

Stranger blamed for bringing deadly flu to town

Ever hear of Charles Ganstine? Perhaps not, but his name is far overshadowed in Bloomington history by what he is reputed to have left behind after his arrival here on Oct. 6, 1918. He is supported to have been the one who brought the Spanish influenza.

In his book, *Relive It*, the late C. Earl East recalled that Ganstine was married to a Bloomington girl whose family lived on Lincoln Street. Ganstine was a school teacher in Humbolt, Kansas, and he came with his wife to visit her parents.

As East put it, "While walking up from the Monon Station the night before (on Oct. 6) enroute to the Lincoln Street home of his wife's parents, he had collapsed on the sidewalk in front of a south side of the square pharmacy."

Once he had been carried inside the store, a doctor was called. It didn't take the physician long to diagnose what ailed the visitor. According to East, the doctor gave Ganstine some harsh words "for bringing this damned thing to Bloomington."

The city had what was inelegantly called a "pest house," and Ganstine was carried



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

there to keep him from infecting others. Unfortunately, he died the following day.

The pharmacy owner was quick to publicize that he had had his store fumigated. It is not known whether the announcement reassured any customers afraid to enter the premises.

East recalled that as the flu epidemic gathered momentum he saw Billy Thrasher pass by the house. "I put the tenth one to bed this noon," said Billy. East wrote that by the next day the young man had been obliged to put himself to bed.

Examining one 7-year-old boy, Dr. J.P. Tournier asked him if he had eaten any green walnuts. At that point in time the physician was yet to see his first case of the

Spanish influenza.

Another East story was about a man by the name of Jerry Green, who directed military training at Bloomington High School. Before dawn one morning, after his fever was gone and his appetite returned, he went to the kitchen and ate some beans. Illness suddenly returned in the form of "progressive pneumonia."

East explained that what was puzzling about the disease was its sudden onslaught. "It wasn't alone the high percentage of fatalities. Almost as chilling was the brevity of the battle some losers put up."

Alarmed at the spread of the epidemic, Indiana University cancelled classes until Oct. 20 and sent students home. The Bloomington *Daily Telephone* reported that there were already 100 cases in town. Equally alarmed, the Monroe County Health Board banned indoor funerals, and graveside services only were conducted. East reported that no children could be seen playing in yards or on the street.

Then there was the very sad case of the Methodist minister's wife. While her hus-

band was serving overseas with the Y.M.C.A., she and the children had rented rooms at 502 East Third Street.

"Little Harriet and Philip Taylor were both very ill when their mother called out a last good-bye to them from an adjoining room," wrote East. The Board of Health refused permission for her casket to be moved from a funeral home to the Methodist parsonage. It was just too risky.

Charles Cosner, a local photographer and director of a Bloomington band, and his family became very ill. Eventually, Cosner and his wife had "double pneumonia." They died approximately 72 hours apart, despite the fact that they were being treated by an Indianapolis specialist.

Was Ganstine really the one who brought the flu epidemic to Bloomington? East commented, "But the new enemy knocking at gates here and elsewhere was not to be denied. Others were returning to their hometowns and to loved ones whom they know would not cast them out. And so like sparks wind scattered on sunburned turf, the virulent flu spread rapidly."

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