Ellis Island and the Great Spanish Flu of 1918

By Torri Brouhard and Jim Peskin

Introduction

Just over 100 years ago, the Spanish Influenza Pandemic spread across the world and now we are in the thick of the largest world health catastrophe since then. While operations on Ellis Island were shut down to help slow the spread of COVID-19, when tours resume, undoubtedly, one of the first questions tourists will ask is to what extent the Spanish Influenza Pandemic impacted Ellis Island. This article seeks to examine that impact and explore the depths of what occurred on Ellis Island between 1918 and 1920.

On February 7, 2020, several weeks before Ellis Island was closed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the *Anthem of the Seas* cruise ship was docked at Port Liberte in Bayonne, New Jersey. Usually such ships dock for one night and leave the next afternoon, but strangely this one stayed for several days. The media reported that it was being held because there was concern that there were sick people on board who needed to be quarantined. Twenty-seven of the passengers had recently traveled to China. Four of them were sent to a hospital for further testing; all tested negative for the Corona Virus and within a few days the ship continued its voyage.[1] The docked cruise ships always form a vivid backdrop for the start of tours of Ellis Island, reminding us how the immigrants whose stories we tell arrived in our country. They also provide a visual reminder of quarantine procedures that greeted ships as they entered the harbor.

History of Quarantine Procedures for the Port of New York

In 1799, a quarantine hospital was built on Staten Island to treat passengers on arriving vessels who had contracted infectious diseases such as yellow fever, typhus, or cholera. By the mid 19th century all ships entering New York Harbor were subjected to boarding and inspection by the quarantine officers with the hospital treating up to 1,000 patients at one time and about 8,000 in a year.[2] If one looks from Ellis Island toward the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge it is possible to see Swinburne and Hoffman Islands, which became the quarantine stations for New York Harbor after the Staten Island hospital was burned down by angry local residents in 1857.[3]

Who knew that when we saw *Anthem of the Seas* docked in February 2020, that this was to be our first glimpse of a new pandemic.

1 "Royal Caribbean Passengers Test Negative for Coronavirus: Ship Scheduled to Depart NJ," *NBC New York*, February, 7 2020, https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/cruise-ship-travelers-returning-to-nj-will-be-screened-for-coronavirus-sources/2281562/.

2 The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library, "The present quarantine station, Staten Island; Map of the New York Bay," New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed June 18, 2020, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-2c21-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.; Joan Lowenthal, "History of Quarantine in New York Harbor and Long Island," Cold Spring Harbor Whaling Museum, April 22, 2020, https://www.cshwhalingmuseum.org/blog/the-history-of-quarantine-in-new-york-harbor-and-long-island.

3 Lowenthal, "The History of Quarantine," https://www.cshwhalingmuseum.org/blog/the-history-of-quarantine-in-new-york-harbor-and-long-island/.

Immigrants on Hoffman Island quarantine station (No date). Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, The New York Public Library. Islands-Hoffman Island-Immigrants. Retrieved from http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dd-9b2c-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.

Hoffman Island hospital (No date). Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, The New York Public Library. Islands-Hoffman Island-Hospital. Retrieved from http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dd-9b32-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.

Waves of Influenza: their impact on Ellis Island

The 1918 Pandemic was not one single event, it occurred in multiple waves over a span of nearly two years. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) officially recognizes the outbreak advancing in three waves, although our research found that epidemiologists recognize four. While historians and epidemiologists have studied the origins of the Spanish Flu for a century, "there is no universal consensus regarding where the virus originated."[4] Contemporary epidemiological and historical studies have identified Camp Fuston, now Fort Riley, in Kansas as well as Haskell County, Kansas, as the first sites of outbreak in the United States.[5] At first, the illness was serious, and lethal, but not as overwhelming as it would soon become. From September to November 1918 the pandemic's most devastating outbreak occurred, where, in only a few weeks millions of people around the globe became infected and died. Scientists believe that the second wave was so deadly because the virus mutated into a more virulent form, quickly wreaking havoc around the globe in a way it had not done in the previous wave. The third outbreak came almost consecutively with the end of the second wave, between the winter and spring of 1919.[6]

