

An Attack of Influenza

Miami and the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of October 1918

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“(T)he city is yet in its youth with all the future before it,” opined the *Miami City Directory* in 1918.¹ Though their city was less than a quarter-century old, the residents of Miami were much like those of any American city at the outset of October 1918. Optimism was in the air. As the month began, business interests, including the Bank of Bay Biscayne, Burdine and Quarterman, the Miami Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the Sewell Brothers, and John Seybold, sponsored a full-page advertisement entitled “Opportunity,” which proclaimed, in part, “The Golden Gate of Opportunity has been flung wide open to all who will deserve Success.”² But this opportunity came at a cost. As the United States and its allies closed in on victory against Europe’s Central Powers, *The Miami Herald’s* headlines detailed war efforts and encouraged patriotism. In space contributed “to winning the war” by the Fidelity Bank and Trust Company and accompanied by a list of casualties, William D. Nesbit’s essay “Yanks” advised that “every time you buy a Liberty Bond you put a newer and higher courage in the hearts of all our boys.”³

Miamians were both encouraged and expected to do their part. The Dade County Liberty Loan Committee proclaimed that Friday, October 4, 1918, “will be known as the War Relic Day of the Fourth Liberty Loan Drive,” and announced the arrival of a “special government train” at Sixth Street and the Boulevard during what would be observed as a citywide holiday.⁴

While efforts were focused on winning the war, there was still time for leisure and comfortable living in Miami. “With practically the same cast you saw in *The Birth of a Nation*,” D. W. Griffith’s *The Great Love* was showing at The Paramount Theater. Billed as a “snappy musical show” that was sure to please, *Too Many Sweethearts* was airing at the Air-drome. Homestyle cooking was on the menu at James McLaughlin’s New Haven Restaurant.⁵ To provide appropriate attire for a night on the town, the Sewell Brothers’ store on Twelfth Street advertised “\$50,000 Worth of Merchandise,” including shoes, hats, shirts, clothing, and furnishings that could be purchased for “cut prices.”⁶ For those choosing to dine at home, Palm Grocery on Avenue D offered apples for six cents a pound and fresh eggs for seventy-five cents per dozen. On Avenue J, Pure Food Grocery, Inc., offered a ten-ounce bottle of catsup for eighteen cents and a medium jar of Van Camp’s Peanut Butter for less than a quarter.⁷

City leaders, however, made a point of enumerating the ways in which Miami differed from all other locales. While describing the city’s location in its 1918 *Miami City Directory*, publishers R. L. Polk and Company exclaimed that, “(a) more fortunate location as to natural beauty could scarcely be imagined.” With its “soft air, gorgeous foliage, and rich vegetation,” Miami possessed all the benefits of the tropics while “escaping the severe heat and enervating lassitude in the realms to the south.” Legislation had been passed to drain the Florida Everglades and cultivate the area for agricultural purposes, an act that would enhance Miami’s reputation as “the center and market for an agricultural empire.”⁸

Along with “an elaborate sanitary and storm sewer system,” the area’s climate and natural resources supported its reputation as a healthy environment in which to live or vacation.⁹ Just twenty-two years earlier, Henry Flagler brought

his Florida East Coast Railway Company south and created a vacation Mecca for wealthy Northern tourists. By 1918, the railroad maintained stops from Jacksonville to Key West, transporting tourists, military personnel, and residents throughout the state. A thriving tourism industry supported the young city's economic survival, but it also came with drawbacks. In their city directory, R. L. Polk and Company acknowledged the difficulty of securing information from seasonal residents and cited a "scarcity of competent help" to support the needs of the growing city. This assertion is supported by listings from their own publication. At press time, the directory listed but one hospital, two sanitariums, twenty-eight physicians, six osteopaths, and fifteen nurses to serve Miami's estimated population of 29,353 permanent residents. More than four pages of the directory, however, were needed to document the city's one-hundred and eight real estate companies and fourteen property rental agents.¹⁰

World War I brought military encampments at Curtiss Field near the Miami River, the Dinner Key Naval Air Station, and Chapman Field in South Dade. Hailing from cities and towns across the nation, the young men housed within these camps prepared for deployment to the fighting fields of Europe. Miamians showed their appreciation by hosting dances and picnics for military personnel, who responded by attending these events in droves.

