

I had thought I might write a little about the Christmas season as it was celebrated in our area a hundred years ago. Our local library has the old *Tustin Times*, and before that, the *Tustin Topics*, all laminated for the use of library patrons. These old papers are a valuable and handy resource for those of us who are interested in some aspect of area history. Although I knew all too well what the winter of 1918-19 meant all parts of the country and much of the world, it hadn't been in the forefront of my thoughts when I decided to see what the *Times* had to say about Christmas that year.

As it turned out, there wasn't much about Christmas at all. World War I had just ended, so that was a piece of positive news, but almost all of the rest of significant local write-ups were concerned with the influenza pandemic. None of the local churches had children's Christmas programs that year, all other celebrations were cancelled, the schools were closed, and the State had even mandated that no auction sales be held. There was no excuse for large numbers of people to congregate in one place. Even the numerous funerals, most of which were the result of influenza deaths, were not usually attended by more than the immediate families of the deceased.

And homes were quarantined. If someone in a household caught the flu, that home was under quarantine for a period of time.

Usually, more than one person in an affected household did get sick. And treatment was not very successful. Pneumonia often took hold and condemned the sick to suffering and death in just a few weeks or even days.

In contrast with other outbreaks of communicable illnesses, it was not the elderly, sick, and weak who bore the brunt of the sickness and death. This time, the flu was particularly devastating in the young, strong population and in children. Some arrived in the community via the young soldiers who had just been released from camp at the end of the war. And, any contact with other people was a danger.

In the December 12th issue of the *Tustin Times* the sad story of the Johnson family was recounted. On November 24th fifteen year old August Rudolph died of the flu, followed by the death of his mother, Hulda Augusta on December 2nd. Huldur Sophia was born in February of 1918 and died on December 4th of the same year. Mr. Johnson and six more children were left among the living. Most, if not all of them, also had been sickened by influenza but had survived.

The stories were all sad, and some seemed even more tragic than others. Bristol residents who had been in the armed services, serving at Camp Custer, were hard hit by the flu. Byron Robertson was one of the victims, as was Sam Trowbridge. His twelve year old sister succumbed to influenza, too. Martin Swanson came home from a hunting trip in the Upper Peninsula and caught the flu and died.

In the January 16th issue of the paper, it was estimated that half the population of Burdell Township had suffered flu symptoms, and there were several deaths. Families were still under quarantine in mid February.

Those who wore themselves out helping the sick were also vulnerable. Blanch Waters Peasley was one of those dedicated women who lost her life as a

result of helping others.

The anti-vaccine believers who waste their energy and time campaigning against vaccines for influenza, childhood diseases, and other sicknesses, many of which were on their way to extinction before so many people were taken in by the fraudulent anti-vaccine literature, are badly misguided. They should take some time and read newspapers of 1918-19--publications from anywhere in the country. And in addition, a trip through any of the local cemeteries would be very instructive. So many markers with death dates of 1918 and 1919, so many young people buried with parents and grandparents still alive--this should tell people something about the effects of a pandemic without any protection available.

And there are several science-based books--not voodoo-oriented--that explain just why vaccines are important. Childhood diseases are returning as percentages of unvaccinated children rise. Measles and whooping cough (pertussis) have already made a comeback. Both cause fatalities that could be avoided. "Herd immunity" is a term for protection of a population because of the responsible vaccination by most of the people. When that percentage drops, the most vulnerable people in an area--those too young, too sick, or with other problems that prevent them from receiving vaccines--are the losers. A really unholy alliance between conservative anti-government conspiracy theorists--who are sometimes evangelical, also, and a liberal "don't tell me what to do for my family" group on the left are busily endangering their own children and the society in general.