Our research on the impact of this flu at Ellis Island revealed the fourth wave was and still is not extensively publicized, for reasons which we can only speculate. The U.S. Public Health Service noted it in their annual report for 1920 and it was acknowledged at the time, but because it was smaller in comparison to the earlier waves and occurred a year later, it never received the same attention. However, it was the fourth and final wave that had the largest impact and gained the most attention in our research on Ellis Island.[7]

Immigration precipitously declined from approximately 800,000 in 1914 to 28,000 in 1918 after war broke out in Europe.[8] As a result of the war the Public Health Service faced two new challenges. First, the Immigration Law of 1917 required that the Public Health Service examine all foreign merchant sailors arriving in New York in addition to arriving immigrants. The number of such merchant sailors often exceeded 500,000 before the outbreak of the war.[9] Second, periods of detention for detained aliens increased due to infrequent sailings to Europe as a result of the fighting and the dangers of sailing while at war as all vessels—military, supply, and civilian—were open for armed engagement. The Public Health Service now had to treat large numbers of sailors in the hospitals in addition to those immigrants who had medical conditions for which in peacetime they would have been deported.[10] All of this taxed the capacity of the hospitals and staff.

The Intersection of Spanish Flu and World War I at Ellis Island

The first cases of the 1918 pandemic were reported in March 1918 at a U.S. Army training camp in Kansas. It was called the "Spanish Flu" due to its coverage by the newspapers across Spain, a neutral country during WWI and where the flow of news was not censored. Ellis Island was at the intersection of both civilians and the military, and the virus impacted the Island's operations.

The War in Europe had been raging since the summer of 1914 but the United States remained officially neutral until it's declaration of war on April 2, 1917. The most significant

4 "1918 Pandemic (H1N1 Virus)," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last updated March 20, 2019, https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html.

5 John M. Barry, "The Site of Origin of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic and its Public Health Implications," US National Library of Medicine, National Institute of Health, National Center of Biotechnology Information, January 20, 2004, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC340389/.

6 "1918 Pandemic Influenza Historic Timeline," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last updated March 20, 2018, https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/pandemic-timeline-1918.htm.

7 United States Treasury Department, Public Health Service, *Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service of the United States*, No. 2884, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1920), 188, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hx3u7v&view=1up&seq=9.

8 Harlan D. Unrau, "Historic Resource Study,"(National Park Service: Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island, 1984) 1:185.

9 Ibid.

10 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1918), 267-269, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c006010507&view=1up&seq=1.; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor*, (Washington, DC: GPO: 1919), 303-306, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c006014424&view=1up&seq=7.