Large and small, the minutiae of everyday life served as a backdrop for what, upon later examination, would prove the much greater drama of 1918. Abetted by the wartime migration of troops and civilians, from March to July, an influenza epidemic swept the globe, claiming tens of thousands of lives.¹¹ Contact between individuals who would not, under ordinary circumstances, interact, led to a rapid spread of the disease.¹² To protect morale and disguise potential vulner-

abilities, nations on both sides of the Great War censored news about the epidemic.¹³ Because initial reports of the outbreak came from Spain, a nation not actively engaged in the war and, therefore, more forthcoming with its news reports, the disease was dubbed *Spanish Influenza*, a misnomer since, in all likelihood, it originated in China.¹⁴

By late August, the influenza virus had mutated.¹⁵ Spanish Influenza's second wave was first detected among naval personnel at Boston's Commonwealth Pier.¹⁶ October would prove especially deadly. That month, the deadliest in United States history, the pandemic claimed an estimated 195,000 American lives.¹⁷ During the week of October 23, alone, influenza killed 21,000 Americans in seven days, the highest weekly number of deaths from any cause ever recorded in the nation.¹⁸

Sometimes referred to as the *Spanish Lady*, and, owing to the color its oxygen-deprived victims' skin took on, *purple death*, the pandemic struck members of the armed services earlier and more severely than it did the civilian population.¹⁹ It is estimated that as many as forty percent of all United States naval personnel had the flu at some point in 1918.²⁰ Most influenza outbreaks are particularly deadly among the very young and the very old. While the 1918 epidemic claimed a number of victims from these categories, it also killed an inordinate number of otherwise robust young adults between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-nine.²¹ This third category of victims overlapped perfectly with the age range of America's fighting forces. Coupled with their confinement to crowded military encampments and troop transport ships, the intercontinental mixing of soldiers and influenza strains proved extremely dangerous.²²

Sweeping from coast to coast, continent to continent,

the 1918 influenza outbreak was a pandemic of epic proportions. In eighteen months, approximately 500 million people, worldwide, would be afflicted with the disease. Between 50 to 100 million people would die.²³ No other war, famine, or disease has claimed as many lives in as short a period of time.²⁴ Though its impact was devastating, records of the outbreak are lacking, most narratives being gleaned from public health records and daily newspapers.²⁵ These sources reveal several common reactions to the epidemic. Many community leaders denied the presence of a threat until it was irrefutable; large, war-related gatherings continued, uninterrupted; authorities failed to report early incidences of the disease; and, at the peak of the outbreak, many municipalities were unable to maintain even the most basic of public services.²⁶ Though different from other cities in many aspects, Miami would prove much the same in its reaction to the Spanish influenza epidemic.

Like other Americans, Miamians did not grasp the gravity of the pandemic until they experienced it firsthand. On October 9, just a week before the epidemic's deadliest day, *The Miami Herald* assured readers that "(a)bove all, there is not the slightest reason for getting excited over the situation, which is not even grave. The disease will speedily disappear, if the people will use the most ordinary precautions and will take care of themselves, as they ought to do at all times."²⁷ City Health Officer Dr. John W. Shisler assured residents that there was a "low percentage of pneumonia cases among the influenza cases among civilians."²⁸ Just thirty-one at the time of the outbreak, Shisler, a native of Richwood, Ohio, and a graduate of the University of Chicago, would become a major force in disseminating information and maintaining order throughout the epidemic.

By the following day, however, *The Herald's* tone had

changed. When reporting the need for trained nurses, the paper referred to the outbreak as “the epidemic.”²⁹ Thus began what must have felt like a roller coaster ride of news coverage. An October 11 *Herald* account referred to the situation as “a near epidemic”; just twenty-four hours later, the journal reported that influenza was “sweeping through this city.”³⁰ It was not until October 16, the epidemic’s deadliest day in Florida, that *The Herald* acknowledged the presence of a pandemic.³¹ That same day, the paper published a circular from the nation’s Division of Sanitation. This document provided a comprehensive overview of the Spanish influenza outbreak, listed purported causes, and discussed the means for transmitting, avoiding, and treating the disease.³²

Even reports on the outbreak’s decline were confusing and contradictory. On October 16, *Herald* readers were advised that the epidemic was “most surely on the wane.”³³ In the paper’s next edition, that reassurance was amended when *The Herald* conceded that “perhaps it is too soon to say positively that Miami’s influenza wave has broken.”³⁴

Word from Miami’s medical authorities was equally confusing. At an October 18 meeting, members of the Dade County Medical Society stated that the influenza epidemic was still critical.³⁵ By October 20, Dr. Shisler announced that the epidemic had reached its crest. Dr. H. G. Babcock, President of the City Board of Health, agreed, as did Drs. James M. Jackson and John L. North. The number of potentially lethal pneumonia cases, however, was said to be increasing.³⁶ It would not be until October 29, with fourteen out of eighteen of the city’s physicians reporting a decline in their caseloads, that the influenza epidemic truly appeared to be on the wane in Miami. The four physicians who did not make reports, it was learned, were, themselves, ill with influenza.³⁷

