THE SICK AND THE DEAD: SELF-DOSAGE, MEDICAL TREATMENT, AND BURIAL DURING THE 1918 SPANISH-INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC IN THE JACKSON PURCHASE

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Throughout history humanity has been afflicted by diseases. Often diseases turned into epidemics that swept over large areas leaving paths of sickness and death behind. Because modern science has developed defenses against diseases such as smallpox, cholera, and yellow fever, the many notorious epidemics in the past seem remote, even legendary.[1]

Many elderly Americans, however, can still vividly recall the year 1918. To most it represents the end of World War I, which had by 1918 left Europe in a "weakened and emaciated" condition after four long years of struggle.[2] By the end of the year, the conclusion of the war dominated attention. Yet the effects of the war ultimately led to the even more far-reaching destruction caused by Spanish influenza.

The Spanish-influenza epidemic of 1918 is unique in the United States because, unlike previous epidemics, it raged through every state. This study concerns the epidemic in Kentucky and, more specifically, in the Jackson Purchase, a region named after Andrew Jackson who helped purchase the land from the Chickasaw Indians in 1818. A century later, the region comprised the state's eight western counties of Ballard, Calloway, Carlisle, Fulton, Graves, Hickman, Marshall, and McCracken.[3]

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1 Geddes Smith, *Plagues on Us* (New York, 1941), 24.

2 Richard Collier, *The Plague of the Spanish Lady* (New York: Atheneum Company, 1974), 18.

3 The Jackson Purchase lies between the Mississippi and the Tennessee rivers with the Ohio River to the north and the Tennessee border to the south.

Like most of the United States, Kentucky was swept by a tremendous epidemic of Spanish influenza during the fall and winter of 1918. From the first diagnosed case in late September, the disease rather than the war effort became the greatest challenge to the citizens of Kentucky. Throughout the dramatic three-month scourge, Kentuckians endured terrible suffering.

In each of the state's 120 counties, the "Spanish Lady" struck with a violent force, leaving entire communities physically and mentally devastated. The influenza epidemic arrived suddenly, striking over 300,000 Kentuckians and killing over 13,000, most of whom were in the prime of life.[4]

Although Spanish influenza infected over twenty percent of the United States population (estimated at 100,000,000), the public remained calm; in fact, there were no riots, lawlessness, or flight such as occurred during the plague years of the fourteenth century. Rather, an amazing degree of confidence prevailed throughout the ordeal.[5] The Spanish influenza epidemic failed to create mass hysteria, in part, because of its general appearance and nature. Influenza, or "flu," had been a common ailment for many years before 1918, usually occurring during the winter months.[6]

Known to most people as the "grippe," influenza at first appearance seemed like a mild cold. This was unlike previous killer epidemics. The Black Death, which recurred during the Middle Ages, caused symptoms of swelling and horrible blotches upon the victims' faces, while yellow-fever victims experienced a black vomit.[7]

The exact location of the initial outbreak of the Spanish influenza pandemic, like its direct cause, is impossible to determine. Only by chance, and not by scientific research, was

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4 Nancy D. Baird, "The Spanish Lady in Kentucky," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 50 (1976): 291.

5 Smith, *Plagues on Us*, 25.

6 Edwin O. Jordan, *Epidemic Influenza: A Survey* (Chicago, 1927), 26.

7 Smith, *Plagues on Us*, 26.

the influenza epidemic named after Spain. In the spring of 1918, it was reported by the European press that Spain had been struck by a mysterious disease. Although this widespread malady was mild, the sickness spread rapidly across the Iberian Peninsula, striking over one third of the population (then estimated at eight million) within a few weeks' time.[8] Few Spaniards died of the disease, but when King Alfonso XIII became afflicted with the so-called "three-day fever" in March 1918, the *London Times* reported that "a strange form of disease of epidemic character has appeared in Madrid; although mild in form, it has the wake of a tornado."[9] Thus appeared "Spanish Influenza."