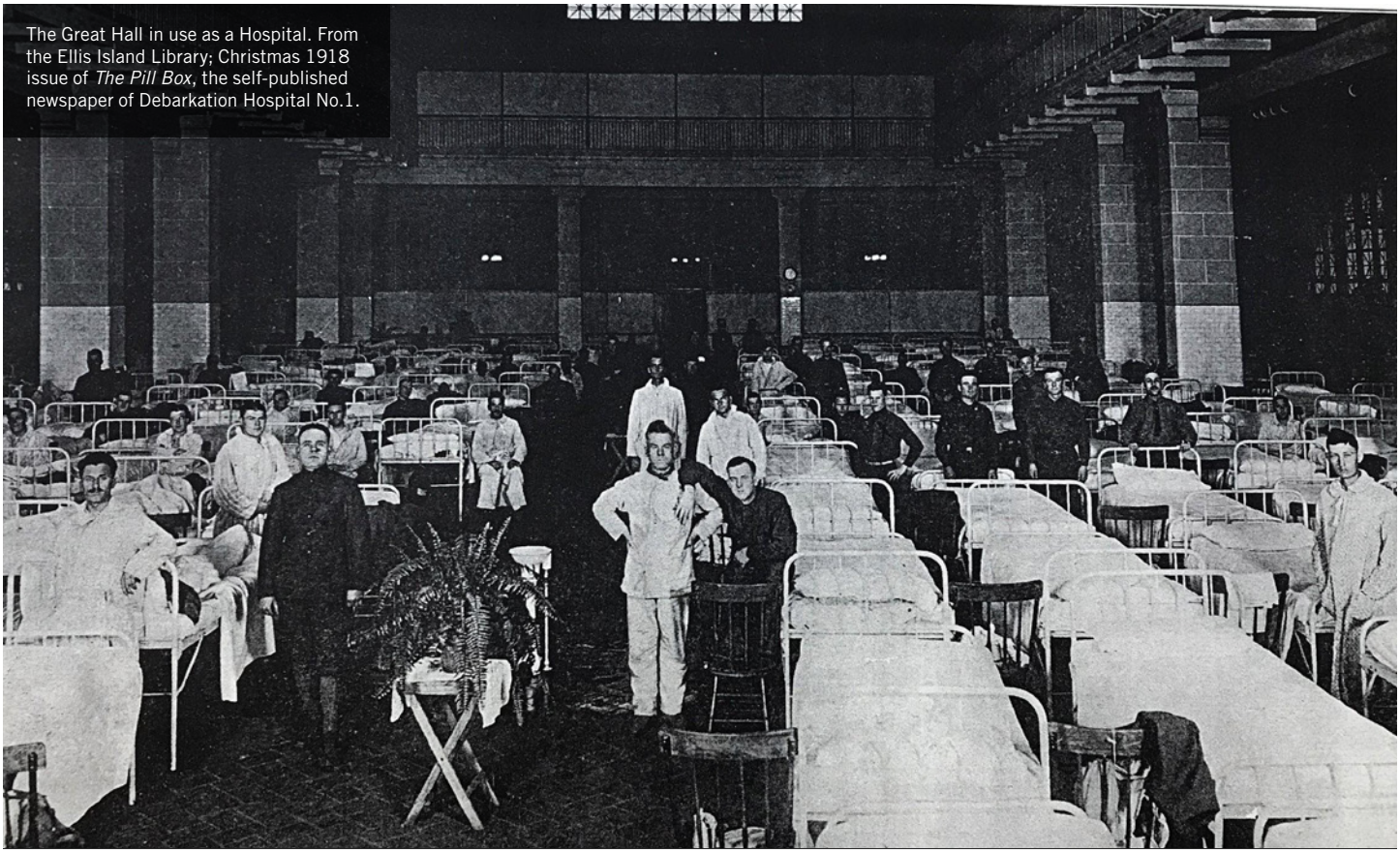
war-related event at Ellis Island prior to the United States' official entry was the Black Tom Island Explosion on July 30, 1916 when German saboteurs blew up several million pounds of explosives destined for the Russian, French and British armies. The explosives were being stored and prepared for shipment in warehouses and barges at the Black Tom Railroad Terminal in Jersey City, now the site of Liberty State Park. *The New York Times* described the destruction that occurred on Ellis as a result of that sabotage. Windows were shattered, parts of the hospital roofs caved in, and debris littered the lawns. Miraculously, the 353 immigrants on the island were evacuated and sent to the safety of the Barge Office, headquarters of the Bureau of Immigration at the Battery in Manhattan. The medical staff were also able to evacuate the 90 patients in the general hospital and the 39 women and children in the contagious hospital on Ellis Island. They were taken to several New York City hospitals. All of this was done with limited injury to those moved and no deaths.[11]

Ellis Island as the U.S. Enters the War

When the United States declared war on Germany on April 2, 1917, President Wilson declared, "The world must be made safe for democracy."[12] After the declaration of war, German and other enemy ships in New York harbor were seized and the foreign sailors were interned and sent to Ellis. They were held on the Island for several months before being dispersed to detention camps, mostly in the southern United States.[13] During this same period, the U.S. Army Nursing Corps used Ellis Island as a mobilization base. Arriving on June 15, 1917, the nurses reported to Ellis Island where they received training, inoculations, and equipment before departing for duty overseas. This certainly added to the influx of personnel on the Island.[14]

