-1919, now

the modern Arlington Heights of Fort Worth, was hit especially hard with the flu epidemic. Soldiers at that time were quartered very close together, 8 to a tent, and by September 1918 the flu was beginning its deadly sweep through North Texas. Schools, theatres, churches, and streetcars were ordered closed to help slow the flu virus.

Despite soldiers' beds being spaced 5 feet apart, the men of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division succumbed to the flu by the dozen. As a 12-year-old boy at the time, Ray Copeland recalled that he was asked to help carry bodies. Ray recalled, "I was a Boy Scout at the time, and during the middle of the flu epidemic, we helped the medics in handling bodies. It was awful." At the flu epidemic's end, it was estimated that 50 million people died from it world-wide including 675,000 Americans (Fort Worth Weekly, May 7, 2020, by Edward Brown).



**Flu Victims at Camp Bowie**



**Private Funeral of Flu Victim**

**Source:** "Fort Worth's Great Plague of 1918." (Fort Worth Weekly, May 7, 2020, by Edward Brown).



### ***(9) Boone County, Kentucky 1918 Flu Epidemic 2020 Eagle Scout Project***

Liam Collins, from Troop 717, completed his Eagle Scout preservation project in the summer of 2020 revealing hidden gravestones at a burial site believed to be from the 1918 flu epidemic. For most of the month of July, Liam and his troop diligently cut down the thick undergrowth and shrubs that completely covered the gravestones and then used a hammer and marker to mark the grave locations so that the gravestones could be more easily seen. Besides the flu epidemic victim gravestones, Liam and his troop uncovered approximately 60 additional unmarked graves. The Boone County Historical Office stated that they believed these graves to be from the 1918 Flu Epidemic. The infirmary associated with these graves sites was the county's "Poor House" and when people died with no family, they were buried at this site. This is an example during the current COVID-19 Pandemic of an Eagle Scout honoring the forgotten from the 1918 Flu Epidemic. Liam Collins said, "I feel like this was a very good mix of paying homage to the people who were laid to rest." This summer 2020's planning and hard work allowed Liam Collins to submit his project to earn his Eagle Scout rank (Spectrum News/Northern Kentucky News, August 18, 2020).

**Source:** "Aspiring Eagle Scout Honors the Forgotten." (Spectrum News/Northern Kentucky News, August 18, 2020)

### ***(10) The 1918 Flu Epidemic in Springfield Illinois***

"Springfield Now Is in Grip of Worst Epidemic in History; Seven More Die. Vigorous Campaign Is Being Conducted to Stamp Out Plague" was the headline of the October 23, 1919, edition of the Illinois State Journal. The flu epidemic spread south from military bases in the Chicago area. By October 8, 1919, 15 cases were reported in Springfield. Two weeks later, October 23, there were 2500 known cases in Springfield. Springfield's response was conservative keeping schools and other public places open and relying on infected people to voluntarily help keep the disease from spreading. This strategy did not work as new cases were ramping up at the rate of 50 per day. By October 15, movie theatres, other amusement places, public and private schools, clubs, and meeting places were ordered closed. Soon after, all churches were closed, all funeral services made private, and social gatherings of any type were prohibited. Most everyone was confined to their homes and the National Guard and Boy Scouts were called into service as messengers to deliver communications related to the epidemic on a house-to-house basis. On October 24, new cases peaked at 170 per day. The epidemic began to abate and by November the number of new cases dropped precipitously. Schools and places of business were re-opened, and everyone thought the flu epidemic concluded. A second wave of flu followed and by December Springfield was thought to be over with the flu. An exact count for Springfield is not known but it is believed that the total flu death count was approximately 400.

**Source:** "Springfield Suffered Badly in 1918 Flu Pandemic." (The Springfield State Journal-Register, January 20, 2004, by Doug Pokorski).

### ***(11) The Spanish Flu Comes to Nebraska***

In October 1918, Spanish flu reached Nebraska. Two flu deaths were reported in Red Cloud on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. The first case was reported in Omaha on October 3<sup>rd</sup> and Scottsbluff reported its first case on October 15, 2018. The state ordered all schools, churches, entertainment locations, places of public congregation, pool halls, and other places of amusement closed. Mail carriers kept working but wore white face masks and the homes of those who were sick were quarantined. The media, at that time, played down the flu epidemic informing the public there was no reason for panic. No vaccines were available, but many remedies were touted. Local druggists were requested to conserve their stocks of Vick's VapoRub for use in areas with flu outbreaks. The Kearney Hub touted the curative powers of Tanlac, a patent medicine. There were accounts of a 36-proof mixture of wine, glycerin, and bitter herbs put down as fakery by the American Medical Association. The Hub also ran ads for "Hills Cascara Quinine" that could prevent and cure the flu at the first sign of a shiver or sneeze. It was advised, to stay healthy, citizens should take regular walks, walk home from work, and eat plenty of porridge.