Spanish influenza in 1918 was clearly a war-related disease. As a result of the American involvement in World War I, several army training camps had been hastily constructed across the United States. These overcrowded and poorly sanitized encampments were breeding grounds for epidemic influenza in late 1918. One of the hardest hit of the thirty camps was Camp Taylor near Louisville. During the month of September 1918, concerned relatives of thousands of sick soldiers flocked to the besieged camp; these visitors often contracted the disease themselves and spread it even more.[10]

The return of infected Jackson-Purchase residents, coupled with the many war-bond parades and rallies held throughout the region, provided the opportunity for a major outbreak. As a result, Spanish influenza swept through the western counties. While hundreds of new cases were being reported daily, county officials, with the support of the state department of health, quickly prohibited community gatherings and closed all schools and churches.[11]

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8 Jordan, *Epidemic Influenza*, 63.

9 Collier, *Plague of the Spanish Lady*, 7.

10 Gregory K. Culver, "The Impact of the 1918 Spanish Influenza Epidemic on the Jackson Purchase," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 65 (1991): 490.

11 Ibid., 491-92.

The initial outbreak of Spanish influenza in the Jackson Purchase continued until the first of November when a significant decline in the number of cases was reported. With the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918, however, thousands of cheering spectators once again gathered in the streets throughout the region. Soon afterward, a second widespread attack of Spanish influenza (lasting until the end of December) once again brought restrictions in public assembly. Both waves of epidemic influenza resulted in widespread sickness and death and limited social activities, holiday celebrations, school events, and elections.

Throughout the epidemic, it was obvious that medical science and technology were almost helpless against influenza. The humbling impact of Spanish influenza on baffled doctors practicing in the Jackson Purchase led them to provide only basic pain-relieving remedies to their patients. Though physicians were unable to cure influenza, most western Kentucky residents still relied heavily on them for advice, comfort, and medicine. As a result, doctors' offices and hospitals throughout the epidemic were nearly overwhelmed.[12]

The Spanish-influenza epidemic also imposed financial burdens on the entire population. Many businessmen could not cope with the economic slump caused by the epidemic. Layoffs were common, and many businesses closed their doors for weeks at a time.[13] Since most citizens kept their shopping to a minimum, few merchants prospered during the ninety-day scourge. On the other hand, the epidemic did improve some businessmen's prospects. Doctors' offices, drug and grocery stores, restaurants, and saloons found plenty of customers. As a result, the epidemic stimulated medically related sales and advertising.[14]

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12 Ibid., 498.

13 Mayfield *Daily Messenger*, 26 October 1918.

14 Paducah *Evening Sun*, 4 October 1918; Mayfield *Daily Messenger*, 20 November 1918; Murray *Ledger and Times*, 11 November 1918.

When the epidemic of Spanish influenza struck in early October 1918, citizens living in western Kentucky noticed changes in advertising. Before the influenza appeared, advertising appealed to patriotism in promoting specific products. Advertising in popular publications often showed a soldier who smoked a particular brand of cigarette, drank a certain beverage, or shaved with a special cream while fighting in France. When Spanish influenza swept across the nation during the fall of 1918, advertising quickly shifted to themes related to the epidemic.[15]

The 1918 epidemic provided an opportunity for profiteers as well. Scientists, chemists, druggists, inventors, and quacks all viewed the epidemic as a rare opportunity that provided the chance for potential millionaires to market their wondrous cures. In many places, medical supply prices soared as these quick-money men moved in to corner the vast market for medicine and supplies.[16] Despite governmental efforts to frustrate profiteers, citizens across the country often paid outrageous prices for simple medical remedies.[17] Indeed, for hundreds of "nostrum nuts," the epidemic proved to be a gold mine.

When influenza broke out among the civilian population in late September 1918, public understanding of it was poor. Many believed the epidemic had resulted from dangerous germs released along the Atlantic coast by German agents in submarines. Others thought pestilence was an omen, signalling the inevitable end of the world. Such ignorance provided opportunity for charlatans claiming to have an instant cure. Many ambitious Americans, in an effort to rid the nation of this unknown enemy, called in medicine men, snake charmers, and

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15 Murray *Ledger and Times*, 13 July 1918; Paducah *Evening Sun*, 21 August 1918; Mayfield *Daily Messenger*, 4 February 1919.