In March 1918, the War Department requisitioned a portion of the Island for its use. The Navy was allocated the baggage and dormitory building which became a Naval Receiving Station for Navy crews, merchant mariners, and outbound soldiers for transport to the front in Europe. The Army was allocated the majority of the remaining facilities for use as a debarkation hospital, renaming it Debarkation Hospital #1. It's function was to receive wounded soldiers returning from combat; the soldiers were treated, then transferred to hospitals closer to their family homes.[15] Island No.1 became a dormitory for enlisted men and accommodated 260 patients. Island No. 2 became the administrative center as well as a surgical hospital

11 "Ellis Island Like War Swept Town; Damage Estimated at $75,000," *The New York Times*, July 31, 1916, 1, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1916/07/31/issue.html.
12 "US Entry into World War I," History, last modified May 2019, https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/u-s-entry-into-world-war-i-1.
13 *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration*, 1918, 270-271.
14 Maj. Albert S. Bowen, M.C., *Activities Concerning Mobilization Camps and Ports of Embarkation*, Vol. 4 of *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1928), 319-320, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435018983254&view=1up&seq=5.
15 *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration*, 1918, 272.



The Great Hall in use as a Hospital. From the Ellis Island Library; Christmas 1918 issue of *The Pill Box*, the self-published newspaper of Debarkation Hospital No.1.

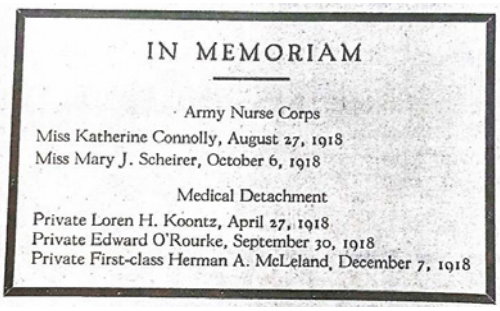
with several operating rooms and beds for 280 patients. Island No. 3 served as an additional hospital able to treat up to 500 patients at one time.[16]

By 1918, the hospital had become fully occupied by incoming wounded, leaving little space for the Army Corps' embarking nurses' accommodations. They were dispersed to hotels in New York City while awaiting transportation to the front.[17] The Army Nurses working and treating patients in the hospitals continued to be housed on the island.

Immigrants continued to arrive into the Port of New York but instead of being processed on Ellis Island, their inspections now took place on board the vessels. Immigrant patients already under Public Health Service care at the time of the transfer, along with subsequent arriving immigrants in need of medical attention, were admitted to one of the 28 hospitals in the New York/New Jersey region for the duration of the war. Relieved from duty at Ellis, Public Health Service doctors and nurses were also transferred and reassigned to other Public Health Service hospitals for the remainder of the war. Some staff members and patients were sent to the Marine Hospital at Stapleton, Staten Island.[18]

The First Wave

When the first wave of the Flu Pandemic broke out in the spring of 1918, the Army had just taken control of Ellis Island. In preparing the research of this article, we could find no official Public Health Service or Bureau of Immigration reports documenting cases of the flu or fatalities on the Island. The Army Medical staff at Ellis Island did, however, publish a newsletter called *The Pillbox* which covered the pandemic. In their final Souvenir Edition dated Christmas 1918, they mentioned the deaths from influenza of five members of the medical staff, two nurses and three enlisted men. The first fatality was on April 27, 1918, during the first wave of the outbreak. The others died during the second wave. The newsletter stated that, "While the influenza hit us hard, we fought it through with no impairment of morale or efficiency."[19]



IN MEMORIAM

Army Nurse Corps
Miss Katherine Connolly, August 27, 1918
Miss Mary J. Scheirer, October 6, 1918

Medical Detachment
Private Loren H. Koontz, April 27, 1918
Private Edward O'Rourke, September 30, 1918
Private First-class Herman A. McLeland, December 7, 1918

ABOVE: A commemorative page from *The Pillbox* Souvenir Edition Christmas 1918.

