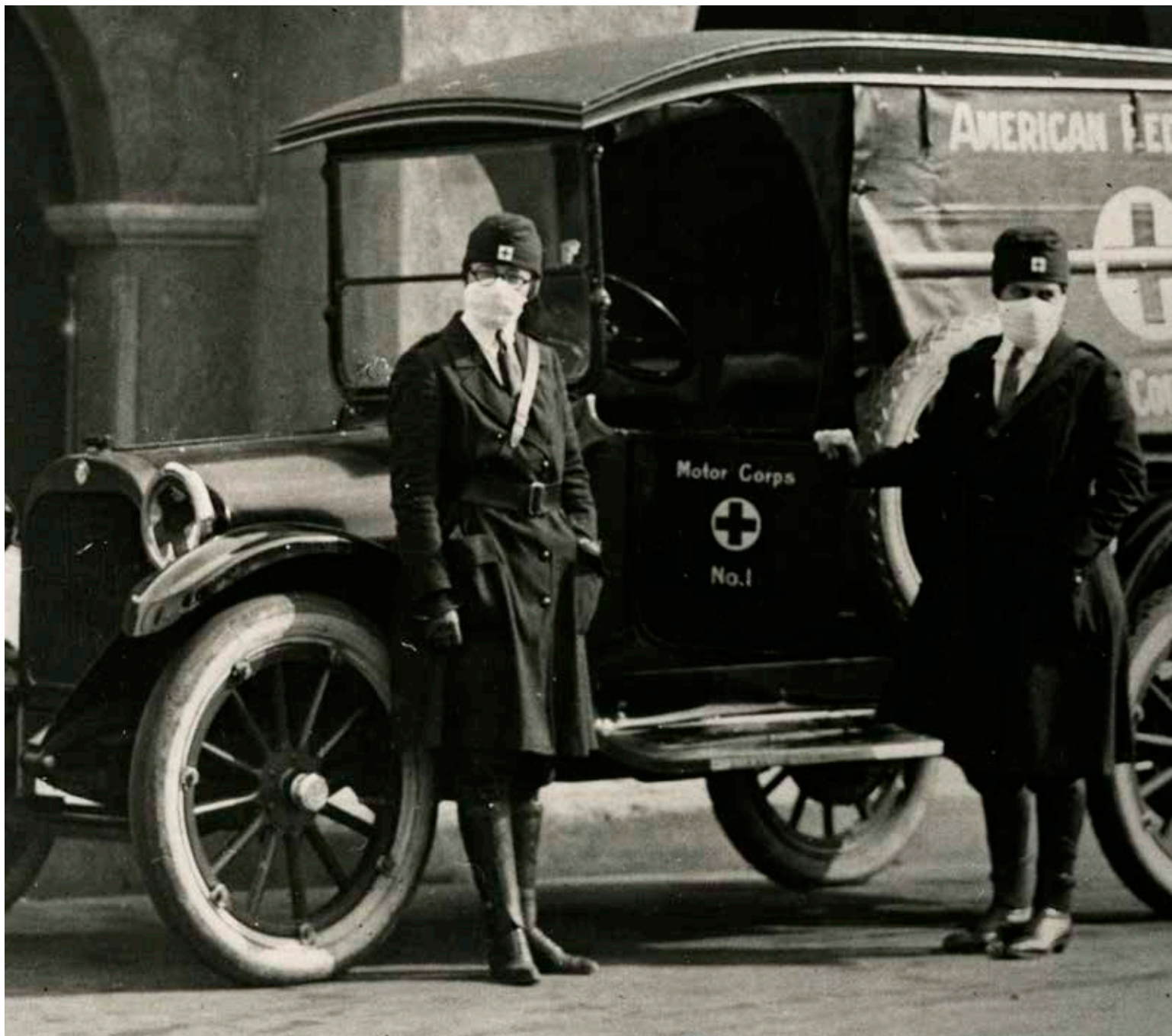




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La Peninsula

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The Influenza Epidemic
in San Mateo County

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To discover the past and
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Cover: Volunteers in the Motor Corps in front of the Burlingame Train Station, c. 1918.

The Influenza Epidemic in San Mateo County (1918-1919)

by Mitchell P. Postel



Soldiers training at Menlo Park's Camp Fremont marched in Palo Alto with masks. Courtesy Menlo Park Historical Association.

Introduction

In the history of humanity, few periods of time have been more catastrophic than the combination of World War I (1914-1918) and the Spanish Influenza epidemic (1918-1919). Nearly 11 million died in the War, while estimates range from 20 to 50 million people lost their lives from the disease. Of the “flu” victims, 550,000 were Americans. This includes some 50,000 American soldiers who died, many at training centers, like Camp Fremont in San Mateo County. Beyond those that succumbed at Camp Fremont, San Mateo County suffered 131 fatalities from the flu just in 1918 (the population of San Mateo County in 1920 was 36,800). The epidemic took 13,340 lives in California, about 45% of which were Bay Area residents.¹

Originally known as *La Grippe*, the illness typically resulted in high fever, chills and a blue coloration on the ears and lips that spread to the whole body. Severe

cases devolved into pneumonia which many times proved fatal as lungs filled with fluid causing the afflicted to literally drown.

Part of its frightening nature was that it acted differently than other epidemics. It hit young adults between 29 and 34 particularly hard, unlike most communicable diseases that severely affect the very young and the elderly. It also generated fear in everyone because it crossed class and ethnic lines. In San Mateo County, when young, prominent citizens were struck down there was particular notice.

Exasperating the situation, America was involved in a war requiring the country's immediate maximum effort. Influenza thrived in training camps, and troop trains and ships. Patriotic mass meetings and parades were important for selling war bonds and for other essential wartime activities, but such public events spread germs.