The flu was relatively non-lethal in the beginning but became more deadly over time. Almost one quarter of the 103 million Americans eventually contracted it, and two out of three patients died. Life expectancy in the U.S. dropped by 12 years in a very short period. The disease was most lethal for those between 20 and 40 years of age due the flu's ability to over stimulate the immune systems of young bodies. The stronger the immune system, the bigger the disease risk.

Life nearly stopped in many locations. The University of Nebraska in Lincoln suspended classes from September 1918 until Thanksgiving. Information about the flu epidemic during this period is scant. World War I was still going on and some commentators at the time accused the government of lying to its citizens about the virility and impact of the flu. Current researchers believe that the lack of accurate information access prolonged the flu epidemic.

The State of Nebraska ordered a statewide quarantine from October 22, 2018, to November 2, 1918. No new cases or deaths were reported in Kearney by October 26 and the Kearney Hub reported that "The Spanish influenza is well under control now in Kearney." However, the Nebraska State Board of Health reported new cases on October 28 and by October 30, Kearney reported four new cases. Public schools in the area alternately opened and closed with the ebb and flow of the flu cases. The Kearney Hub reported on December 12, that Dr. Woods Hutchinson stated, "The closing of all public places is a relic of barbarism and has no value whatever." Dr. C.K. Gibbons, a physician, believed that fear caused more deaths than the disease. In surrounding towns, cases and deaths continue to rise into the spring of 1919 when the disease moved on and things began to return to normal.

Larry Hardesty, a Kearny Rotary Club member, and retired dean of the library at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, wrote about the Spanish Flu Epidemic and other topics when the local Rotary celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019. A report stated that 2,087 Nebraskans had died from the flu by December 17, 1918. However, many rural Nebraska deaths likely went unreported. Other reports indicated that 7,500 Nebraskans had died from the flu. One doctor at the time estimated that there were 3,000 flu deaths in Buffalo County. Buffalo County's population at the time was almost 24,000; with 8,000 living in Kearney. Spanish flu was more virulent in young people under 40 and the death notices in local newspapers at the time indicated this demographic pattern of mortality. Flu victims included Frances Ellen Avery, age 8, the oldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Avery of Ravenna, and William Myley Eaton 16, of Pleasanton, Nebraska. The Ravenna News reported that young William's ("Willy's") funeral was held in the Eaton yard

because the family was in quarantine. The Kearney Hub did a full-page coverage of the funeral of Horatio Hendryx, aged 19. The funeral included the Kearney City Band, the Gibbon Home Guards, and the Kearney Boy Scouts, and others who escorted his body from his home to St. Luke's Episcopal Church. The article reported, "It was impossible to accommodate all who came to pay respects (with) hundreds turned away.



**Masked Men Posing in Shelby, NE During the Spanish Flu Epidemic on December 8, 1918.**

**Source:** "Local historian: Coronavirus parallels Spanish Flu." (Kearney Hub, April 4, 2020, by Mary Jane Skala).

### ***(12) Scouts Distribute Influenza Literature in Salt Lake City, UT***

More than 15,000 influenza health pamphlets were distributed by Scouts in various wards and stakes in Salt Lake City as reported by The Desert News on October 21, 1918. The effort was under the direction of various ward and stake scoutmasters with the city divided up into four districts. All Scouts wore masks to avoid the flu contagion during the distribution project. The health pamphlet project was in addition to previous and current efforts to help with the World War I Liberty Loan Drive. In all efforts, Scouts were reported to have performed admirably.

The Desert News reported on December 7, 1918, that Scouts would oversee the War Savings Campaign in the Burlington Ward under the direction of T.S. Green who reported three junior assistant scoutmasters to assist in managing the effort. All Scouts were required to wear flu masks as a disease protection measure.