The Second Wave

The second wave was a different story for both immigrants and the military. The *1919 Annual Report to the Commissioner General of Immigration* reported that,

> The presence of the disease in epidemic form had been reported in different parts of Europe in the early summer of 1918, and cases in considerable numbers were recognized among passengers and crews arriving from European ports during the last week in July [1918.] The volume of infection among this class of the population increased during August, September, and October. Thirty-one arriving vessels had a total of 178 cases reported among the passengers and 51 among the crews, with 8 and 3 deaths, respectively. Thirteen medical officers and attendants engaged in medical examination in handling aliens at New York had the disease. All but 2 of these cases occurred in October, this being the month of the greatest occurrence of the epidemic among the population of the city of New York.[20]

This was at the same time that the hospitals were filled with military personnel. Because the inspections of immigrants took place on the arriving ships, virtually all of the patients in the hospital at this time were military, with the exception of a few stowaways or warrant cases. Immigrants who violated the terms of their initial admittance to the United States by committing a crime, being an anarchist or communist, and being unable or unwilling to work were issued warrants for deportation and brought back to Ellis Island. Immigrants who were ill were dispersed to the contracted hospitals.

The Army reported that:

> This disease made its first appearance about September 20 and lasted for a period of six weeks. Every precaution was taken for early diagnosis and isolation of suspected cases. Both patients and personnel were inspected twice daily and those presenting the slightest symptoms were isolated. This resulted in having 232 isolations made. Of these, 24 developed pneumonia, six of whom died.[21]

16 Lieut. Col. Frank W. Weed, M.C., US Army, *Military Hospitals in the United States*, Vol. 5 of *The Medical Department Of The U.S. Army In The World War* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1923), 792, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435018983247&view=1up&seq=798.
17 Bowen, *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War*, 4: 319-320.
18 United States Treasury Department, Public Health Service, *Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service of the United States*, No. 2859, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1919), 166, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hc539t&view=1up&seq=208.
19 *The Pillbox*, published by The Exchange: Christmas 1918, Bob Hope Memorial Library, Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration, https://online.fliphtml5.com/ylpvj/ollb/.
20 *Annual Report to the Commissioner General of Immigration*, 1919, 304.
21 "Extracts from Reports Relative to Influenza, Pneumonia, and Respiratory Diseases: Influenza," Office of Medical History, U.S. Army Medical Department, last modified September 8, 2009, https://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/1918flu/ARSG1919/ARSG1919Extractsflu.htm#W2.%20DEBARKATION%20HOSPITAL%20NO.%201.

In his unpublished senior thesis, historian Ryan Radice, discovered that many of the Army Corp nurses at Ellis awaiting assignment for overseas duty were also affected by the second outbreak.[22] What these nurses did during the Pandemic relates more to where they did it—in Bergen County and so we have included it in this article.

Military units came from all over the United States after completing their training on their way to the front in Europe. Their first stop in the region was at an Embarkation Camp. There were several in the New York area, Hoboken, New Jersey, being one of the main ports of embarkation for the U.S. military during World War I that all other camps passed through on their way out. However, Camp Merritt in Cresskill, New Jersey, was the first one, the primary one, and was designated as a medical camp. It had a large hospital and several smaller infirmaries to handle the needs of 38,000 soldiers who were stationed there at any one time. Over one million troops passed through it during its lifespan from 1917 to 1919.[23] The Medical Department of the U.S. Army in the World War noted that:

> A few cases of epidemic influenza made their appearance in this camp about the middle of September, 1918. Instructions were given to all medical officers to be on the lookout for cases suggestive of this disease and to remove them at once to the hospitals. Daily temperatures were taken and intimate contacts were segregated for five days. Attendants and patients in dispensaries, visiting infirmaries, or removed in ambulances wore masks of gauze or a handkerchief. Special orders were published by camp headquarters placing the camp in quarantine and directing the attention of all concerned to the necessity for constant ventilation, avoidance of overcrowding in barracks, early treatment of any ailment, and the use of individual toilet articles and mess equipment. Auditoriums and the theater were closed and the troops were segregated within their own barrack areas. Careful, detailed inspection of troops was instituted for the removal of early cases and their contacts. But few troops arrived from other camps after influenza became pandemic. … Between September 15 and November 15, 1918, there were a total of 5,025 cases of influenza; of these, 396 died, a mortality [rate] of 7.7 percent.[24]