Although it was called the “Spanish Flu,” where it

originated has been historically debated. Some say it actually started in the United States training camps toward the end of the winter of 1917-18 – perhaps at Camp Funston (later Fort Riley) in Kansas. Camp Fremont's physicians noted problems with an infectious disease before the start of the epidemic as well, the Fifteenth Cavalry having a particularly bad time with sickness after heading for France. Sadly, the flu became far deadlier in war-torn Europe. In late August the *Journal of the American Medical Association* warned of a new "acute influenza-like disease" spreading across the continent.²

By the fall of 1918, the deadly nature of the virus was gaining attention, but treatment was rudimentary. In military camps, aspirin was employed to reduce fever. At Camp Fremont records frequently mention morphine, not so much as a cure but to reduce suffering.³

Nurses forced strict bed rest on patients. They also wrapped them in special chilled jackets to reduce temperature. Doctors at Camp Fremont and other training bases took cultures from the sick to help with research. They were also encouraged to perform autopsies in an effort to provide information that could lead to a cure. At Camp Fremont, the hospital commander was, in fact, criticized by the acting Surgeon General for not undertaking enough of these procedures.⁴

Civilians faced curfews and quarantines. Throughout the Bay Area, Halloween parties were cancelled, which were at that time major occasions. Many local governments required the wearing of cheese cloth face masks. Kids not having them on were reprimanded, while volunteers patrolled the streets making sure everyone complied with the law. However, nowhere on the Peninsula were the effects of the flu more devastating but at the crowded military training facilities at Camp Fremont in the Menlo Park area.

From the beginning, the presence of this military installation gained major interest among the locals. On July 13, 1917, the front page of the *Burlingame Advance* announced: "Construction Work on Big Army



Artillery training at Camp Fremont, 1918. Courtesy National Archives and Records.

Camp Started." Businesses, anticipating the build-up, got busy. The *Advance* reported a flurry of activity at Redwood City and "a rush" to Menlo Park where "every available building and site suitable for business purposes was grabbed up and leased." Two weeks later the *Advance* headlined "Six Hundred Buildings Ordered for Camp Fremont."

Indeed, the Camp was built to train between 30,000 and 50,000 soldiers. It stretched out over 25,000 acres from the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks to just west of the Spring Valley Water Company's lakes.⁵ According to military historian, Colonel William F. Strobridge, it was "a sprawling city of canvas tents and wooden buildings"⁶ one of 16 "mobilization camps" in the United States. When occupied by the troops it nearly doubled the population of San Mateo County.

The survey work for the Camp began in July 1917, and eventually construction costs came to \$1.9 million. On 1,300 acres of level land, troop billets and headquarters offices were built. The Southern Pacific laid a spur line to the Camp from its main track to transport the troops. Other improvements included numerous warehouses, nine YMCA huts, a library and a theater. In order that the soldiers be able to talk to the folks back home, 37 pay phones were installed.⁷

Major General John F. Morrison assumed command of Camp Fremont in March 1918. For the ordinary

trainee, conditions were crowded, with six men to a tent. They had “off duty” times on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons when they could leave their tents and wander around the Camp. Sunday was considered a day of rest. The YMCA and Knights of Columbus catered to the men during these leisure time hours. There was also a community center in Menlo Park that provided activities, as did a YWCA Hostess House.⁸ At one point, just the four regiments of the Eighth Division at the Camp included 27,000 soldiers. The troops sent to France from Camp Fremont never were engaged in combat as the War came to a close. However 5,000 saw duty in Siberia while opposing the Bolshevik Revolution.⁹

Local Peninsulans were favorably inclined toward the camp, at least in the beginning. They made patriotic displays and welcomed the troops. As predicted, Menlo Park bustled with activity as businesses catered to the huge number of recruits with goods and services.¹⁰

Placed into historical context, what happened in San Mateo County during the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 had importance. The effects on Camp Fremont, one of just 16 such training facilities in the United States, had national ramifications. Outside the Camp, while instances of the sickness and the resulting death toll were microcosms of what was occurring everywhere else, the volunteer response to the suffering of others was quite beyond ordinary and is inspiring, given the struggles we are encountering in 2020 under attack from COVID-19.

The Spanish Flu Strikes

September 1918

Barbara Wilcox in her 2016 study, *World War I Army Training by San Francisco Bay: The Story of Camp Fremont*, believes a fire that destroyed a part of the wood-frame hospital at Camp Fremont in early September 1918 was indicative of what was to happen to the installation within a couple of weeks. She blames the fire on “low building standards and lack of fire protection” and feels the episode reveals the



Tents and buildings of the 319th Engineers at Camp Fremont, c. 1918. Courtesy National Archives and Records.

Army’s mobilization efforts were “inadequate as men spent months crammed into flimsy quarters meant for a few weeks.” It also reveals the diminutive value the Army placed “on the health and safety” of its soldiers. In Wilcox’s view, this camp, and others like it, were destined for a health crisis.¹¹

Accounts vary, but some maintain that the scourge reached San Francisco as early as September 4. The first recorded case on the Peninsula was documented on September 24, and the first at Camp Fremont on September 28. That same day the United States Public Health Service issued a report on what it termed “a very contagious kind of ‘cold’ accompanied by fever, pains in the head, eyes, ears, back or other parts of the body...that was afflicting portions of the country.” In most cases, it assured the reader, these symptoms would disappear after three or four days, and the patient would recover. However, sometimes pneumonia and other complications could set in and result in death. The report suggested that this was an airborne disease and although it was being called “Spanish Influenza” it probably did not generate from Spain. It was also known as the “Three Day Fever” and “The Flu.”¹²

October 1918

For the soldiers at Camp Fremont, and the residents of San Mateo and San Francisco counties, October



Sgt. Paulsen at Camp Fremont's "Contagious Section," c. 1918. Courtesy Menlo Park Historical Association.

was the worst month of the epidemic. At the start of the month, the well disseminated notice issued by the federal Public Health Service was bolstered by an article written by a naval surgeon, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. He reported that at Boston's Commonwealth Pier barracks, servicemen were suffering through an attack of a "mutated virus."¹³ Suddenly across the nation it became apparent that a health care emergency was in progress. Nevertheless, because of wartime patriotism, on October 6, 150,000 Californians gathered in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park to demonstrate support for the soldiers fighting in the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

At Camp Fremont, the virulence of the disease was demonstrated on October 8. That afternoon, Charles J. Sullivan, a member of the Student Army Training Corps from Stanford had no symptoms of the sickness. However he developed a high fever and within hours had to be carried away from his dorm room on a stretcher. He then spent two nights at the Camp hospital packed in ice, which succeeded in bringing down his temperature.

