

THE GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Preserving and promoting the history of Georgetown

Fall 2018 Newsletter

100 YEARS AGO—THE SPANISH FLU PANDEMIC OF 1918

In late August of 1918, the deadly Spanish Flu arrived in the U.S. by way of the busy port of Boston. Within a week, 100 cases a day were being reported among sailors along the waterfront and the disease soon spread into the civilian population. The flu struck with terrifying speed, with many reported cases of people waking up in the morning feeling fine, getting sick and dying by the end of the same day. It was especially deadly to young adults.

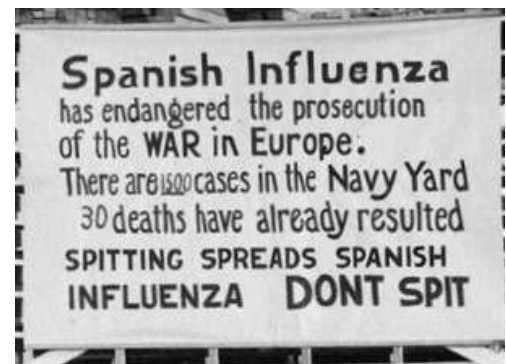
While the first flu symptoms were typical of what we see today, many people quickly developed a deadly form of pneumonia. Lungs would fill with viscous fluid, dark “mahogany spots” would appear on the ears and cheeks and would spread, making it difficult to distinguish between the races of victims. Unable to breathe, victims would suffocate, often with bloody foam oozing from their mouths and noses. Over the course of six months, the Spanish Flu pandemic affected an estimated 25,000,000 Americans, killing 675,000 of them, and killing up to 50 million worldwide.



Here in Georgetown, the schools were closed for three weeks and the library for one week due to the high number of people suffering from the flu. Although many in town became sick, records show only eight Georgetown residents dying of the flu, including a Naval Cadet from Georgetown who died in Newport, RI. All died between September 20th and January 17th. While the first two were men in their 70s, the rest were more typical of Spanish Flu victims, ranging in age from 13 to 38. One victim, a twenty-six-year-old Italian immigrant, was in the late stages of pregnancy when she became sick and died. An attempt was made to save the child, but it was stillborn.

Although the Spanish Flu was one of the worst global pandemics in history, it pales in comparison here in Georgetown to another deadly epidemic. From 1736-1737, the throat distemper epidemic devastated coastal New England, with most of its victims under the age of eighteen. In Rowley West Parish, now Georgetown, forty-six children died of the disease over a period of eight months.

If you would like to learn more about the throat distemper epidemic, check out the article in our fall 2009 newsletter at: http://georgetownhistoricalsociety.com/Newsletters/2009_10.pdf or hear the story at our upcoming Halloween Cemetery Tours.



A TALE FOR HALLOWEEN

With Halloween only weeks away, we thought our readers might enjoy a story from our popular Halloween Cemetery tours.

Moses Nelson lived with his brother and sister-in-law, Joseph and Lydia (Pingree) Nelson and their four children, Lydia, Elizabeth, Aaron and Hannah, in Rowley West Parish (now Georgetown). The children absolutely adored their Uncle Moses, and he was equally fond of them.

In 1744, the French declared war against England. After the French, aided by their native allies, had attacked English ports in Nova Scotia, the English chose to retaliate. Four thousand soldiers were recruited from the New England colonies in what became known as King George's War. Moses Nelson, age 33 and single, decided to enlist. The children begged him not to go, fearing they might never see him again, but Uncle Moses promised that he would return and they would see him again, and the children knew Uncle Moses was a man of his word, he always kept his promises.

Moses Nelson and other recruits boarded a ship and sailed for Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, where they were involved in the successful campaign to capture the French Fort at Louisbourg in 1745.

A year after his departure, the three oldest children, ages 11, 9 and 6, were outside when they saw their beloved uncle step out of the woods heading toward them. With great excitement, they ran into the house to tell their parents, but when the family emerged from the house, they saw... nothing. All three children were positive they had seen Uncle Moses; there was no doubt in their minds.