Because of the scale of the outbreak at Camp Merritt and the other embarkation camps, the nurses on their way to the front were temporarily reassigned to the Embarkation Camps in October 1918. When the outbreak died down they returned to Ellis Island and shipped out for Europe.[25]

The Third Wave

The third wave occurred in December of 1918, by which time the war had ended. The armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, but hospitals on Ellis Island were still treating wounded soldiers as they returned from Europe—an influx which would last until June 30, 1919. Newspapers, such as *The Concordia Empire* in Concordia, Kansas, published letters from soldiers at Ellis telling their families that they would soon be transferred from Ellis Island to hospitals near their home.[26] The 1919 Public Health Service annual report records only six deaths during that fiscal year, four of which were from flu and one from pneumonia. Most likely these were among the stowaways or warrant cases, who continued to be the only non military patients in the hospitals until they were returned to the Public Health Service.[27] There is no record of how many cases the Public Health Service doctors and nurses treated.

When the Army returned Ellis Island to the Immigration Service at the end of June 1919, the Public Health Service renamed it Marine Hospital #43.[28] With the renaming came an expanded postwar mission to treat immigrants and employees of the Public Health Service, the Bureau of Immigration, the Coast Guard and the other Marine Services. These government employees were recorded as "beneficiaries." Shortly after WWI, however, immigration laws became very restrictive and by the end of the 1920s there were more beneficiaries in the hospitals than immigrants.[29]

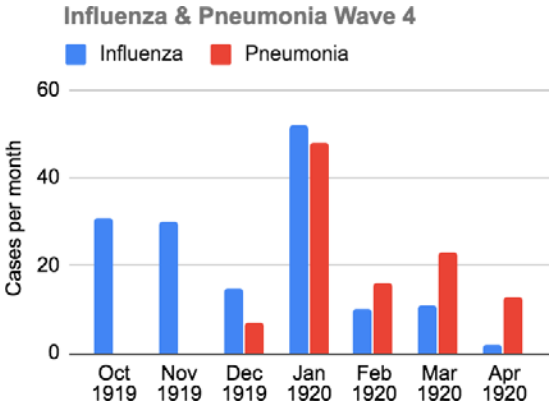
The Fourth Wave

The fall/winter of 1919-1920 saw the outbreak of the fourth and final wave of influenza. In the 1920 PHS annual report covering the period from July 1, 1919, to June 30, 1920, the Public Health Service reported 151 cases of influenza, 107 of pneumonia, resulting in six deaths from influenza, 16 from broncho-pneumonia and 45 from lobar-pneumonia. Deaths

22 Ryan Radice, "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag: Medicine on Ellis Island During the First World War," senior thesis, Monmouth University, January 2020, 24-27; Bowen,, *Activities Concerning Mobilization Camps and Ports of Embarkation*, 4:319-20.
23 "Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, N.J.," Office of Medical History, U.S. Army Medical Department, last modified September 4, 2009, https://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/wwivoliv/chapter6.htm.
24 Bowen, *Activities Concerning Mobilization Camps and Ports of Embarkation*, 4:332.
25 Ibid., 4:319-320.
26 Letter from Harl Buoy, "The St. Mihiel Drive: Cut Wire Through a Grave Yard Amid High Explosives," *Concordia Empire*, December 5, 1918, 1, https://www.newspapers.com/image/?clipping_id=48933743&fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVlLXZpZXctaWQiOjEzMjc5NDk5MCwiaWF0IjoxNTkyNDA0NTI2LCJleHAiOjE1OTI0OTA5MjZ9.S6azHJoeLEvm4-Hqm7tZbKcIQl-OtoGqlbd9EhiUQyI.
27 *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration*, 1919, 167.
28 *Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service*, 1920, 318.
29 United States Treasury Department, Public Health Service, *Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service of the United States*, No. 2976 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1926), 235-238, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b2947261&view=1up&seq=249.

from pneumonia during that period were recorded separately from those of influenza, but were likely the result of complications from the flu[30].

