

The Flu – More than a century ago

As a timely history lesson, the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic ripped thru the US, killing 675,000 – and between 20 and 50 million in the rest of the world. In big cities, quarantines were imposed and residents encouraged to wear masks – but the movement of World War I troops helped spread the pandemic. At the time –when Florida had less than one million residents, and the impact was modest compared to the Northeast. Yet as many as 100,000 Floridians may have caught the flu and there were over 4,000 Flu deaths in Florida in 1918 -- with thousands more weakened survivors died from pneumonia.

Lake Worth was spared a major impact --- although flu illnesses were reported and *The Lake Worth Herald* published articles describing the Flu, its symptoms and treatment throughout late 1918. During this period Lake Worth also advertised lack of cold winter-induced Flu as an argument to “Come to Florida”. In October, the Lake Worth Town Commission appointed the Vice Mayor V. L. McKoy as “Special Health Officer” and established procedures for reporting cases. Children moving to lake worth were required to quarantine for 12 days before attending school.

In December, the *Herald* published the following anonymous poem

You've Got The Flu

When your back is broken, and your eyes are blurred,
And your shin bones knock and your tongue is furred,
And your tonsils squeak and your hair gets dry,
And you're doggone sure you're going to die,
But you're scared you won't and 'fraid you will,
Just drag to bed and have your chill,
And pray the Lord to see you through,
For you've got the flu, boy

What is it like, this Spanish flu?
Ask me, brother, for I've been through:
It is by Misery, out of Despair,
It pulls your teeth and curls your hair,
It thins your blood and brays your bones,
And fills your craw with moans and groans,
And sometime, maybe, you'll get well:
Some call it flu – I call it hell

If you want to learn a little more, about the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic, a good starting place is: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/journal-plague-year-180965222/>