The City Commissioner of Salt Lake City had 10,000 influenza pamphlets printed for the city health department for public and Dr. S. G. Paul (in Chicago at that time attending a health convention) distribution as reported by the Desert News, December 13, 1918. Local Boy Scouts supervised by Dr. John H. Taylor, Scout Commissioner, distributed these pamphlets over a two-day period. Each troop was assigned a particular district, and each stake and ward troop with scout troops of W. D. Heisier will ensure that no home is left out of the pamphlet distribution. Scouts received instructions at the Commercial Club before they were sent out into the city's districts and neighborhoods.

## Sources:

1. "Health Pamphlets Delivered by Scouts." (The Desert News, October 21, 1918).
2. "Boy Scouts in Charge." (The Desert News, December 7, 1918).
3. "Scouts to Distribute Influenza Literature." (The Desert News, December 13, 1918).

### ***(13) Scout Press Topeka, KS, and St. Paul, MN in 1919***

In 1919, the Boy Scouts in Topeka Kansas were designated to be Junior Health Officers working with the City Public Health Department. Scouts were required read and sign a service pledge that stated, *"In assuming the duties in the Topeka Health Service, I agree to hold myself responsible for the distribution of all notices and literature in my district requested by the commissioner of health. I further agree to gather any information that may be desired and to report on the health and sanitary situation in my district when asked to do so. I agree to assist the Topeka health department in every way I can, with the understanding that I will not be called upon to perform any duty that will interfere with my schoolwork or endanger my health."*

In this same year, Boy Scouts in St. Paul, Minnesota became part of the city health inspection force as planned by Dr. B.F. Simon, Chief City Health Officer. The Scouts were required to report any violation of the city health ordinances to the health officer followed by an immediate investigation by the regular health department inspection.

**Source:** "Topeka and St. Paul Scouts to Chase Dirt." (Scouting, National Headquarters of the Boy Scouts of America, New York, March 13, 1919, Vol. VII.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

More than 100 articles from various types of publications were reviewed to this thesis to identify information and anecdotes about what the Boy Scouts did for community service related directly to the Spanish Flu epidemic in the United States. Of all the many articles reviewed, there were 13 individual descriptions of flu epidemic community service performed by the Scouts in their home communities. Some articles were duplicate descriptions. Most articles came from local newspapers and community type publications. A few came from Scouting publications and in most cases the information about Scouts and the flu epidemic was very brief often couched in the description of various aspects of the epidemic and how the deadly disease spread through communities and its terrible impacts on human life and human activity.

A numbered summary of the 1918 Spanish flu community activities performed by the Boy Scouts is provided here as a conclusion to this thesis.

## Conclusion Summary

1. In New York City, Scouts approached people in the street and handed them cards stating that spitting and uncovered coughing on public street violated the sanitation law. Only the local police could ticket people for the sanitation law violations.
2. Local Scout troops in Dallas Texas helped public authorities clean up the city during the epidemic. This involved flushing the streets and sidewalks with water and spraying antiseptic.
3. Memphis Tennessee Scouts assisted local police by manning emergency phones and other types of communication and messaging to help track and report flu cases.
4. In Granite Falls Minnesota local Scouts helped officials keep people and boys off the streets and to deliver medications to the home of flu victims. Scouts were not allowed to enter the houses of flu victims and families.
5. St. Paul Minnesota Scouts delivered flu information to homes, stores, and offices. This included public health compliance measures and recommendations.
6. A highly motivated self-less 15-year-old Scout in Richmond Virginia volunteered against his parents' wishes to help transport sick patients from their homes to emergency hospitals lost his life to the flu and was honored by his community as a hero.
7. A 12-year-old Scout in Fort Worth Texas Scout recalled helping Army medics haul dead flu victims' bodies to the morgue at the height of the flu outbreak.
8. Boone County Kentucky Scouts, during the current COVID-19 pandemic participated in an Eagle Scout Project that expended many manhours removing overgrowth brush from a forgotten graveyard that contained hundreds of flu victim graves previously unidentified. The graves were associated with a local "poor house" infirmary at the time of the flu epidemic. This project honored those flu victims who were lost at that time and allowed the Life Scout to earn his Eagle rank.
9. In Springfield Illinois, Scouts were called on to deliver flu-related communications house-to-house in many neighborhoods.
10. Ravenna and Kearney Nebraska Scouts helped conduct and attend flu victims' funerals to support their families and the community.
11. In Salt Lake City Utah, local Scout troop distributed more than 15,000 flu health pamphlets in various wards and stakes. The Scouts wore masks and the public health information distribution coincided with the Scouts' World War I Liberty Loan Drive. Top performance was achieved by the Scouts earning the recognition of their community.
12. Topeka Kansas and St. Paul Minnesota Scouts were designated Junior Public Health Officers during the flu epidemic to assist local public health officials to fight the disease. All Scouts participating were required to read and sign a strict pledge of behavior, service, and personal health protection.