Margaret V. Daly, the head nurse at Ellis Island from 1906 to 1936, wrote a memoir of her time spent at Ellis Island. An excerpt from the memoir describes her return from Stapleton, Staten Island to Ellis Island in July of 1919:



Cases at Ellis Island, compiled from the *U.S. Public Health Service 1920 Annual Report* page 188 and pages 192-3.

> July came and things quieted down, enabling me to get a week's vacation. On the memorable twelfth of the month, however, while still on vacation, I received telegraphic orders to return to Ellis Island. The second day after my arrival we admitted five patients for whom I had to care. The Army had left the hospital in a terrible mess and it was necessary to engage again in a clean-up crusade. Visions of my first days at the Marine Hospital in Stapleton came back to me. The wards were in a frightful condition and we had to pitch in at once. We succeeded in painting 52 beds, and as at Stapleton, the improvement was so marked that the nurses volunteered to continue similar operations throughout other wards. After a while we got things in fairly good condition, though not a bit too soon for the wards were being filled up even while we were busy cleaning and renovating. But at any rate the place was not so depressing.
>
> Patients were now arriving in droves, for a second flu epidemic was well on the way. So crowded were we that we were obliged to turn the patients' dining rooms into wards. The halls were crowded with the very sick and every available nook and cranny were used for hospital purposes. To make matters worse, a good many of our nurses unfortunately fell victims to the disease. For a time the situation seemed out of hand, but eventually difficulties were overcome and we again resumed our normal routine. Ellis Island has never been an easy station and often I have been exceedingly tired, but thank God, my health has been good.[31]

Although Nurse Daly says that some nurses fell ill, there is no record of any of them dying from the flu.

During an oral history project conducted by the National Park Service in the 1970s, Dr. T. Bruce Anderson, who returned to Ellis Island with the rest of the Public Health Service staff in July of 1920 also recalled his experience with influenza that winter. He told the interviewer:

> I was again assigned to Ellis Island. In the winter of 1919 there was a large population of aliens—so-called warrant cases—held on Island No.1 waiting for disposition by the Immigration authorities. An epidemic of influenza broke out, from which, as I recall, we had at least 9 [the number 90 is recorded in transcript, but his speech is garbled. From statistics of the Public Health Service Annual Reports, nine is consistent with their records] fatalities in the Hospital during the month of February. At first, the Bureau questioned the diagnosis, but pathological material proved that it was influenza.[32]

The warrant cases that Dr. Anderson described as being the focal point of the final wave of the Pandemic at Ellis Island, adds another unique layer to the story of what was happening on Ellis during the flu epidemic and the war.

30 *Annual Report to the Commissioner of Immigration*, 1920, 318. To read page 318 and the rest of the section, click on the link and read the whole section pp 313-320 https://fliphtml5.com/ylpvj/ngdu.
31 Margaret V. Daly, "Nursing at Ellis Island: A Memoir," 7. Retrieved from https://online.fliphtml5.com/ylpvj/kzvk/#p=1.
32 Dr. T. Bruce H. Anderson, interviewed by Elizabeth Yew, in Agricola, Virginia, September 22, 1977, https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/oral-history-library.

A group of nurses standing outside the hospital complex c. 1920. Nurse Daly is likely one of the nurses pictured. (National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument.)

In the summer of 1919 anarchists tried to blow up the home of A. Mitchel Palmer, Attorney General of the United States. This was only one in a series of bombings and riots that year. Palmer enlisted the help of a young J. Edgar Hoover, who was in charge of the Bureau of Investigation, and jointly they decided to rid the US of the "Red Menace." During the fall of 1919 and winter of 1920 in a series of raids across the country, named "The Palmer Raids," they arrested several thousand suspected radicals. The ones rounded up in and around New York were held at Ellis Island awaiting deportation hearings.[33] This description from the Encyclopedia Britannica sums it up the scope of the arrests and deportations:

> On December 21, 1919, 249 radicals, including anarchist Emma Goldman, were packed aboard the USS Buford, which the press dubbed the Soviet Ark, and deported to Russia. On January 2, 1920, the most spectacular of the Palmer Raids took place, when thousands of individuals (estimates vary between 3,000 and 10,000) were arrested in more than 30 cities.[34]

The 1920 Census, conducted at Ellis Island between January 19 and January 22 contained the names of 150 Public Health Service staff members who lived on Ellis Island along with a list of approximately 400 patients being treated in the hospitals.[35] 29 of those patients had their profession listed on the census as "Anarchist." Records did not note if any of them died.