On the same day that Sullivan became ill, the Camp's headquarters made the decision to impose a "strict" quarantine on its personnel. The *San Mateo Leader*, a local newspaper, explained that there were now 152 cases of influenza at the Camp.¹⁴ Soldiers wanting to leave and visitors trying to gain access were stopped at entry points. Privileges allowing troops to move freely about the Camp on Wednesday afternoons and the weekends were rescinded. Those that did manage to make a case for leaving became subject to local emergency laws. While San Mateo County did not as yet, Palo Alto was requiring people to wear gauze masks outside their homes.¹⁵ At first the Camp's officers with nearby families could leave, but the next day, October 9, even they were now confined.

Because headquarters understood that the disease was probably airborne, ventilation was seen as a significant way to keep the men safe. Tent sides were rolled up, bunks were turned around so that heads faced feet. Mess hall procedures did not change, but most other gatherings were banned. The YMCA and Knights of Columbus huts were closed, as were the

library and the theater; although the theater's old movie projector was moved outside and films were shown in the open air as the evening breeze flapped the screen around.

In anticipation of greater case loads, officers' office spaces were transformed into regimental infirmaries. Only Army chaplains were permitted to move about, mostly to deliver letters as the Camp post office became off-limits.¹⁶

Knowing that the virus was virulent did not stop the Army. On October 10, it ordered most of the Eighth Division to board trains for the East Coast in order to be eventually sent to Europe. Despite the cold weather, train windows were opened with the hope that ventilation would reduce the spread of the disease. Unfortunately, many were already sick and were left at hospitals along the way. The Army regarded those that died as having sacrificed their lives for "war service."¹⁷

The men that made it to the East never did see combat, as the Armistice ended the War on November 11. On the same day the Eighth Division was shipped east, Redwood City officials, aware of the increased problems at Camp Fremont, made moves. The *San Mateo Leader* of October 10 reported that 12 residences had been quarantined in that town. Redwood City Health Officer Dr. J.D. Chapin explained that in view of what was happening at Camp Fremont, "my orders quarantining those homes were merely precautionary."¹⁸ The *San Francisco Chronicle* elaborated that despite his calm demeanor, Chapin was concerned enough about the "over 200 cases" at Camp Fremont that he also ordered the closure of "all motion picture theaters, schools, churches, lodges and other public gathering places...."

It was also a bad 24 hours in San Francisco. The *Chronicle* reported 44 new cases, "the highest number in one day" so far. The total cases in San Francisco was now 153.¹⁹

A couple of days later, the *Sacramento Bee* reported on the spread of influenza throughout the state. Los Angeles, alarmingly, had 500 new cases.²⁰

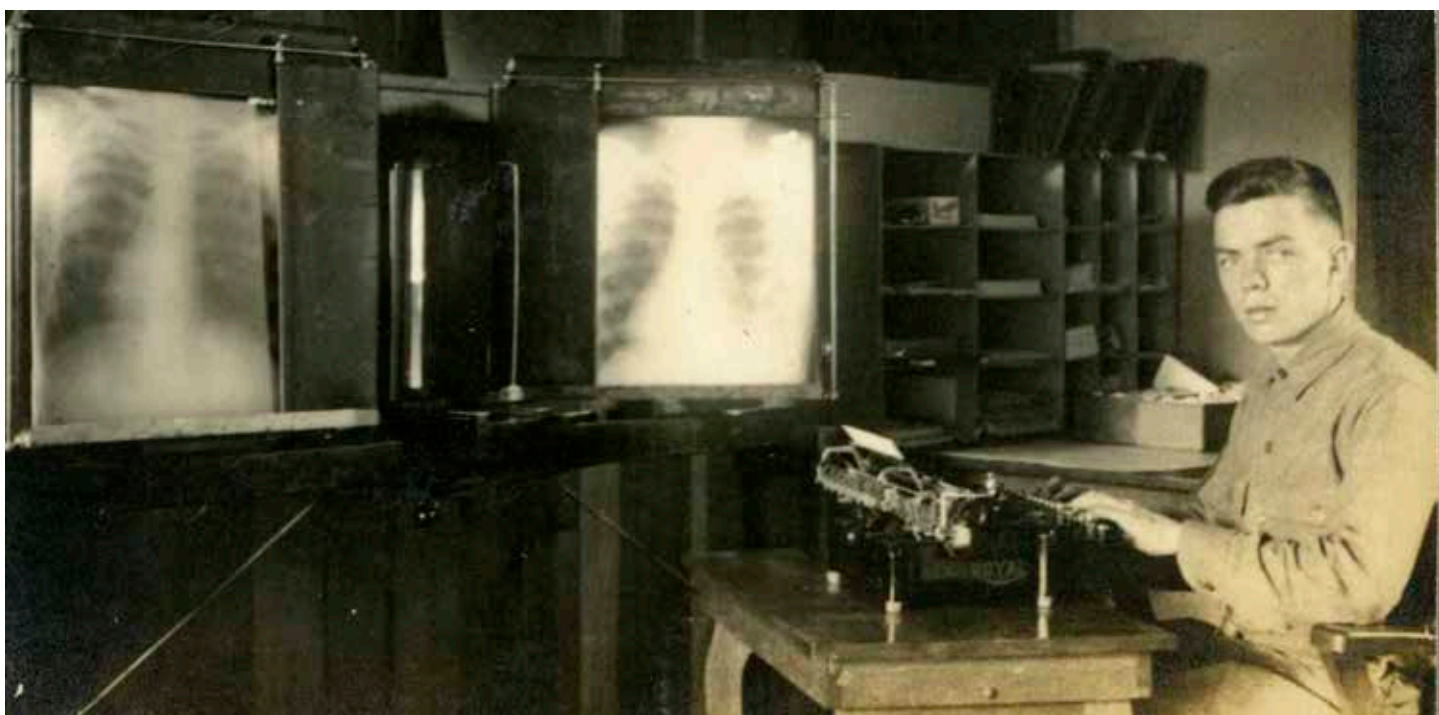
By the middle of the month conditions at Camp Fremont continued to deteriorate. Camp records list 164 patients as critically ill by that time. The 25 nurses available seemed inadequate. However when the hospital commander requested more help, the Army responded that there was even greater need elsewhere.²¹ Meanwhile, the quarantine seemed to be getting tougher on the soldiers. Camp chaplains did what they could, even arranging for a marriage at the bus station on the edge of camp.²²

