

A look back at Blue Ash History...

The following is excerpted from a special section of the *Sycamore Messenger/News*, dated August 1978 titled "Spotlight on Blue Ash." The section included articles on recreational facilities, Blue Ash industry and industrial parks, the new Civic Center, and Blue Ash history. It was written and produced by the staff of the *Sycamore Messenger/News*, Mary Lou Rose, Editor

A Time of Settling...

At about the time in the late 1700s that John Ferris, who had accompanied Benjamin Stites on the flatboat to settle along the Ohio River at Columbia (now Cincinnati) traveled north to build a long house on land he purchased from John Cleves Symmes on what is now Kenwood Road, four families brought their families to a point west of that, the present intersection of Cooper and Plainfield Roads, each building a log cabin.



Ferris House

According to several histories written about Blue Ash, it was in 1792 that Jacob Price Thompson, Nathaniel Denman, James Ayres and James Carpenter came to that intersection, each owning a section of land purchased from John Cleves Symmes.

John Ferris did not remain in his cabin too long. He returned to the fort in Columbia for two years, but returned to build another cabin. In 1826 the handsome two-story brick house on Kenwood Road was built from bricks fired on the site and made from Blue Ash clay.

Indians not only forced John Ferris to return to the fort, but the marauding Shawnees and Miamis, attracted to the excellent springs on the south side of Cooper Road, proved so troublesome that the

four settlers at Carpenter's Run constructed a fort around their homes and had an agreement that one member of each family would stand guard each night to protect the others against the Indians.

In 1796 the Baptist Church of Columbia built the Carpenter's Run Baptist Church on the site of the location of the Plainfield School. It was built of blue ash logs in blockhouse style to keep out the Indians. The church later moved (in 1818) to establish Mt. Carmel Baptist Church at the corner of Kenwood and Kugler Mill. Buried in the graveyard which once stood beside the church are John Ferris and his wife, each with an identical gravestone.

The Carpenter's Run Baptist Church Cemetery, bisected by Plainfield Road, reveals the history of the area. Four Revolutionary War soldiers are buried there: Richard Bowen, Nicholas Johnston, Francis Nichols and Price Thompson. Thompson served with George Washington's Continental Army for more than six years. He was with Washington's army on the night of December 25, 1776 when Washington shuttled his men across the Delaware River in freezing winds, marched them nine miles to Trenton and caught the enemy asleep.

The Great Dying: Cincinnati Endures the 1918 Influenza Pandemic

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Cincinnati Curiosities, September 24, 2018.
Photos courtesy of catalog.archives.gov

With the beginning of autumn, a grim Cincinnati anniversary looms – the centennial of the influenza pandemic of 1918-19. One hundred years ago, more than 2,200 Cincinnatians died from a disease known then as “Spanish Flu.”

The pandemic did not originate in Spain, but the nickname stuck. Later research has yet to definitively pinpoint the origin of the disease, but it was particularly virulent in Allied military camps in Europe and spread to the United States as soldiers returned home with the end of World War I.

In Cincinnati, influenza, also known as The Grip, or Spanish Grip, arrived in September. The Cincinnati Post [18 September 1918], with a headline “Spanish Grip Is With Us,” sounded the alarm, but downplayed the seriousness of the situation:

“Spanish influenza, a germ disease which started a world-wide journey in Spain, has arrived in Cincinnati” it was announced by Dr. William H. Peters, acting health officer, Wednesday. Those catching it may derive consolation from the fact that the Germans have had it, too. The disease, which is more uncomfortable than serious, has affected several Cincinnatians, according to unofficial reports made to Dr. Peters by physicians.”

Within a few weeks, the deadly truth emerged. Patients suffering from influenza easily caught pneumonia and quickly died. A growing file of evidence demonstrated that infection spread rapidly from person to person. Cincinnati’s health department responded by ordering a general ban on public gatherings of all types. On Sunday, 6 October 1918, the Enquirer published orders from the Board of Health:



Influenza was carried to the US by soldiers returning from European combat in WWI. These doughboys on furlough from Camp Gordon in Georgia wore medical masks as they shopped in Cincinnati.



In the belief that fresh air fought germs, Cincinnatians joined a national movement to keep home and trolley car - windows open until November.

