

FLU EPIDEMIC OF 1918

Of special interest is the influenza epidemic at the end of World War I which was serious in Chelmsford but much less so than in some other communities. It was in 1918 that the influenza epidemic took such a heavy toll of lives. Mr. Moore, as chairman of the Board of Health, wrote:

"Chelmsford did not escape the terrible epidemic of influenza and pneumonia which prevailed throughout the country in the last half of the year 1918.

"There were approximately 950 cases reported in this town from September 1st to December 31st and of this number there were 25 deaths from pneumonia and one from influenza.

"The Health Department received the hearty co-operation of all the churches of the Town and the Board of Education in getting the epidemic under control. At this writing (January, 1919) there are many cases in Town, but of a milder type."

Dr. Scoboria's report for Precinct's 1 and 4 (1918) listed six cases of lobar pneumonia and 652 cases of influenza. He noted that "For Liberty Measles, Measles and Influenza, these figures represent only a part of the actual cases."

Dr. Varney, reporting for Precincts 2 and 3, listed 22 cases of lobar pneumonia and 198 of influenza, adding:

"I presume that one-half of the cases of lobar pneumonia and influenza have not been reported to the Board of Health."

The total number of deaths from all causes in 1918 was 107 as compared with 84 in 1917 when, Mr. Moore said "no contagious or infectious disease of any magnitude" had threatened the town. In 1919, 96 deaths were reported, and in 1920, 75, so allowing for population changes, it does not seem that the influenza epidemic in Chelmsford was of "massive" proportions measured by the death rate.

The cemetery commissioners did not mention the epidemic in their reports, and the selectmen's reports at this time were purely statistical. The superintendent of schools' report for 1918 notes, however, that the town schools were closed for 4 1/2 weeks on account of influenza and in 1919 adds that the local schools were more

fortunate than some others, because some had lost so much time due to the epidemic that they had to begin the school year with the same grading as the 1918 school year.

In a final comment, 36 cases of influenza were reported in 1920 by Dr. Scoboria for Precincts 1 and 4. He said, however, that there had also been "many cases" of influenza that, he believed, had not been reported.

The three-member Board of Health, authorized by the May 14, 1920, special Town Meeting, was elected in 1921: Abbott L. Emery was given the full three-year term, while Curtis A. Aiken and A. Samuel Gustafson each received one year terms. In 1922 the board's rotation in office had been established with one member's term expiring each year: Mr. Gustafson in 1925; Mr. Emery in 1924, and Mr. Aiken in 1923. In 1923 J. Clarke Osterhout defeated Mr. Aiken for the three-year term and George A. McNulty was elected to fill out the unexpired term of Mr. Gustafson. Mr. Emery was defeated for re-election in 1924 by Eliphalet G. Brown.

The first report of the Board of Health in 1921 was a statistical accounting of "diseases dangerous to the public health:

"Respectfully submitted: Curtis A. Aiken; Abbott L. Emery; A. Samuel Gustafson, Board of Health:"

For the next year no report at all was made, but in 1923 a series of reports began in which the board showed willingness to adapt to new situations by appointing new officials for specified tasks under its direction and by working hard for improvements of public health.

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Disease	Cases
Chicken pox	2
Diphtheria	9
Dog bite	8
Measles	4
Scarlet fever	2
Pulmonary tuberculosis	3
Typhoid fever	1