Closely related to a community's inability to recognize the threat of influenza was its failure to report early cases. Many boards of health did not make influenza a reportable disease until the fall wave was well underway. In 1918, the U. S. Census Bureau did not receive transcriptions of death certificates from Florida. For this reason, the number of Floridians who died during the pandemic can only be estimated.³⁸ To its credit, Miami's City Board of Health did ask physicians to report new cases of influenza on a daily basis.³⁹ And, to their credit, Miami's physicians tried to comply but, faced with mounting caseloads, they were often unable to keep up with the task of filing reports. On October 11, ten of the city's eighteen physicians provided updates.⁴⁰ The following day, only five physicians filed reports.⁴¹ By October 14, Dr. Shisler stated that physicians were too busy to compile reports and that the epidemic showed no signs of abating.⁴²

It was not until the epidemic's second wave was ebbing that *The Herald* reported statistics from Dade County's outlying areas. In Lemon City, Dr. John G. DuPuis stated that he had treated several hundred influenza cases during the epidemic. Dr. Mary Freeman shared that she cared for 300 cases throughout South Dade. In Homestead, a community that did not see its first influenza-related death until October 18, when Japhus Rolle, a 36-year-old black man, succumbed to the disease, Dr. J. B. Tower said he had treated 250 cases and had assisted in establishing a hospital for his city's black patients.⁴³ Dr. Tower, himself, was stricken with the disease but recovered and was able to resume providing care in his community.⁴⁴

Despite muddled whispers of an epidemic, early October found many Miamians fully engaged in supporting America's war efforts. With "ample space ... arranged for the accommodation of the entire community" and the following

Friday afternoon being “reserved as a holiday in this city,” the October 2 *Herald* informed Miamians of their patriotic duty to participate in the War Relic Day of the Fourth Liberty Loan Drive. It was informing them of their patriotic duty. The arrival of a “special Government train” would be accompanied by speeches, musical performances, and airplanes that would “bombard the city with Liberty Loan literature.” Miamians were asked to “help swell the crowd.”⁴⁵

In 1918, the United States lacked a uniform policy for limiting contact in public gathering places. With no central authority to create and enforce rules, each community acted on its own. On October 4, the same day as Miami’s War Relic Train assembly, U. S. Surgeon General Rupert Blue recommended closing all public gathering places.⁴⁶ This recommendation did not discourage Dade County’s Liberty Loan Committee from conducting their October 5 meeting in the Central School auditorium. “Our boys are still dying in France, giving up the last drop of their life’s blood for all of us who stay at home,” the committee’s Bulletin Number 9 admonished. “How far are you willing to go for them?”⁴⁷

Some individuals and agencies were, however, taking heed of the Surgeon General’s advice. On October 2, City Physician John W. North advised Miamians to avoid public gatherings. Children who might be suffering from influenza, he warned, should be kept home from school.⁴⁸ Two days later, *The Herald* announced that Coconut Grove’s community dance and other weekly entertainment for servicemen had been postponed. A Baptist social was postponed “on account of the prevalence of Spanish influenza in the camps” and, because she was suffering from influenza, Mrs. Emmett McDonald was forced to cancel her Sunday school class picnic.⁴⁹

By October 7, local authorities appeared to be heeding the Surgeon General's advice. After consulting with the State Board of Health, Dr. H. G. Babcock, Chairman of the City Board of Health, ordered schools, theaters, dance halls, and other places of amusement closed. No request was made to close church or lodge gatherings, though many were expected to close voluntarily.⁵⁰ The following day, members of the city's ministerial association voted to close local churches the following Sunday and to close all church services for the remainder of the week. As of October 14, the only church that remained open was St. Agnes Episcopal Church with Archdeacon Phillip S. Irwin, the church's pastor, stating that there was a need for church services during the epidemic.⁵¹ Despite an urgent push to secure funds for the war effort, Dade County's Liberty Loan Committee postponed a meeting scheduled for the upcoming weekend.⁵² Miamians, it appeared, were hearing the message and taking it seriously.

Soon, they would have no choice. On October 9, Dr. Shisler issued the order to close "all churches, theaters, schools, the Y. M. C. A., lodges, dance halls, while forbidding any mass meetings." This order included a ban on weddings and funerals.⁵³ Dr. Shisler's order did not prevent all gatherings from taking place. On October 11, Alice Frederick and E. McIvor Law were married in what was described as "a simple ceremony" at Trinity Episcopal Church. Because of the ban on public gatherings, only the wedding party was permitted inside the church.⁵⁴ When Edith Brickell, a Miami pioneer and a scion of the fabled land-rich family, succumbed to influenza, her funeral was private. John W. Watson, John B. Reilly, John Sewell, J. Gilman, Dr. James M. Jackson, and J. H. Cheatham were, however, on hand to serve as pallbearers.⁵⁵