A few miles north, Redwood City seemed to be suddenly in denial. The October 17, *Redwood City Democrat* proclaimed: "The Spanish influenza situation in this city was considerably improved yesterday..." citing "...a rapid decrease in the number of new cases." It reported the Sequoia Theater would open anew that night and that schools would be operational after the weekend. It quoted Dr. Chapin as saying that he hoped the city would be back to normal in the coming week. The *Democrat* credited Dr. Chapin for the improvement, that his "strict precautions," aided by local physicians:

...resulted in checking the epidemic which last week threatened [to] spread rapidly. Dr. Chapin said yesterday that if people who have coughs or colds of any description would refrain from mingling with others, the situation would soon take care of itself.²³

Later in the month, the *Democrat* took a different track on what was occurring in Redwood City. In the 14 days that ended on October 26, there had been a total of 149 new cases giving the town 250 altogether of which there had been seven fatalities. The City trustees (City Council) had adopted a resolution calling for all residents to wear masks. The newspaper maintained that Police Chief Coleman was approaching citizens "without gauze" and directing them to where "they could provide themselves with one."²⁴

To the north in the Tri-Cities Area (San Mateo, Burlingame and Hillsborough) a serious tone had set in due to the death of a prominent person. The *San Mateo Leader* of October 17 ran a large front page headline



Chest x-rays at Camp Fremont, c. 1918. The first medical use of x-rays came in the 1890s. Courtesy Menlo Park Historical Association.

saying “Thurlow L. Murray Dies of Pneumonia.” This was upsetting news on three counts. First, Murray held a position of importance as the Superintendent of both the Las Pulgas and Tri-Cities Mosquito District. Second, he was the older son of well-known Burleigh G. Murray, a long-time ranch owner in Beresford (unincorporated land south of San Mateo). Third, he was only 28 years old and left behind a wife and baby.

In that same edition, the *Leader* reported that San Mateo’s City Health Office had ordered schools, churches, theaters, clubs, lodges and even pool rooms to shut down. The newspaper noted that the Burlingame Health Board had taken similar action. San Mateo Union High School Principal W.L. Glascock announced that only the manual arts classes would be allowed to continue, as the students were “filling an emergency order for surgical appliances for Siberia.”

Statewide the news wasn’t better. The *San Francisco Examiner* of October 18, reported on the announcement of Gary P. Jones, the Assistant Secretary of the State Board of Health, that there were 19,000 “Spanish influenza” cases in the state. The day before there

had been 26 deaths. The total known cases at Camp Fremont was listed as 127 of which 29 had died. Two recent deaths were reported for San Mateo, 28-year-old Thurlow Murray on the 17th and 36-year-old Pauline V. Blonchard on the 17th.

Another jolt for the Tri-Cities area came on October 21, when the *San Mateo Leader* ran the headline “Joe Parrott is Taken by Death After Brief Illness.” The 30-year-old was of the famous Parrott family who had helped pioneer California and settled in San Mateo, gaining a reputation for important local philanthropy.

Before America’s entrance into the War, Joe had volunteered for a year in an ambulance unit on the Western Front. After returning from the War, he spent only six months at home before volunteering again, this time as a private in the 62nd Infantry Division being trained at Camp Fremont. Sadly, his brother, Lieutenant P. Edmund Parrott, had been killed in action only months before, in France. After a brief bout with influenza, Joe died of the resulting pneumonia in the Camp hospital.²⁵

In the same edition of the *Leader* that announced this

loss, the newspaper also ran a story about the death of E.J. Reinhart, a respected local man who had been chief clerk of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Influenza took his life too. Also seen in that day's paper was an article about the jailing of Lazio Galino, a Serbian immigrant, by the recorder of South San Francisco for refusing to wear a mask in that City. The *Leader* said that it was believed that Galino was an unemployed member of the International Workers of the World, a radical organization sometimes known as the Wobblies, giving an added sinister element to his character.

Despite the death of Joe Parrott, the *San Francisco Examiner*, on October 21, headlined: "Quarantine Raised at Camp Fremont." It reported that the two-week quarantine was over, as of the day before, and now soldiers could leave the Camp with the exception of the Twelfth Infantry, which apparently was still having problems. The *Examiner* understood from Army authorities that "the influenza epidemic has been entirely stamped out...." It seems curious that this statement was immediately followed by "...the only deaths reported being those from pneumonic cases...." By now everyone realized that the main reason people died from influenza was because that illness made its victims susceptible to pneumonia.

Meanwhile, in the same edition in which the *Examiner* spoke of the lifting of the quarantine at Camp Fremont, the newspaper reported that at a joint meeting of the Tri-Cities, San Mateo, Burlingame and Hillsborough agreed to establish ordinances requiring residents to wear masks. The laws were made to be "effective immediately"²⁶ and had maximum punishments assigned to them of a \$100 fine and 20 days in jail.