“Drastic measures were taken yesterday by the Cincinnati Board of Health to check the spread of influenza in Cincinnati and vicinity. By unanimous vote, the members adopted a resolution ordering the closing of all churches, schools, theaters, including motion picture theaters and public meeting places until the danger of an epidemic of the disease has passed.”

Norwood, Covington, Newport and other nearby cities soon issued similar or identical orders. This ban on public congregation lasted 38 days into November. Interestingly, the ban spared saloons, not because of any official fondness for alcoholic beverages, but because it was legally impossible to distinguish saloons from restaurants. Too many Cincinnatians took their meals outside their residences because sleeping rooms, rooming houses and most apartments had no kitchens.

Saloons, however, were ordered to sell beverages in bottles only, for off-premises consumption.

The ban landed in the middle of the final patriotic push to boost support for the war effort and to sell bonds to finance military operations.

“The order of the Board of Health prohibits indoor and outdoor meetings of all character, including liberty loan meetings and parades, liberty loan rallies, church and fraternal celebrations and meetings of all kinds scheduled during the coming week have been called off indefinitely.”

The city shut down all sporting events. The University of Cincinnati ended up playing a reduced season of only five football games because of the influenza restrictions.

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In mid-October health officer Dr. Peters himself took ill and he was temporarily replaced by his assistant, Dr. Oscar Craven, who continued to issue restrictive orders. Craven cracked down on crowded hotel lobbies and saloons that allowed customers to quaff on-site.

The military training camp on UC's campus spent most of the autumn in quarantine because of a suspicion – proven to be accurate – that troop movements accelerated the dispersion of influenza and pneumonia. Just outside Chillicothe, Camp Sherman recorded extremely high mortality rates and may have had the worst casualty rate among all United States Army camps. By spring 1919, Camp Sherman recorded nearly 1,200 influenza deaths.



Although this Cincinnati barber's business was permitted to open during the quarantine, he and his partner wore masks to protect themselves.

In Cincinnati, firefighters suffered more than almost any profession. Confined to enclosed spaces under stressful conditions, they contracted the disease in greater numbers, spread it among their co-workers and – most dangerously – carried infection home at the end of their shifts. The Enquirer [5 November 1918] tallied the casualties:

“Influenza has played havoc with the Fire Department, according to Fire Chief [Barney] Houston. Eight members of the department have died of influenza and 139 have been stricken with the disease, according to his records. He said more than 100 fireman were off duty yesterday because of illness, necessitating the temporary abandonment of two companies, Fire Company No. 44 and Water Tower No. 2, Seventh and Sycamore streets. “When the ban on gatherings was partially lifted and children returned to school, another wave of illness and death washed over the city. Businesses protested restrictions such as ordering all retail establishments to close by 4:30 p.m. Shopkeepers noted that restricted sales hours led to greater congestion on the street cars, negating any sanitary impact. At one point, the health department considered a citywide quarantine, closing every factory, office and store in town, but relented under intense public pressure.

By February 1919, the Cincinnati Post reported that more than 80,000 Cincinnatians had contracted influenza and that 1,400 children had lost one or both parents because of the disease. The awful tally continued to grow. The Cincinnati Post [7 March 1919] listed new federal data for the period 11 September 1918 to 1 March 1919:

“The figures show Cincinnati had 2,263 deaths from influenza and pneumonia in that time, with a rate of 5.4 per thousand.”

As spring arrived, the worst of the epidemic had passed and the death rate plummeted but so many Cincinnatians suffered from the lingering effects of lung infection that 13 public health stations opened in

May 1919 to deal with residual complications, including increased susceptibility to tuberculosis.

The epidemic was devastating in Cincinnati, but it was much worse elsewhere. Worldwide, somewhere between 50 million and 100 million people, or 3 to 5 percent of the world population, died. Mortality in the United States was between 500,000 to 650,000.

Hunt House Update

From the Blue Ash Public Works director:

“The engineer feels that the repairs can be completed primarily with wood, making them easier to build. This is a unique structure and doesn't follow the conventional construction design requirements.

They hope to have this bid out early next year and complete it for the spring of 2021.”

We can only hope...