16 Collier, *Plague of the Spanish Lady*, 96.

17 Many national reports showed that oftentimes citizens were required to pay as much as five dollars for a simple fever thermometer.

even voodoo doctors. In many Southern states, quacks urged citizens to "sprinkle sulphur in their shoes, tie sliced cucumbers to their ankles, and carry a potato in each pocket."[18]

Outlandish remedies and concoctions appeared by the thousands. For a small fee, many charlatans offered to contact persons, who had recently died of Spanish influenza, using magical Ouija boards. People of all ages purchased voodoo charms, bracelets, and dolls, hoping to ward off the evil spirits of influenza. White chicken feathers were also popular during the epidemic along with special incantations chanted by medical wizards. One of these required the patient to rub vinegar over his hands and face twice daily, while chanting:

"Sour, sour, Vinegar-V;
Keep the Sickness Off'n me."[19]

Although many citizens living in the Jackson Purchase strongly believed that there were special cures for Spanish influenza "somewhere in the unknown world," most relied primarily on homemade remedies and concoctions that had been passed down within families for several generations. Like most rural areas, western Kentucky flourished as a "rural textbook" for folk medicines; cures could be found in family diaries and journals for almost any disease. Most of the favorite home remedies generally consisted of poultices and salves which were made from grain, garlic, onion, and mustard plant.[20]

The most popular preventive used was asafetida, an ill-smelling gum placed in a small bag and worn around the neck. Asafetida was believed to be a cure for almost any ailment, including influenza. Groceries and drugstores stocked this "mad combination of odors," usually on a high shelf near the

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18 Smith, *Plagues on Us*, 296-97.

19 Collier, *Plague of the Spanish Lady*, 197.

20 William E. Collins, *Folkways and Customs of Old Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), 77.

back of the store.[21] Country doctors in the Purchase region often frowned on the use of home remedies, although they agreed that the hand-me-down family cures might boost morale.[22]

As Spanish influenza swept throughout western Kentucky during the fall and winter of 1918, there was an observable increase in the use of home remedies. Old family cookbooks, diaries, journals, and even Bibles were retrieved from dusty bookshelves and damp attics in a desperate attempt to thwart the dreaded symptoms of influenza and pneumonia. One of the oldest homemade concoctions dated back to 1833. Originally used as a cure for cholera, it was believed by many to be strong medicine for any disease. It consisted of:

20 drops of Spirits of Camphire,
20 drops of Tinker of Asafetida,
8 drops of Spirits of hearts-horn
12 drops of acence [essence] of peppermint
20 or 30 drops of calomel
along with one gram of opium.

All of these "basic" ingredients were designed to be mixed together and used as a plaster placed over the chest.[23]

Simpler remedies were also popular: French brandy, steam baths, castor oil, calomel, quinine, and particularly whiskey. Local newspapers also published many remedies received from inventors who distributed free descriptions of their creations. One came from a retired Massachusetts shoe salesman, who claimed to have saved hundreds of lives. Although he never sought fame, he did ask for donations to help the further development of his product:

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21 Baird, "Spanish Lady in Kentucky," 297.

22 Interview by Susan Shirley with James C. Hart, M. D., 17 January 1976, Murray, Kentucky, West Kentucky History and Culture Collection, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky.

23 "Recept [*sic*] for the Cholera," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 27 (1953): 334. Asafetida was an ill-smelling, homemade concoction consisting of garlic, parsley, mustard, and onion. The ingredients of hearts-horn are unknown.