Sadly, the grim toll continued. The October 24 editions of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Mateo Leader* carried news of three more deaths in San Mateo, a 44-year-old painter, a 38-year-old housewife and a 28-year-old chauffeur.²⁷ In that edition of the *Leader*, the newspaper warned its reader that "Fear of Flu" could cause illness in itself and could result in what it called "influenza hysteria."



Making masks in San Francisco, c. 1918. Courtesy Joan Levy.

October 24 brought yet more news from the City to the north. The *San Francisco Examiner* headlined: "Drastic Laws Being Framed to Check Flu." Citing a surge of new cases of influenza (1,371) and 72 added deaths, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors moved to require all people within city limits to wear masks. San Francisco's totals now jumped to 8,876 cases and 202 deaths. The next day, October 25, was the City's worst with 2,319 new cases and 102 deaths.

The initial reaction of San Franciscans to the mask law seemed to be accepting, as a sort of patriotic gesture. Volunteer sewing groups formed to create masks for everyone. However as the days rolled on, there developed some resistance. The City's newspapers ran stories about law enforcement officials hauling "Mask Slackers"²⁸ into court by the hundreds. In one incident a health inspector shot a mask protestor during an altercation. An Anti-Mask League was formed. Its rallies were attended by thousands.

Meanwhile, down the Peninsula, the sickness continued to rampage through communities. Recognizing the situation, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors approved a law making the wearing of masks compulsory everywhere in the County. The October 27 *San Francisco Examiner* reported this to have happened in an "extraordinary session"²⁹ of the

Supervisors, and now a maximum penalty of a \$100 fine or ten days in jail or both could be attached to violators.

Three days after this story came out, the *Chronicle* headlined “Epidemic Puts Fear in Heart of Cupid.” In the midst of the epidemic’s mayhem, while the War in Europe was reaching its climax, the *Chronicle* came out with this curiously lighthearted story which in part read:

Cupid must have gone into hiding when the influenza epidemic struck San Mateo County.

No marriage licenses have been issued here for four days.

Could it be with death and disease all around, newspapers, and people in general, were becoming so used to the carnage that they could joke about it?

On the last day of the horrific month, the *Redwood City Democrat* reported the popular Reverend Charles A. Verleger, formerly the pastor at St. Peter’s Episcopal church in Redwood City (he had left the year before), had died of “Spanish influenza” in Lodi, California. Manuel Aguilar of Beresford fell victim to the same. Local personality Frank Rainer, only 31, had succumbed to pneumonia and Charles Calvalli, of the well-known family at La Honda, was recovering from the disease.

November 1918

The November 2 *San Francisco Chronicle* featured a story claiming a “decided falling off of influenza cases.”³⁰ From Daly City to Redwood City, improvement was evident. Specifically, the newspaper reported the Boards of Health for San Mateo and Burlingame declared the epidemic was abating.

However, other evidence suggests the disease was still prevalent on the Peninsula. For example, the *Fresno Morning Republican* ran a story the same day detailing the ordeal of a popular Bakersfield man who “felt that he could be the most use to his country...by helping in the shipyards”³¹ in San Mateo County (probably South San Francisco). Here he came down with the influenza which degenerated into pneumonia and he died. Another grim reminder of the danger still relevant came from County Health Officer F. Holmes Smith on November 5,

who announced monthly burial permits had tripled; the average being 575, but in October it was 1,633, with most of the permits issued for San Franciscans buried in north county cemeteries.³²

Mid-county was shaken by the demise of yet another local celebrity. The November 7, *San Mateo Leader* revealed the passing of Mrs. A.C. Sweetzer, the wife of the Secretary of the *Leader*. The 35-year-old had been ill with influenza for a week, then spent one day at Casserly Emergency Hospital before dying of pneumonia. She most likely was infected while performing volunteer work. The *Leader* eulogized her as “...one of the first of San Mateo to respond to the call of the Red Cross...and unselfishly devoted many hours of her time to the merciful service of attending in-homed afflicted with influenza.”³³ Besides leaving her husband behind, she was mother to a 14-year-old son.

Down in south county, news that day was different. The *Redwood City Democrat* headlined: “Epidemic is Well Under Control.” In the last week there had been only 21 cases reported, with only one case listed the day before the article’s publication. While the town’s schools, churches, and theaters were still closed, they were expected to be reopened within days. On November 14, the *San Francisco Chronicle* followed up on the upbeat turn of events (this only three days after World War I was concluded with the Armistice). It headlined: “Redwood City Wins Fight on Influenza.” The newspaper announced that the City’s Board of Health had gone ahead as expected and approved the reopening of theaters, churches and schools.

Less than a week later, the *San Francisco Examiner* revealed that schools in San Mateo would now reopen. Churches and theaters had previously been allowed to do so. The *Examiner* proclaimed that influenza had been “wiped out” in the mid-county town.³⁴ Continuing this momentum, a week after that, the *San Mateo Leader* reported that the high school was to resume night school. However, while all but two students from the day-time high school had shown up for classes, night school attendance was “still short” indicating older

students might not have felt completely safe from the infectious disease.³⁵

December 1918

By December 1918, many in the San Francisco Bay Area believed if not entirely eradicated, influenza was a decreasing problem. That and the euphoria caused by the Armistice resulted in a lessening of attention by local newspapers to the epidemic.

However, the toll for 1918 was staggering. During October, November and December 35,111 people caught the disease while 2,389 lost their lives from influenza in just San Francisco.

At Camp Fremont, because the War was over, its dismantling had begun before the end of 1918. Nevertheless the final numbers tabulated by the Army shows something on the order of 8,000 soldiers, or more than a quarter of the Camp, sought treatment for some respiratory ailment. Of these, 2,418 were in bad enough shape to be admitted to the Camp hospital. Of these, Camp doctors detected 408 (36%) pneumonia cases and tragically 147 (6%) lost their lives from the disease.³⁶

For civilian San Mateo County, 131 died from the epidemic in 1918. This represented a sixth of all the deaths reported in the County for the entire year.³⁷

January 1919

The *San Mateo News-Leader* (note this newspaper changed its name in January) of January 3, 1919, ran a column entitled: "Spanish Influenza – Just Grip Camouflaged Under a New Name." The article told readers what they had recently faced was simply "old fashioned grip" that since 1831 had afflicted Americans five separate times. Thus this respiratory illness was nothing new. With the disease minimalized in this way the hope was that the country could now get back to normal. Unfortunately, the crisis was not over – not nationally and not locally.