Miami's epidemic did not preclude its residents' need for

food and other essential supplies. Nonetheless, on October 12, the City Board of Health ordered the closing of all stores and restaurants. Only drug stores were exempted from this mandate. Because many people had been unable to purchase food, grocery stores and meat markets were allowed to open for several hours on October 13, and restaurants could continue operations, though people were urged to eat at home. Dr. Shisler stated that “soft drink places and soda fountains” could reopen on October 14, after glasses and dishes had been sanitized.⁵⁶ Effective sanitation practices were believed to be tantamount to success in combatting influenza, for, as Dr. Shisler advised, “an unsanitary glass is one of the greatest mediums for the spread of disease.”⁵⁷

As the epidemic wore on, Dr. Shisler would do his best to maintain order, but his decisions would not go unopposed. An October 11 *Herald* editorial questioned the benefit of cancelling school and closing churches and movie theaters when children were permitted to play together and young people continued to gather with their friends.⁵⁸ This argument was not unfounded, as schools in New York City and Chicago remained open throughout the epidemic.⁵⁹ On October 26, Clifton A. Sawyer, in a letter to the editor, suggested that a quarantine be imposed on homes in which someone was suffering from influenza and questioned why Dr. Shisler had not mentioned the idea.⁶⁰

Nor were the orders always easy to understand. Much like reports of the epidemic’s severity, the rules governing business hours wavered from day to day. After one night of curtailed services, regular hours resumed at Ye Wayside Inn on October 13 and many Miamians ventured to the restaurant for Sunday dinner.⁶¹ On October 19, all mercantile establishments, with the exception of drug stores, were ordered to close at 6:00 p.m. While grocery stores and meat

markets could remain open until 7:00 p.m., soda fountains and soft drink stands had to cease operations at 6:00 p.m. and remain closed on October 20. Restaurants were not required to close early but were asked to avoid the crowding of patrons at tables and lunch counters. Schools and theaters had yet to reopen.⁶²

“With the influenza keeping people off the streets (and with a lightless night and a heavy rain,” the October 17 *Herald* reported, “Miami fully lived up to the statement of a disgusted sailor, on Tuesday night, that this was some dull town.”⁶³ Its social events cancelled and its amusement venues shuttered, even the normally bustling tourist town of Miami could not deny this assessment.

With club meetings cancelled and dining out discouraged, Miamians found other ways to socialize. Despite admonitions to stay at home, the October 13 edition of the *Herald* reported that “Misses Violet Eberhart, Alberta Eberhart and Alice Carrier were guests of Mrs. Frank Wheeler on Wednesday afternoon.”⁶⁴ On October 28, *The Herald* reported that Miss Carrier was ill with influenza.⁶⁵ Bending the board of health’s rules was so common that the Red Cross and Miami health officials urged women to refrain from making social calls, as the women were at risk of carrying influenza from affected individuals to healthy ones.⁶⁶

Travel outside the city was affected, as well. An October 23 advertisement in the *Herald* reported that “The citizens of Rock Harbor, Fla., ask the people of Miami and the intermediate stations not to get off trains at said station on account of Spanish influenza.”⁶⁷ Fearing the spread of contagions, Rock Harbor had, in effect, voluntarily cut itself off from the world.

By the end of the month, regular hours were resuming, but authorities warned merchants to prevent crowds

from gathering in their stores and cautioned against “loafing about.” Police officers and Boy Scouts were detailed to enforce these rules.⁶⁸ On October 29, *The Herald* reported that, should conditions continue to improve, the city hoped to reopen churches, theaters, and soda fountains by the following week.⁶⁹ This prediction held true and, by the beginning of November, the lights went on in local theaters and churches resumed services. On Monday, November 4, school children returned to class for the first time in almost a month.

Enmeshed in a world war, Miami’s military operations were impacted by postponements and cancellations. Following the advice of Dr. James M. Jackson, Battalion Surgeon, the Dade County Guard cancelled an assembly, parade, and drills planned for the weekend of October 12-13. Drills had to take place in “open air,” meetings, had to be held outdoors and “(n)o man feeling indisposed should be allowed to attend and must be excused accordingly.”⁷⁰ On October 22, a contingent of ten men left Miami for basic training in Key West. Because of the influenza epidemic, this was the first draft contingent to leave Miami in several weeks, a phenomenon almost unheard of during wartime.⁷¹

The greatest impact of a community’s failure to respond to the influenza crisis was its inability to maintain even the most basic of public services. No stranger to natural disaster and disease, Miami was, nevertheless, unprepared for the challenges it would endure in October 1918.