> Take six to ten onions, according to size, and chop them fine; place over a hot fire, and about the same quantity of rye meal, and Vinegar enough to form a quick paste. Stir thoroughly, letting it simmer from 5-10 minutes. Then put the mass in a cotton bag large enough to cover the lungs and apply to the chest as hot as the patient can bear it. Before this gets cold, apply another, and then continue by reheating the poultices. In a few hours the patient will be out of danger.[24]

Home remedies gained their psychological effect from the foul odors, the result of onion, garlic, and vinegar compounds, which were believed to kill the germs before they reached the victim. In Harrodsburg, J. G. Mallon reported that he carried with him a small vial of embalming fluid, which he sniffed throughout the day. He insisted that the fluid would "kill instantly any germ, no matter how powerful." As a result of this widely publicized technique, morticians throughout the state, already exhausted from overwork, were constantly hounded for small amounts of the dwindling supply of embalming fluid.[25]

Besides stimulating discussions of folk remedies, Spanish influenza caused dramatic changes in local newspaper advertising. Daily advertising by merchants throughout the region provided small newspapers with a substantial portion of their income. Therefore, as the daily headlines gradually switched from news in France to the sweeping epidemic, advertisements also reflected the attention given to Spanish influenza. Many of the medically related products, which had previously been war-related, changed their slogans to include the new disease:

> Clean yourself at once with 'Vin Hepatica'; which not only cleanses your kidneys, liver, and bowels, but also restores your vitality against the likes of colds, sore throat, and Spanish influenza. Come in and get a bottle

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24 Paducah *Evening Sun*, 19 October 1918.
25 Louisville *Courier-Journal*, 14 October 1918.

now.[26]

Other local advertisements recommended using a product specifically to prevent Spanish influenza:

> For twenty years, Lists's La Grippe Capsules have been the standard cure for grippe. Don't be careless, the Board of Health warning advises you to treat at first symptoms. A box of capsules, taken at the start, will do everything that medicine can do to ward off a serious attack of influenza.[27]

Perhaps the most popular and widely acclaimed national preventive for influenza was Grove's Tasteless Tonic: "This tonic is an exceptionally good tonic for any member of the family. It is acceptable to the most delicate stomach and does not cause nervousness or ringing in the head. Price 60 cents."[28]

Advertisements for tonics, pills, oils, salves, and soaps flooded magazines and newspapers daily throughout the Jackson Purchase, promising instant cures and complete recovery. Most of these wonder drugs have long since disappeared: Bond's Liver Pills, Grandma's Powdered Soap, Pape's Diapepsin, Dobell's Solution, Shambough's Nasal Tube, Folney's Honey and Tar, Cascara Quinine, Miller's Antiseptic Oil, and countless others.[29]

Other businesses used the Spanish-influenza epidemic to their advantage as well. Cleaning houses throughout the region advertised that wearing clean clothes was necessary to prevent influenza: "For sick clothes, call Doctor Well's Cleaners, it may save you from the flu." Even the clothing-store merchants, whose profits had been drastically reduced by the epidemic, devised catchy slogans:

Don't let your body get chilled, that's the way to protect

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26 Mayfeld *Daily Messenger*, 19 October 1918.

27 Paducah *Evening Sun*, 9 October 1918.

28 Ibid., 15 October 1918.

29 Mayfield *Daily Messenger*, 23 November 1918; Murray *Ledger and Times*, 19 October 1918; Paducah *Evening Sun*, 19 October 1918.

> you from influenza. Better right now, get the proper weight and size in the famous Munsing Underwear. Union seats and two piece garments at B. Weille and Son. $1.50 to $6.00.[30]

Another clothing store, located in Paducah, also advertised proper dress as a safeguard against the disease:

> Keep warm and keep off influenza. All health authorities say the very first precaution to take against influenza is to keep warm. There is nothing that will give more bodily comfort than a good sweater. Wallersteins-The Store with a Conscience.[31]

Restaurant owners, dentists, barbers, plumbers, and even cola-bottlers all promoted their professional contributions towards the prevention of Spanish influenza.[32] McCracken County chiropractor, A. B. Black, advertised the efficacy of his treatment for influenza:

> Avoid the so-called Spanish influenza by taking chiropractic administration when you have a pain, soreness between the shoulders; that is the time to call a chiropractor. He will remove the cause which will check your troubles at once, the same as others have done. No cases of influenza reach pneumonia under chiropractic signal adjustments.[33]

The period of Spanish influenza, lasting from October through December 1918, also provided area drugstores with a golden opportunity to advertise their products. Previously, most druggists had been content with advertising directed to the general public: "All of our drugs are fresh and pure, we compound all prescriptions with great care. R W. Walker Company."[34] However, with the onset of influenza in the Jackson

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30 Paducah *Evening Sun*, 10 October 1918.