Conclusion

A lack of concrete data, aside from a few references and numbers listed in the Public Health Service reports, the excerpt from the U.S. Army Medical Department reports on Influenza, *The Pillbox*, and personal testimony, has made it difficult to gauge the full impact of the Spanish Flu on Ellis Island. From the extant data, it seems clear that the devastation was less than in neighboring New York and New Jersey, but it's obvious it had a large impact on the operations of a military hospital at the end of war. The only specific references that we have been able to find thus far mentioning that the flu even had a presence on Ellis Island during the first wave was a memoriam in *The Pillbox* to the five medical staff members that perished during 1918 from Influenza. Only one is listed as having died during that first wave.

The second and third waves were clearly documented by the U.S. Army and Immigration Services and so all these cases appear in military records. Immigration processing did not stop completely while Ellis was in use by the military. All the sick passengers were taken from the ships to local hospitals, these cases would have been counted in statistics relating to New York City and not Ellis Island. The Public Health services report of deaths at the end of 1918 to early 1919 were minuscule and without detailed documentation of how many they treated for what diseases we cannot know for certain what those few deaths meant in relation to the mortality rate of the flu. As far as the numbers of Influenza reported on Ellis among military personnel during these two waves, it seems that a couple hundred fell ill with only six resulting deaths. This did not make a large impact on the activities at Ellis because of the huge numbers of medical and military personnel passing through Ellis Island regularly.

The fourth wave of Influenza on Ellis Island in 1919 to 1920 seemed to garner the most attention. There are personal accounts from one of Ellis's Nurses, an oral history account from one of its doctors, along with the listing of cases from the Public Health Service. Yet, even with this more detailed documentation, this wave of Influenza on Ellis seems to have likely been on par with the number of cases as the second wave had been, which was recorded by the Army in 1918.

The account of the flu on Ellis Island that has been garnered from these limited sources paints a picture of a disease that while it wreaked havoc worldwide and in nearby embarkation camps, at Ellis it seemed contained and mild in comparison. It's possible that Ellis Island's unique position in the harbor along with its well trained staff and fully prepared medical facility, was well equipped to handle and combat the virus in a way others could not. Further research is needed to uncover medical reports to ascertain the full impact of flu during the pandemic and whether Ellis was just lucky in not having had an explosion of cases and deaths like the rest of the world or if it was more devastating than currently known sources suggest.

33 Adam Hoschschild, "When America Tried to Deport its Radicals," *The New Yorker*, November 4, 2019, https://link.newyorker.com/view/5be9e9813f92a40469fd947ab0zxv.90e0/2972a83f.

34 Gregory Dehler, "Palmer Raids," Britannica Online, last modified May 5, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palmer-Raids#:~:text=Palmer%20Raids%2C%20also%20called%20Palmer,of%20whom%20were%20subsequently%20deported.

35 Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *14th Census of the United States, 1920—Population*, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, 4A-7B, https://online.fliphtml5.com/ylpvj/atol/.

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Photo courtesy of Z22.

About the Save Ellis Island Foundation

Save Ellis Island is the National Park Service partner for the restoration and preservation of the 29 unrestored buildings on Ellis Island's south side. Save Ellis Island, its partners and members work together for the preservation of our nation's historical and cultural heritage for this and future generations.

The foundation provides numerous educational opportunities, including an online blog, author and historian talks, and "hard hat tours" where the public can experience this historic site while stabilization and preservation efforts are underway.

www.saveellisisland.org

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