Across the nation, hospitals faced a shortage of nurses and supplies.⁷² On October 2, *The Herald* published a call for trained nurses willing to assist in the fight against influenza at military encampments in other parts the United States.⁷³ Locally, Mrs. Mary E. M. Carter was appointed

chairman of the Red Cross' Committee on Nursing. Responsible for organizing the United States' hospital system in the Philippine Islands, Mrs. Carter was a graduate of New York City's Bellevue Hospital and, according to *The Herald*, was employed by the Rockefeller Foundation to study infantile paralysis in that city.⁷⁴ On October 5, all Miami women with nursing training were instructed to contact Mrs. Carter, as, according to *The Herald*, "(t)he present epidemic of Spanish influenza and pneumonia in cantonments and in civil life is straining the number of women nurses available." Black women with nursing experience were asked to report to the community health center located at Fourth Street and Avenue G.⁷⁵

Their schools closed, furloughed teachers answered the call for volunteers until Director A. Leight Monroe, Superintendent of Schools, asked them to refrain from serving as nurses unless directly called upon to do so by local health authorities. Dr. Monroe feared that, after being exposed to influenza, teachers would not be able to return to work when schools reopened.⁷⁶ By October 19, the superintendent rescinded his directive, stating, "I see no reason why the teachers should not offer their services in this emergency. It will probably be some time before the schools can be reopened." Teachers were urged to volunteer their services "at once." On the same day, Mrs. Carter at the Red Cross declared the shortage of nurses "a question of life or death."⁷⁷ To meet the demand, the Red Cross began accepting male volunteers and established a training school for them.⁷⁸ With their shows at the Airdrome cancelled because of the epidemic, members of Mack's Musical Review answered the call to volunteer, as well.⁷⁹



Miami City Hospital, the Alamo, circa 1918. Claude C. Matlack, photographer. Matlack Collection, HistoryMiami Museum, C45.

With its only hospital filled to capacity, city leaders sought ways to care for an ever-increasing number of critically ill patients. Located approximately two miles from Miami's center, City Hospital was less than a year old at the onset of the influenza epidemic.⁸⁰ City Physician North declared that no new patients would be admitted to City Hospital until the nursing shortage had been resolved and Dr. Shisler advised that, if necessary, he would close all Miami businesses in order to secure the manpower needed for fighting the epidemic.⁸¹ An emergency hospital with space for 100 patients was established at First Street and Avenue D.⁸² Back at City Hospital, tents were erected to accommodate the overflow. Their quarters converted into sick bays, hospital workers were forced to sleep outdoors.⁸³

The strain on hospital workers took its toll. After receiving reports that patients from local military encampments were not receiving adequate care at City Hospital, City Auditor Hoffpauir inspected the hospital and found that its matron, Lilla B. Harley, and all but one of the nurses were stricken with influenza. Volunteer nurses, local women with little or no nursing experience, and orderlies were overseeing patient care. Hoffpauir promised public assistance to the greatest degree possible.⁸⁴ On October 14, *The Herald* reported that Miss Harley was in “very critical condition.”⁸⁵ She would recover, but at least two trained nurses, City Hospital’s Beatrice Horne and Bay View Sanitarium’s Alice Keeler, succumbed to the disease.

Adding to the chaos and much to the surprise of local authorities, on October 11, health officials from the Dinner Key Naval Air Station commandeered City Hospital. Naval personnel stated that civilian patients could remain in the hospital and receive care from private physicians, but it did not comment on whether new civilian cases would be accepted. Dr. Shisler stated that, as Miami had financed the hospital to ensure medical assistance for its residents, it was wrong for naval authorities to take charge and refuse civilian patients. He suggested that the navy could have commandeered a hotel for use as a hospital.⁸⁶ By October 13, civilian authorities regained control of City Hospital, but naval personnel retained command over a portion of the facility.⁸⁷

To compound matters, on October 26, the same day it issued a call for new volunteers, due to the fact that “women who volunteered early in the epidemic (were) worn out and must be relieved,” the Red Cross was addressing a new problem. On October 13, it was reported that volunteer nurses were needed to care for the civilian population. In many households, every family member was ill and there was no

one to care for them.⁸⁸ Within two weeks, Red Cross offices were receiving requests for nursing services from individuals who were healthy but did not want to care for sick family members for fear of contracting influenza. In a statement printed by *The Herald*, the Red Cross urged all families to care for their own patients.⁸⁹



Christian Hospital opened soon after the epidemic to serve African Americans. This view probably depicts the dedication ceremony. Hicks Studio, photographer. Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami Museum, 1989-011-2822.