31 Ibid., 21 November 1918.

32 Mayfield *Daily Messenger*, 20 November 1918; 26 October 1918; Paducah *Evening Sun*, 15 November 1918.

33 Paducah *Evening Sun*, 25 October 1918.

34 Ibid., 16 September 1918.

Purchase, many druggists aimed their advertisements at specific customers.

> Take no chances with this dreaded disease now sweeping the country. A preventive antiseptic wash or spray solution should be used by every industrial or office worker. Ask your physician. Health authorities recommend Dobell's Solution.[35]

By the first of January 1919, after the epidemic had subsided throughout western Kentucky, newspaper advertising continued which was aimed at those who suffered from the lingering effects of the disease. Many products, which had previously been advertised as preventives, were recycled as effective agents in treating the aftereffects of the disease:

> I am an old soldier named G. S. Morris, now seventy years old. I had the Spanish influenza and it left my stomack in an awful shape. Yet after taking Eatonic, I feel fine. So if you want to enjoy life again after you have battled the flu, be sure to take a box of Eatonic with you today.[36]

The family doctor was certainly the most trusted ally in combating Spanish influenza. Often the most respected and best-educated citizen of the community, the physician was forced into roles he might not have wanted. While treating diseases, fighting both mental and physical effects, the family doctor also served as faith healer, counselor, civic leader, diplomat, and peacemaker.[37] Being on call twenty-four hours a day, doctors during the early twentieth century provided house calls, then considered both a courtesy and a necessity. When called upon to deliver a baby or settle a family dispute, the family doctor usually responded, regardless of the hour, the weather, or his own physical condition.[38]

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35 Ibid., 8 October 1918.

36 *Carlisle County Mercury*, 10 January 1919.

37 Hart Interview, 17 January 1976.

38 Collins, *Folkways and Customs of Old Kentucky*, 77. During the worst

Physicians usually carried a small black bag filled with aspirin, quinine, castor oil, morphine, and other pain-easing remedies. Doctors were required to make journeys throughout the Jackson Purchase, traveling on dusty dirt roads, which, like the weather, often posed precarious problems. Most physicians living in the Purchase in 1918 traveled either by horse-and-buggy or Ford Model-T.[39] Like the postman who also traveled by horse-and-buggy, the local doctor was an overworked servant of the people, whose services were often taken for granted.[40]

When notice of the first confirmed case of Spanish influenza appeared in newspaper columns throughout Kentucky in late September 1918, the state was not able to respond effectively to the emergency. Kentucky, like most states, had suffered a severe shortage of nurses and physicians because of the war effort. One survey indicated that over fifty percent of the state's physicians were serving in the armed forces. As a result, an estimated 1,500 physicians were left to care for Kentucky's 2,000,000 citizens throughout the epidemic.[41]

Although medicine in the early twentieth century was far from perfect, cures had been discovered for such long-dreaded diseases as milk sickness, typhoid fever, and smallpox by the time Spanish influenza arrived. During the influenza epidemic doctors in western Kentucky and throughout the state were confused and generally perplexed by the virulence of the disease. Most local physicians had only pain-killing drugs, and they could offer only a simple, commonly known method of treatment - plenty of rest, aspirin for fever, and fluids. Unlike their medical ancestors, who had attributed diseases to an imbalance of body humors, the doctors of 1918 knew the

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phase of the epidemic, physicians had to contend with exhaustion, complaints, and even threats from grief-stricken families. See Hart Interview.

39 Hart Interview, 17 January 1976. The popular Model-T Ford in 1918 sold for approximately $695. For an advertisement, see the Mayfield *Daily Messenger*, 28 January 1919.