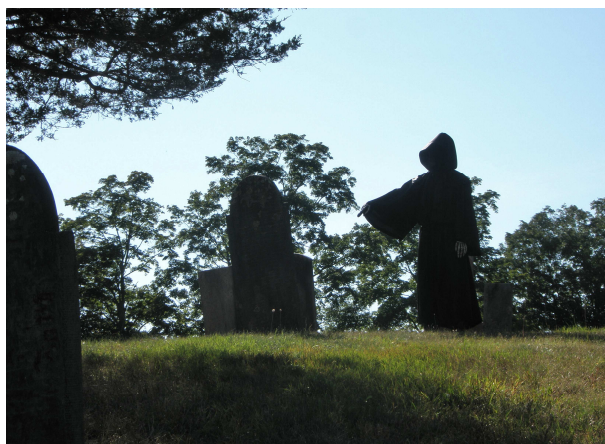
A while later the family received a letter from Moses' commanding officer, with the sad news that Moses had died of disease in Canada...on the very day that the children had seen him!

Uncle Moses had promised the children that they would see him again and Uncle Moses always kept his promises.



Colonial troops move cannons into place outside Louisbourg, 1745
(National Guard Heritage Series Painting)

HALLOWEEN CEMETERY TOURS



Join GHS President Chris Comiskey and the Grim Reaper on **October 27th and 28th at 2:00 pm** for a glimpse at the macabre side of Georgetown's history. Hear the legends of the bewitched meal chest and the ghost of Moses Nelson; ponder the mysterious deaths of suspected witch Elizabeth Cloughlin and her black cat, Jumper; plus hear stories of ghastly deaths, including a murder and a most surprising murderer! Tours take place in Georgetown's historic Union Cemetery on East Main Street. Cost of admission is \$5 per person. Parking is available in the cemetery. Please use the east entrance.

ANNUAL MEETING SPEAKER ANNOUNCED – SAVE THE DATE!



The Annual Meeting of the Georgetown Historical Society will be held at the Georgetown Peabody Library on **Wednesday, December 5th at 7:00 p.m.** Our special guest speaker this year will be **Dr. Michael Cross**, who will give a presentation on **“Snake Oil – Can you tell fact from fiction?”**

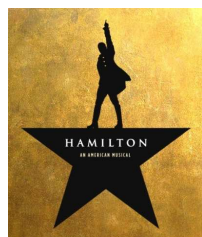
The late 19th and early 20th century is considered the “Golden Age of Quackery,” a time when snake oil salesmen sold patent medicines to an unsuspecting public. This lecture presents many of the scientific and medical “quack” tonics and devices so prevalent during this time period as well as their modern counterparts.

Michael Cross is an Associate Professor of chemistry at Northern Essex Community College. All are welcome to attend this meeting. Gift shop items will be available for sale, and light refreshments will be served.



Watch your mailboxes—Annual Meeting notices and ballots will be mailed out in November.

RAFFLE WINNER ANNOUNCED



Our raffle of two tickets to see the hit musical HAMILTON in Boston was a great fundraising success! Thank you to all who purchased or sold raffle tickets and to the very generous GHS member who donated the tickets. The drawing was held at the museum on September 16th, and the lucky winner was GHS member Jeff Lamoureux, who can no longer say, “I never win anything.” Congratulations, Jeff!

WORLD WAR I DISPLAY

Thank you to all who visited the Brocklebank Museum this year and saw our display commemorating the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I and honoring the five Georgetown servicemen who lost their lives during the war. Thank you again to all who donated or loaned items for the display.

We were especially delighted to welcome ninety-eight-year-old Irene Prescott and her great-grandson (right), who came to see the medals and other memorabilia of Irene’s father, George Moffitt, which were loaned to GHS by Irene’s brother, Wayne.



WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS!

We extend a warm welcome to new members Julianne Barretto, Ian Memhard and Leah Crohn, who received free histories of their historic homes with their new memberships.

If you own a historic home in Georgetown and have not yet requested your free house history, just e-mail us at info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com.



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Georgetown Historical Society



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