Without a hospital of its own, the situation was even more dire in Miami's black community. To fill this gap, a resident of nearby Highland Park offered to provide a house in that neighborhood for use as a hospital for black influenza patients. A number of residents complained to Dr. Shisler, who informed them that, if they did not want the Highland Park residence to be used by the black community, they would have to find an alternate location for the proposed hospital. Within twenty minutes, the complainants had lo-

cated an alternate location and turned it over to the health department.⁹⁰ A 25-room temporary hospital was donated by D. A. Dorsey, while 11th Circuit Judge H. Pierre Branning donated funds to pay a week's salary for two black nurses.⁹¹ Following the influenza epidemic, members of the black community sought to establish a permanent hospital.⁹² In 1920, the Christian Hospital opened at 1218 N. W. First Place. The hospital was destroyed by fire, but rebuilt, in the same location.⁹³

Like their counterparts across the nation, Miami's socialites responded to the community's cries for help. Assisted by Maude Wallace and Cornelia Leffler, Lucy Cushman took control of the diet kitchen at Coconut Grove's Hopkins School, which was serving as an emergency hospital for personnel from the Dinner Key Naval Air Station.⁹⁴ In an October 16 interview, the hospital's commanding officer joked that, with the epidemic supposedly on the decline, he feared losing his job and having to, once again, eat "regular chow."⁹⁵

After City Auditor Hoffpauir found the City Hospital in disarray, Mrs. John Sewell, wife of Miami's third mayor, promised to volunteer at the hospital as long as needed. Sarah Ament Dodson took charge of the hospital kitchen. Mrs. W. N. Hull, Mrs. Bain, and other Miami women volunteered under the guidance of the few trained nurses still available.⁹⁶ Mrs. Sewell also proved instrumental in securing supplies for the temporary hospital on First Street and Avenue D and for establishing a nursery for children whose parents were too ill to care for them.⁹⁷



Dinner Key Naval Air Station quarantine hospital, 1918. Gift of William Bordeaux. HistoryMiami Museum, 1983-074-12.

Along with a shortage of manpower, Miamians faced a scarcity of supplies and funds for supporting the fight against influenza. Drug stores were unable to meet the demand placed upon them. There was a dearth of medication and atomizers.⁹⁸ Despite this shortfall, Dr. Shisler asked drug store operators to create an agreement to ensure that at least one store was open throughout each night.⁹⁹ As the epidemic worsened, some manufacturers were unable to keep up with the demand for their products. In an advertisement, the makers of Vicks' VapoRub warned of potential shortages but offered druggists booklets containing information about Spanish influenza.¹⁰⁰

Hospitals lacked even the most basic supplies needed to ensure adequate patient care. During his visit to City Hospital, City Auditor Hoffpauir found a need for blankets and sleeping garments. Upon learning of Hoffpauir's findings, Mrs. Sewell set about collecting the needed items.¹⁰¹ The epidemic may have been coming to a close, but, at the end of October, Patriotic League No. 7 was still making sleeping garments for children at the emergency hospital.¹⁰²

When an emergency hospital for black patients opened at the Crescent Hotel, a call went out for donations of hand towels, disinfectants, alcohol, turpentine, surgical gauze, bed pans, urinals, malted milk, grape juice, wash basins, water pitchers, tin trays, fly paper, fresh eggs, tea towels, ice, Ivory Soap Powder, lye, blankets, and pillow cases.¹⁰³ There may have been a building to house patients, but there were no supplies for meeting their needs.

For those convalescing at home, obtaining and preparing food proved a challenge. On October 13, a soup kitchen opened at Trinity M. E. Church. Those in need of food could secure chicken soup and broth by sending a covered

pitcher or glass jar to the kitchen. Anyone who could not send a container was advised to telephone the pastor, Rev. J. M. Gross, for assistance.¹⁰⁴ To supplement patients' meals, the Red Cross provided the soup kitchen with a supply of ice cream.¹⁰⁵ Supported by donations, by month's end, the church was serving up chicken soup, beef broth, vegetable soup, broiled chicken on toast, cup custards, baked apples, and gelatin to anyone in need.¹⁰⁶ While, at mid-month, it appeared that the church was meeting the dietary needs of Miami's influenza victims, the Woman's Club was prepared to open a soup kitchen at their club building on Twelfth Street should the demand for food increase.¹⁰⁷

The influenza outbreak placed a tremendous strain on Miami's economic resources. On October 22, at a special meeting, the Miami City Council, appropriated \$10,000 to be used in combatting the epidemic. The relief fund would be administered by a committee of five citizens: Mayor J. W. Watson, Acting Finance Commissioner J. W. Claussen, President of Council J. W. Blackmon, Judge H. Pierre Branning, and Attorney F. B. Shutts. Funds to support the appropriation would be secured from the forthcoming collection of taxes. County commissioners promised to appropriate funds for fighting the epidemic, as well. Relief monies would support efforts at City Hospital and the two auxiliary hospitals.¹⁰⁸ Despite promises of increased funding, on October 26, the Women's Relief Association stated that, without additional financial support, their auxiliary hospital and children's home were in danger of closing.¹⁰⁹

