

# Diphtheria outbreak causes concern for IU in 1922

*"Diphtheria, acute contagious disease ... It begins as a soreness of the throat with fever ... The toxins may disseminate to other parts of the body, damaging the tissues of the heart, kidneys or nerves. Deaths from diphtheria often result from inflammation of the heart. Inflection of the nerves can cause inability to swallow and paralysis."*

— *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 1975 edition.

Back in the days before sulfa, penicillin and antibiotics were available, getting diphtheria was a very frightening thing. Bloomington lived through an epidemic of the disease in 1922.

More specifically, it was Indiana University that survived an outbreak. On Sept. 30, *The Evening World* ran a short report from the IU physician, Dr. J.E.P. Holland. It read: "Three cases of diphtheria were found yesterday among the students. All students suffering with sore throat are urged to present themselves at the office of the university physician for examination at once. Students are advised to gargle their throats twice daily with equal parts of peroxide of hydrogen and water as a preventive measure."



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

The first three cases were all sorority girls from two different houses on campus. Of the 2,903 students, 150 showed up at Holland's office to take a Schick test. By Oct. 2 the university reported that there were five new cases.

Announcement of the new statistics was swiftly followed by another statement to the effect that despite a prevalent rumor floating around the campus, the university was not going to close. In the Oct. 6 bulletin, the number of cases in the hospital had increased to 10.

There were five new cases on Oct. 9. Dr. Holland appealed to the Eli Lilly Company in Indianapolis for help with Schick test materials. Not only were the materials forthcoming, but the company loaned out Dr. E.G. Kyte from their research laboratory.

The university continued to round up stu-

dents for tests. In his book, *History of Indiana University*, Burton D. Myers wrote "On Tuesday, October 10, a conspicuous box notice in *The Indiana Daily Student* requested all students to present themselves at once at the University physicians' office for the Schick test. It was reported that 17 students were in quarantine."

*The Evening World* of Oct. 10 added that there were 10 additional cases out in town. By Oct. 14 it was reported in the newspaper that more than 1,500 students had taken the test, and 400 of those susceptible to the disease had received immunization.

Even more welcome was the news that the epidemic seemed to have run out of steam. The county was down to five in the city and eight under quarantine in the university hospital. "Mrs. Fannie Ferguson, 826 Atwater Avenue, was the last case reported."

Dr. Holland was able to heave a cautious sigh of relief on Oct. 19. In fact, there had been no new cases reported in the last three days. Five days later he declared that the epidemic had been stamped out.

Dr. Holland became a local hero. His prompt and efficient reaction to the possibili-

ty of an epidemic had kept a real disaster from happening. Actually, university officials and local health personnel had learned a valuable lesson from the misery caused by the Spanish influenza in 1918.

Dr. Fred Batman, acting university physician while Holland was in the army, had called for precautions – extra blankets for the Student Army Training Corps and "cold" shots at the physician's office.

Nevertheless, the university was shut down. The total number of students hospitalized for flu was 350. Three students died. When it was over, IU President William Lowe Bryan wrote: "I wish to express the heartiest thanks of the University to those who have helped our soldier boys make the fight against influenza. The almost unequaled record of our University hospital in saving the boys is due to the physicians, nurses, soldier orderlies and voluntary helpers from the town and the faculty. The work was hard and dangerous. Not a few of the workers broke down with the disease or with exhaustion. Those who are at the battle have not shown more devotion than many who have helped to make the victorious fight here."

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