40 Hart Interview, 17 January 1976.

41 Baird, "Spanish Lady in Kentucky," 296.

general causes of communicable diseases, but they did not always know how to prevent them.[42]

Whenever possible, patients displaying the most severe complications of influenza were taken to one of several hospitals in the Jackson Purchase. Among the many clinics and hospitals scattered throughout the region, the larger ones were located in the larger cities: the Illinois Central and Riverside hospitals in Paducah; the Fuller-Gilliam, the Fuller-Morgan, and the Mayfield hospitals in Mayfield; and the Mason Hospital in Murray. Rural patients who needed immediate attention were often brought into town on featherbeds behind a team of mules.[43] Throughout the ninety-day epidemic, most clinics and hospitals were filled to capacity.

Although physicians in western Kentucky knew of no cures for influenza, they were still in great demand. Medical bulletins, issued through the various local newspapers, strongly urged that persons with symptoms, "Go home and immediately call a doctor." Doctors throughout the region during the first wave of the epidemic in October averaged between fifty to one hundred cases daily.[44] Physicians usually prescribed tonics, painkillers, relaxants, and whiskey. Doctors practicing in western Kentucky purchased their medical supplies from drug manufacturers, hospitals, and even local drugstores, a point evidenced by one advertisement: "To the physicians: We carry a complete line of phylacogens, serums, antitoxins, and fresh vaccine points. Call or phone us your needs at Hunt's Drugstore."[45]

In treating influenza patients most doctors took tremendous chances with their own safety. The records of the American Medical Association revealed that 428 physicians through-

42 Collier, *Plague of the Spanish Lady*, 304.
43 Hart Interview, 17 January 1976.
44 Paducah *Evening Sun*, 11 October 1918.
45 Mayfield *Daily Messenger*, 28 January 1919.

out the United States died of influenza and pneumonia.[46] In the following years, the numbers declined to 313 deaths in 1919 and 223 deaths in 1920.[47]

Although medical fees during the epidemic varied among physicians throughout western Kentucky, most doctors worked very long hours. During the ninety-day period of the epidemic, doctors had to contend with exhaustion, small fees, complaints, and even threats from families stricken with grief over the loss of a loved one. Many doctors of the region had record books filled with "unpaid," and "charged" accounts. Most of these debts were eventually paid off later, but doctors were often forced to enter many unpaid accounts as simply "worthless assets." They also accepted payments in the form of pigs, cows, chickens, eggs, butter, and watermelons.[48]

Some doctors in the area had raised their fees prior to the epidemic. In the early part of 1918, for instance, the nine physicians in Murray, Kentucky, the county seat of Calloway County, posted a "new schedule of prices to take place of the old schedule."

> *Notice to the Public* We, the unsigned physicians in Murray, Kentucky, owing to the high cost of living and unprecedented high price of drugs, agree to make the following schedule of prices to take place of the old schedule: City Calls - day, $2.00. Night - $2.00. Each $2.00 call reaches one mile in the county, meaning from the county courthouse, then a minimum of 50 cents per mile is added until a four mile limit is reached. *Night Calls* - County, $1 extra
>
> *Obstetrics* - Normal case, $15 cash
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> *Consultation* - Minimum, $10 with $2 mileage until a four mile limit is reached.

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46 Jordan, *Epidemic Influenza*, 215.

47 Kentucky physicians did contract Spanish influenza and some died. Unfortunately there are no statistics on Jackson Purchase physicians.

48 Hart Interview, 17 January 1976.

Office Examination and Prescription - $1 to $5.
Office Dispensing - Positively no medicine given for less than 50 cents. Gonnorrhea [*sic*] $10 in advance for 10 days treatment
Fractured Forearm - $15 to $25, and extra for each dressing.
We know these prices are not out of proportion to the high prices farmers are getting for tobacco, corn and produce, or in fact anything that is "made or sold on the farm."[49]

In addition to medical services, funeral services were also in great demand during the epidemic. Traditionally there had been two methods of burial in the region, funeral parlors for those in the larger communities and "homemade funerals" for those living in rural areas. For those who could afford such a luxury, the cost of a funeral home service ranged from $100 to $150.[50]

Throughout Kentucky, undertakers during the Spanish - influenza epidemic faced a double burden of having to cope with the burial of victims both of war and influenza. Because of the tremendous demand resulting from bodies shipped from France, Kentucky, by the middle of October 1918, already faced a severe "coffin shortage," which lasted throughout the epidemic. During the month of October alone, over 1,000 influenza deaths were reported throughout the state.[51] This shortage was announced by the only coffin manufacturer in the state of Kentucky, the Falls City Casket Company, a branch of the

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49 Murray *Ledger and Times*, 4 February 1918. This kind of advertisement was unusual. Most physicians were completely independent. This notice was signed by P. A. Hart, Richard Keys, W. H. Graves, A. V. McRee, Will Mason, Jr., R. M. Mason, W. G. Johnson, C. O. Gingles, and Ben Keys.