## Discussion

- During this time, one cannot avoid attempting to compare the similarities and differences between the current COVID-19 Pandemic of 2019-2021 and the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918-1920. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to describe and analyze what Scouts did and are doing now to assist their communities with the COVID-19 pandemic. This topic remains for future investigation and analysis and maybe it will be a Doctor of Commissioner Science thesis some years from now.



- The World Health Organization (WHO) has offered some similarities and differences between the COVID-19 Pandemic and the influenza virus. The following points are made in summarizing similarities and differences (“Corona Virus Disease, COVID-19 Similarities and Differences” from the World Health Organization, International Emergencies, Novel Corona Virus, 2019 Newsletter).
- COVID-19 and the influenza virus are both viruses that are similar diseases with similar presentations. Both cause respiratory disease with a wide range of symptoms from mild to severe, with severe cases resulting in death.
- Both diseases are spread by respiratory droplets and fomites. Therefore, simple public health measures of frequent handwashing, respiratory etiquette, social distancing, and masking are effective in preventing and controlling infection spread.
- Speed of transmission differences are evident between the two viruses. Spanish flu has a shorter median incubation period compared to COVID-19. Influenza spreads faster by 4 to 5 days.
- The reproductive number i.e., the number of secondary infections generated from one infected individual is 2 to 2.5 for COVID-19 virus and much higher for influenza virus. This is a currently incomplete comparison and not well understood.
- While children are important vectors for flu virus, COVID-19 has a much lower effect on children compared to adults, with clinical cases lower in the 0-19 age group and adults more likely to infect children than the other way around.
- The range of symptoms between the two viruses is similar but the fraction of severe cases appears to be different. For COVID-19, current research indicates that 80% of cases are mild or asymptomatic, 15% are severe infections requiring oxygen therapy, and 5% are critical infections required full ventilation. These severity fractions and critical infection are higher than observed with influenza.
- Most at risk for influenza severe infection are children, young adults, pregnant women, and the elderly (with underlying chronic health conditions). For COVID-19, older age and underlying health conditions increase risk for severe infection and death.
- Mortality for COVID-19 appears higher than influenza. Crude mortality for COVID-19 appears to be approximately 3-4% and for seasonal flu well below 0.1%

### Final Observations

This thesis chronicled examples of Scouting community service in support of local leadership, public health, medical, and law enforcement efforts during the devastating Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918-1920 in the United States. The investigation and writing of this thesis occurred during the COVID-19 Pandemic that caused and is causing tragic levels of human suffering, death, and economic and social impacts world-wide. While several vaccines are currently available for preventing the disease, the battle is not over yet and there will be many more deaths before the tide is truly turned for the better.

Epidemics and pandemics will occur again in local regions as well as worldwide. We must be much better prepared in every way on a local and global basis to provide quicker analysis, rapid notification, and much faster responses to these types of virus disease threats. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected Scouting in the United States over the past two years. The COVID-19 pandemic along with the National Scouting organization declaring bankruptcy, and the on-going child abuse court settlement case, created a “perfect storm” for the Scouting Movement in the United States. Future analysis of Scouting community

service and how Scouts BSA units and councils weathered the COVID-10 Pandemic is needed. New epidemics and pandemics may again call on Scouting to serve communities in the battle for public health and recovery. Should the Public Health Merit Badge once again be a required Eagle Scout requirement? For the next epidemic or pandemic will Scouts BSA be prepared?

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Author Biographic Statement**

Terry Stentz is an Eagle Scout from Troop 16, Lincoln, Nebraska, a former Lodge Chief, and Vigil Honor Member of the Golden Sun Lodge #292 Order of the Arrow. He is active as a commissioner in the Cornhusker Council helping to manage council properties and in promoting council and troop conservation efforts. Terry is a University of Nebraska (UNL) College of Engineering and University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) College of Public Health associate professor, Vietnam War Veteran, and retired U.S. Navy Captain (O-6) happily married to Christie Hobensack of Chillicothe, Ohio.