As they had in fighting America's enemies in Europe, through acts large and small, Miamians did their part in the war against influenza. Each day, female employees from the E. B. Douglas Company Store donated forty newspapers to servicemen suffering from influenza.¹¹⁰ When a truck donated by

the Railey-Milam Company broke down while transporting patients and supplies, the Miami Grocery Company stepped in to provide another vehicle.¹¹¹ Overwhelmed by calls from frantic influenza patients and their families, the South Atlantic Telephone and Telegraph Company gently reminded customers to “(k)eeep the wires clear for those who must use them” and to avoid speaking harshly in telephone conversations.¹¹² And, though not all hardships were avoidable, Mi-amians did their best to greet the adversity with humor. After the Southern Express Company suspended shipment of liquor from Tampa to Miami, *The Herald* quipped, “Whiskey may, possibly, be good to use in influenza cases—but not the Tampa brand.”¹¹³

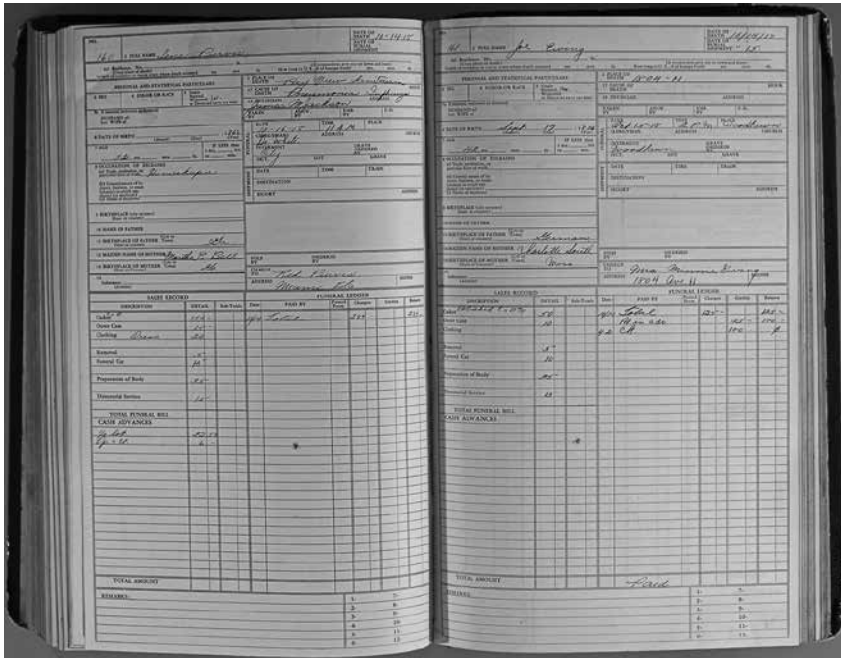
As residents strove to conquer the epidemic and keep their wits intact, they found themselves confronted with rumors and fallacies that, if allowed to run rampant, could prove dangerous to the community’s health and well-being. Throughout the influenza epidemic, researchers and physicians grappled with identifying safe and effective treatments for the disease. Nurses were advised to wear gauze masks or helmets and told to separate patients with gauze curtains, precautions now known to be largely ineffective, as they do not prevent the transmission of small, airborne contaminants.¹¹⁴ While it was true that anyone experiencing fever and muscle pain should rest and contact a physician, the suggestion that there “need be no dangerous after results if the patient will use a little common sense” was unfounded.¹¹⁵ It took more than common sense to fight influenza and the oftentimes accompanying pneumonia. University of Pennsylvania bacteriologist Henry F. Smith advised readers to treat influenza with a twice daily salt water gargle, fresh air, a hot foot bath, hot lemonade, quinine, and bed rest.¹¹⁶ The Dade County Medical Society expanded upon this advice by

instructing anyone with cold symptoms to take a light laxative.¹¹⁷ Without an adequate understanding of the disease, even the most highly regarded advice could bring adverse results.

“People should refrain from dwelling too much on the matter, and above all should not spread rumors as to the number of cases of influenza and the number of resultant deaths. A ridiculous rumor has been going around the city that there have been fifty deaths in this city from influenza, and that the doctors and newspapers are suppressing the news so that there will be no panic.”¹¹⁸ *The Herald’s* admonition to avoid gossip did little to quell widespread panic. The paper reinforced its call for accuracy by printing daily reports detailing conditions at the city’s hospitals, updates from the Red Cross, and the steadily rising death toll. Even this strict attention to detail did not prevent some slip-ups. Under a headline that read “Combs Is Not Dead,” *The Herald* shared, “A report was in circulation yesterday that W. H. Combs, of the undertaking firm by that name, had died of influenza. When seen last night Mr. Combs said he was almost dead from overwork and loss of sleep, but he did not have the influenza, and had not thought of dying. One of his friends on hearing the rumor went so far as to order a wreath of flowers for his funeral.”¹¹⁹ Combs, a North Carolina native who grew up in Central Florida and arrived in Miami at the turn of the century, directed the funerals of many of Miami’s influenza victims, and his name appeared frequently in *The Herald’s* October obituary columns.