50 Interview by Charles Beaman with Ronald Churchill, 20 February 1976, Murray, Kentucky. Western Kentucky History and Culture Collection, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky.

51 Paducah *Evening Sun*, 19 November 1918.

National Casket Company, which was located in Louisville. The war casualties, coupled with the number of influenza deaths, created an unprecedented demand for caskets throughout the state.[52]

For most of the Jackson Purchase residents in 1918, however, manufactured caskets were a rarity. Instead, western Kentuckians were accustomed to more crude methods of burial. Death in the rural areas of the region was viewed as a community responsibility, for few factory coffins were available or affordable. Cheaper caskets could be made from store-bought fixtures.[53]

Throughout the region, "coffin hardware" was usually purchased at the local store for those who could not afford a "proper funeral." Here a person could buy all of the necessary supplies for the manufacture of a homemade coffin: nails, handles, nameplates, silk pillows, and poplar boards. These materials were normally kept underneath the shelves, out of the sight of customers. The underlining for homemade coffins could also be purchased at country stores which carried a wide selection of white, gray, and black calico cloth.[54] But because of the tremendous fear and superstition that surrounded burial of the dead, store owners were reluctant to advertise coffin material, although a few did so: "Carter Hardware Company, Undertakers and Embalmers Service Deluxe."[55]

Most western Kentuckians in 1918 viewed the undertaking profession as a necessary but "silent service." Unlike doctors, morticians were often feared because of the mysterious nature of their work and the traditional dark clothing most wore. Although funeral homes were rare in 1918, the undertaker's services were in great demand. Morticians prepared

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52 Louisville *Courier-Journal*, 22 October 1918.

53 Most stores carried a small supply of the factory-made coffins, though they were usually kept out of sight. See Thomas D. Clark, *Pills, Petticoats, and Plows: The Southern Country Store* (Indianapolis, 1944), 265-67.

54 Ronald Churchill Interview, 20 February 1976.

55 Mayfield *Daily Messenger*, 28 January 1919.

bodies for burial by injecting embalming fluid. The undertaker, often aided by a physician in this process, used embalming fluid to make the person look life-like and in the hope of preventing the spread of the disease.[56]

While the undertaker was preparing the body, friends and relatives of the deceased would spend several hours hammering the water-soaked boards into the shape of the body, wide at the shoulders and tapered to the feet. Preparing the coffin often took all night, for funerals were usually held the following day.[57] Funeral services were held in the home of the deceased with only family members present because of the restrictions on public assembly. After a short service conducted by the family minister, the body would be taken to the cemetery by a horse-drawn hearse.[58]

The Spanish-influenza epidemic of 1918 caused great changes in all aspects of medical treatment. Although newspaper editors, druggists, physicians, undertakers, and many other professionals were all men of thriving businesses throughout the epidemic, their tasks were often quite difficult. Long hours, low wages, frequent complaints, and fatigue created tremendous burdens on men whose own careers were furthered by the widespread epidemic. Although the deadly epidemic enabled many businessmen to expand their operations, it also took many longtime friends, neighbors, and customers. It was a "prosperous era" that most would have gladly avoided.

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56 Ronald Churchill Interview, 20 February 1976.

57 Sometimes undertakers operated cabinet-making and furniture businesses on the side. See Sue Lynn McGuire, "Parting Friends: Southeastern Kentucky Funeral Customs, 1880-1915," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 67 (1993): 50. Soaking the boards in water made it possible to adjust them to the size of the deceased.

58 Prior to the influenza epidemic, Jackson Purchase funerals were usually conducted in churches.