Just the day before the *News-Leader* ran the story: "San Mateo Girl Dies Suddenly from Pneumonia." Hazel

**Influenza?
La Grippe?**

Foley's Honey and Tar is just what every sufferer of influenza or la grippe needs now. It covers the rough inflamed throat with a soothing healing coating, clears away the mucus, stops the tickling and coughing, eases the tightness and bronchial wheezing. Day and night keep

FOLEY'S HONEY AND TAR

handy. It gives ease and comfort from the very first dose. Buy it Now.

YOUNG DRUG COMPANY

This advertisement appeared for several months in the *Redwood City Democrat*.

May White, a well-liked local young woman who had graduated from Stanford only two years previously, had been struck down. The very day the "old fashioned grip" column appeared, the *News-Leader* also reported on the death of Joseph A. McCormick the former local Justice of the Peace. After a three day illness, he died of pneumonia. His family said, assured the *News-Leader*, that diabetes had more to do with McCormick's death than the "flu."³⁸

The next day the *News-Leader* announced: "Burlingame Schools to Open Monday." Burlingame grammar schools had been closed for some weeks "on account of the illness of several teachers with influenza." Now education could get back to regular schedule for the children.

However, evidence continued to reveal that all was not well. On January 6, the *News-Leader* included two stories about further San Mateo fatalities. Mrs. L. Herron, wife of a sheet metal worker, died of the "flu," and 29-year-old Irving Taylor was taken by pneumonia. The next day the *News-Leader* printed L.A. Stark, a

“popular member of the San Mateo Elk’s Lodge” and owner of a sheet metal works on Burlingame Avenue, had succumbed to pneumonia at the age of 40.³⁹

The *News-Leader* that day informed the community that the crisis certainly was not over at San Mateo High School. Principal W.L. Glascock, complaining about a “sudden flare-up of influenza the last few days,” announced that 100 students, or about a third of the school, had been absent. In his opinion: “very few of them have influenza and many of them are being kept at home because...their parents are afraid....” Glascock asserted the students ought to go back to wearing masks in class, thus making parents feel more comfortable about allowing the teenagers to return to the school. In the same edition of the *News-Leader*, San Mateo Health Officer, W.C. McLean, revealed 26 new cases of influenza had been reported to his office the day before. McLean also called for the resumption of wearing masks.

On January 8, the *News-Leader* discussed the situation in the Burlingame schools. The principal for its three elementary schools (Burlingame High School did not yet exist) denied reports that the public schools were closed because of the epidemic. However he admitted that four teachers were out due to illness and 100 children had been absent the day before.⁴⁰

The next day, another blow to the educational community of San Mateo County occurred. The *News-Leader* of January 9 headlined: “George E. Britton

South City Principal, Is Dead.” The 35-year-old Stanford graduate, with a wife and three-year-old son, had been at home for nine days with the influenza which turned into pneumonia. He had been principal of both South San Francisco High School and the town’s grammar schools.

On the evening of January 10, the San Mateo Board of Health decided drastic measures had to be taken once more. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported the town was “Closed Down.”

Influenza masks must be worn in San Mateo after 7 o’clock tomorrow morning by force of an order of the Board of Health....All schools will be closed, but churches may hold services as long as the members of the congregations attend them masked.⁴¹

The *News-Leader* elaborated that San Mateo had made this move in light of San Francisco beginning to consider the reissuing of its mask law. According to the *News-Leader*, besides churches, lodges and clubs continued to meet. However, theaters were closed, and restaurants were now required to sterilize dishes and cover utensils. Health officer McLean cited 111 new cases in San Mateo over a week long period. This presented an increase of 73 over the previous week.⁴²

Despite the seriousness of the matter, San Mateans seemed to be tiring of the crisis, even if it was not over. On January 13, the *News-Leader* editorialized:

The mask covering order issued Friday night by the San Mateo board of health seems to be regarded as a huge joke. Only about one in ten persons in San Mateo is complying.... The police are unable to enforce it because of an insufficient supply of masks. The board of health would have shown better judgement by giving the public more adequate notice....⁴³

Despite the community’s impatience, the bad news continued. Also on the 13th the *News-Leader* reported that Ed Kerrigan, a one-time popular manager of the town’s smoke-shop, had died of influenza in a San Francisco hotel.⁴⁴



Howard School in Burlingame, 1915. Photo by A.G.C. Hahn.

On the 15th, the *News-Leader* revealed the principal for the Hillsborough schools, Mrs. Clara Cuthbert, had been critically ill, but was at that point recovering.⁴⁵ The Hillsborough schools had been “closed for several weeks because of influenza,” but with hope that Cuthbert would be back, the community looked for schools to reopen in the next week.⁴⁶

Up in San Francisco, where victory had been declared over influenza in late November, impatience had set in as well. However, just as down the Peninsula, the crisis had not passed. On January 15, its chief health official Dr. William C. Hassler reported 510 new cases in the City along with 50 fatalities. The next day, San Francisco reinstated its mask law despite strong and organized opposition. The *San Francisco Chronicle* of January 26 reported thousands attending protest rallies. The next day the newspaper ran an article in which “mask proponents”⁴⁷ claimed major improvement in the situation, due to the mask law. The day previously saw only 12 new cases and four deaths.