Perhaps the most poignant reminder of the influenza epidemic’s impact on Miami and its residents, these obituaries illustrate the diversity among Miami’s victims. Wealthy and poor. Young and old. Black and white. No group was spared, but the cause of death remained the same: pneumonia, follow-

ing an attack of influenza. Ivan S. Jaudon, manager of the Consolidated Fish Company left an estate valued at \$35,000 but no will. Just thirty-two years of age, Jaudon wasn't prepared to die.¹²⁰ Far from his Salt Lake City home, Nicholas V. Shishman died at the county tubercular hospital. His belongings indicated he was an actor or employed by a theatrical company.¹²¹ Quartermaster Leonidas M. Estill was well known in Miami, having commanded the guard that accompanied funerals. Twenty-one years old and stationed at the Dinner Key Naval Air Station, Estill was returned to his home state of Oklahoma for burial.¹²²



One of Miami's influenza casualties, housekeeper Lena Purves, died of pneumonia on October 14, 1918, and was buried in the Miami City Cemetery. This entry, on the left page, in a Combs Funeral Home journal typifies the October 1918 entries. Funeral Home Record [for] 1916-[1917]-[1918]. Kolski-Combs Funeral Home Records, HistoryMiami Museum, 2000-510. Gift of Patricia Kolski.

And then there were the children. Gardener Butler, age one. James Roberson, age two. Harold Saunders, age thirteen. All are interred in Miami's City Cemetery. Just three days old, a child identified only as Sealey Infant, died along with three other family members. The Sealeys were not the only local family decimated by influenza. Edward Kalb, 16, came to West Palm Beach to live with his sister and attend high school. Stricken with influenza, he was brought to Miami's City Hospital, where he died. Within ten days, two of Edward's sisters, twenty-two-year-old Rose Greenberg and twenty-eight year-old Sarah Ginsberg, would die as well. With "but one additional death" occurring the previous day, by October 29, at least eighty-seven Miamians had succumbed to influenza. While more were certain to follow, America's deadliest month had come to a close.¹²³



Ivan S. Jaudon died of influenza, as did many other Miami residents. This studio portrait, 1913. James F. Jaudon papers, HistoryMiami Museum, x-055-112.

The dark month of October behind it, Miami rebounded quickly. On November 1, theaters reopened. With the cast of Mack's Musical Review returning to their role as entertainers, the Airdrome proclaimed, "Good-bye 'Flu'—Hello Friends." For thirty cents, adults could watch moving pictures and a musical comedy at the Hippodrome, and the Fotoshō announced it would "reopen with its usual run of high class pictures."¹²⁴ Elbre's Pharmacy was back in business, completely renovated with "sanitary features of perfect sterilization" and Stewart's Orchestra performed for dancers at Elser's Pier.¹²⁵ At the Halcyon Hotel, preparations were being made for the upcoming tourist season. The hotel's southern and eastern verandas were being enclosed and the basement was being remodeled. Based on existing reservations, it was believed that the hotel would be filled within weeks of reopening in mid-November.¹²⁶

For those wishing to purchase food, Avenue D's White House Grocery offered Lowney's Cocoa at twenty-five cents a can, grape juice for fifty cents a quart and two packages of Kellogg's Corn Flakes for a quarter. Hoping to lure influenza-weary customers, the New Haven Restaurant claimed to have received a "medal for cleanliness."¹²⁷

Even Halloween celebrations went on, undeterred, with the November 1 *Herald* reporting many "parties and dances, and there were the time-honored pranks of changed gates and signs."¹²⁸ No mention was made of Miami's influenza epidemic or the ensuing bans on public gatherings and events.



World War I ended, as did Miami's flu epidemic, in November 1918. Naval officers and sailors from the Dinner Key Naval Air Station paraded on 12th Street (Flagler Street), as part of Miami's celebration of the signing of the Armistice. Claude Matlack, photographer. Matlack Collection, History-Miami, 231-36.

Like the rest of the nation, Miami and its residents were greatly impacted by 1918's fall influenza epidemic. Overwhelmed by the number of sick and dying, the City of Miami's infrastructure was shaken but did not falter. Doctors, nurses, community leaders, and everyday citizens put their own health at risk to care for their neighbors. As they had done in the past and would do in the future, Miamians faced an extreme crisis with wit and determination. October faded into November and, after an attack of influenza, Miamians were back on their feet.