Down the Peninsula at mid-month the toll kept mounting. On January 16, the *News-Leader* gave word that 30 year-old Francis Ahlert, of a “pioneer”⁴⁸ family of San Mateo had passed on after a bout with pneumonia, leaving a wife and two children. That same day the *Redwood City Democrat* recorded Mrs. E. Parker of San Gregorio had developed pneumonia “from a bad cold”⁴⁹ and died. Also that day in the *Democrat*, the former clerk at the Sequoia Hotel had his life taken by influenza, and the newspaper reported two city trustees J.C. Jones and Mark E. Rayan, who was also chief of the fire department, were stricken by the influenza. On January 17, the *News-Leader* announced that the Burlingame Board of Health had ordered the town to “go back to the ‘flu mask’”⁵⁰ at all public assemblies.

A couple of days later, the news out of Burlingame continued to be discouraging. On January 20, the *News-Leader* reported the town had closed its schools again. Principal H.E.H. Ruggles disclosed that 175 children had been absent in a single day. He blamed the outage of students on “...the fear of their parents that

they might contract influenza from their schoolmates.”⁵¹ He felt the shutdown could last several weeks.

Also in the *News-Leader* that day was the revelation that the Redwood City Board of Trustees had drafted a new mask law because of increased influenza cases. This time penalties included fines of \$5 to \$100 or ten days in County jail.⁵²

On January 24, a prominent Daly City resident, 32-year-old Elfrieda Sweeney, wife of school trustee William Sweeney, died of the influenza leaving two children.⁵³ That same day, the *News-Leader* reported that Mrs. William Ring (the former Miss Ethel Cheatam, of the prominent mid-county family) had passed away in San Francisco because of the disease. She was only 25. The article noted her husband was also ill.⁵⁴

Then, suddenly, the news improved. The *News-Leader* of January 27 headlined: “Influenza Cases in San Mateo Decline.” The newspaper reported that just 20 new cases had been recorded that week versus 51 the week before, and during that seven day period there had been only one death. The town’s Regent Theater had opened again. By this time the *News-Leader* estimated that less than 1% of the people of San Mateo were wearing masks despite the town’s ordinance. The editor allowed the question: “Are Masks Effective?”

On the mask issue, the *San Francisco Chronicle* of January 27 cited San Mateo County Health Officer Dr. F. Holmes Smith as challenging the need for masks. He pointed out that in San Mateo County, which had eased off its mask requirements, there was the same “phenomenal decline” in influenza cases as in San Francisco, where the law was still in effect. The *Chronicle* quoted Smith:

The mask may be efficient when worn by a person just recovering from the influenza as such a person carries germs in the mouth and nose, but I am far from convinced that the mask when worn by a healthy person does any good. I have seen too many patients come down with the influenza who had regularly worn their masks.⁵⁵

On January 29, the *News-Leader* headlined: "Schools to Reopen Mon.; Flu is Over." Readers might have questioned this a bit the very next day when the *News-Leader* headlined in far larger print "Jos. H. Nash Passes Away." Nash's illness had been covered by local papers for a week with headlines reporting him "much better" and recovering from pneumonia. Then on the 27th it was revealed he had suffered a relapse from the influenza and then a couple of days later, he died. The 41-year-old had been a resident of San Mateo County since the age of three. In 1906, he ran for office and became the first elected San Mateo County Clerk. He had been a popular public official, and his loss was taken with much grief all around the County.

February 1919

San Mateo County newspapers fully covered the Joseph Nash funeral. In fact the *Redwood City Standard* (in its first issue since changing its name from *Redwood City Democrat*), declared the services "the largest in the history of San Mateo County"⁵⁶ with hundreds in attendance. Nash's popularity moved the Board of Supervisors to name his widow, Elizabeth N. Nash, as the new County Clerk. Hers would be a two-year term until the general election.⁵⁷ The *Standard* cited the cause of death as "pleuro pneumonia." Increasingly in January and February 1919, local newspapers avoided using the terms flu or influenza.

In fact, except for coverage of the Nash funeral, the newspapers of early February 1919 seemed anxious to push negative disease stories off the front page. Positive news did get in print. For example a lot of attention was paid to Dr. Hassler when he lifted the San Francisco mask order on February 1.

Down the Peninsula, further good news on February 1 came on the pages of the *News-Leader*. It reported that Sunday School at St. Matthew's Catholic Church in San Mateo would resume the next day.⁵⁸ Up in Burlingame, city health officer Dr. Jane Parkhurst was quoted as saying the epidemic was "practically at a standstill." The mask ordinance would from that point only apply to

where crowds congregated and this for just one week, and then the ordinance would be repealed altogether. Hearing of this, the Burlingame school board met that night to consider reopening the schools.⁵⁹

On February 3, the *News-Leader* did contain a story about how 28-year-old plumber H.J. Wingler had died of the "Flu,"⁶⁰ and that his wife was critically ill. However, in the same edition the *News-Leader* headlined: "Pupils Flock to Make Up Lessons," and discussed the reopening of San Mateo High School and the public grammar schools. It reported that on this first day back, there had been almost perfect attendance.

On February 12, the *News-Leader* declared: "No Influenza Cases Here." It quoted health official Dr. McLean as saying that there had not been a new case in San Mateo in a "week or two." In the article it was mentioned that Burlingame and Redwood City were "said to be entirely rid of the disease." In a feel good story this edition of the *News-Leader* described how San Mateo grammar school teachers had agreed to voluntarily lengthen school days in order to "Make Up for Lost Time" caused by the influenza epidemic.

As February went on, sporadically a negative story about influenza surfaced. For example on February 17, the *News-Leader* covered a story about a 59-year-old widow in Daly City who while suffering a "tenacious attack"⁶¹ of the "Flu," hanged herself. However, far more coverage was given by the County's newspapers to the huge welcome home celebration for servicemen returning from the War to be held at the Sequoia Theater in Redwood City, across from the Courthouse, on February 22. Seemingly, the people of the Peninsula had willed the epidemic to be over.

Volunteer Response to the Epidemic Initial Reaction

The efforts of local women volunteers of the Red Cross during the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 engender one of the most uplifting stories in San Mateo County history. As far back as 1898, during the Spanish-American War, two units of the Red Cross existed in

San Mateo County: one at Pescadero and the other at Redwood City. In 1910, the Redwood City group qualified to become a fully recognized chapter. When the United States entered into World War I on April 17, 1917, the American Red Cross took on significant responsibilities as an auxiliary of the country's armed forces. Its ambulance detachments, already serving at the Western Front, became part of the United States Ambulance Corps. With the organization's enhanced importance, local leaders determined a San Mateo County chapter of the Red Cross ought to be organized. Only five days after the declaration of war, the national organization granted authority to form the chapter. As Redwood City already had the status, the new group encompassed all of San Mateo County, except Redwood City. The Pescaderans opted to become part of the county effort.

The rapidity of the formation of the San Mateo County Chapter was due to the work of a group of influential women from the mid-county area. As the War approached, they met on Easter Sunday, April 6, 1917, and took the initial steps necessary to create a chapter. By April 25, some 60 volunteers were in action, making surgical dressings, hospitals garments and other sewed and knitted items for use by the military. The women installed their "headquarters" within the Burlingame Bank Building and set hours of operation at 10:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The Chapter's original officers were:

Mrs. William (Carrie D.) Hitchcock, Chair

Mrs. Walter Martin, Vice Chair

Mrs. Lawrence I. Scott, Treasurer

Mrs. George Reardon, Secretary⁶²

Besides creating medical supplies, one of the first activities of the San Mateo County Chapter that April was organizing a polo game as a fundraiser. The *Burlingame Advance* reported "several hundred dollars" being obtained.⁶³

In May, *Burlingame Advance* articles indicated that the Chapter now had 100 volunteers supported by seven hundred members and was prepared to ship a "Large Quantity of Material" overseas.⁶⁴ On June 15,

the same newspaper announced that the Chapter had undertaken a fund drive to raise \$20,000 "in all parts of the county except Redwood City." In November the *Advance* told how the Chapter had decided to focus on creating Christmas gift packages for troops who were on their way to Europe.⁶⁵

Two of the women, Hillsborough's Mrs. Harold Mack (popular member of the all-Jewish Beresford Country Club) and San Mateo's Mrs. Leslie Whitney (of the family who founded Leslie Salt) decided to specialize their volunteer activities and form a "Motor Corps" in support of the Red Cross. They created rather "elaborate uniforms" and recruited volunteers who would be challenged to pass First Aid and "mechanical auto" classes. The *San Francisco Examiner* announced Mack and Whitney were given "commissions as commandant and adjutant" on August 19. Their volunteers took the necessary courses in San Francisco and also on August 19 formally began operations. Their initial function was to run personnel and supplies to volunteer Red Cross groups and perform other functions. At first, they had a few regular drivers who could be called on at any time, day or night. They were supported by eight "substitute assistants." During the influenza epidemic their responsibilities increased immensely and 25 additional "emergency drivers" were added to the roster.⁶⁶

When the threat of the influenza epidemic first surfaced, the United States Surgeon General called on the American Red Cross for help. Needed were volunteer nurses and emergency hospital supplies. It was clear that local health authorities would be taxed to the maximum and might be unable to cope with the disease without help. The request was made while America was at war meaning that nurses and medical supplies were already depleted. The Surgeon General made it clear that women Red Cross volunteers needed to rise to the occasion and help try to prevent "a national calamity."⁶⁷

For the San Mateo County Chapter, it was the October 8, 1918, reprint of the *U.S. Public Health Service*, issued by the American Red Cross, that

moved the women into action. According to Chapter historian, Ardee Rochex: "The Flu epidemic was the great challenge of immediate volunteer service that the Chapter met during the War period and the detailed records and reports give ample proof of the efficient manner it was met under the Chairmanship of Mrs. L.I. Scott."⁶⁸

When the desperate call came, San Mateo County Chapter Chairman, Mrs. Hitchcock, was back east. Vice Chairman Mrs. Walter S. Martin stepped up and on October 18 appointed Mrs. Scott as the Chairman of a new committee to conduct emergency influenza work.⁶⁹

Scott was an inspired choice given her energy and organizational abilities. Later, she and another of the Red Cross heroes, Mrs. Harold L. Mack, would team together within yet another all-woman committee in 1919 to build the Town of Hillsborough's first library.⁷⁰ Scott was motivated in her influenza work by her husband, who had been called up in August 1917 as a captain in the all-California National Guard unit known as the "Grizzlies."⁷¹ Unfortunately, Captain Scott became ill in training camp and by the time of the epidemic was back at home recuperating.⁷² Members of Mrs. Scott's initial organizational group consisted of Miss Germaine Levy, Secretary; Mrs. Thomas Breeze, Nurses Sub-Committee; Mrs. George Cadwalder, Mrs. Harry Kiersted and Mrs. Lewis Hobart, Medicine and Medical Equipment; and Mrs. H. Poett and Mrs. Harry S. Dana, "Food for Families." According to Rochex this leadership committee was well supported by the Chapter's members and the community at large: they "...had only to mention its needs and the wants were filled."⁷³

The day after her appointment, Mrs. Scott got out a letter to qualified women to act as nurses at Camp Fremont, some of the women would be paid. Others like Mrs. Frank Bain and Mrs. A.A. (Ardee) Rochex would volunteer.

The first formal meeting of the Influenza Committee was called to order on October 22, during the worst hours of the epidemic. At this time a more formal



Ardee Rochex, shown in later years, remained active in the American Red Cross. Courtesy American Red Cross, Golden Gate Chapter.

structure of sub-committees was established. Mrs. Walter Martin was chair of the House Committee, with support from Mrs. Clarence Walter, representing Public Health Nursing under the Social Service Commission, and Mrs. George Cameron. Mrs. George Cadwalder, with four assistants, took on the Nursing Committee. Mrs. Henry Dana was to organize the "Diet Kitchen" with two assistants. Their task was to provide food for hospitals and the homes of the afflicted. Mrs. H. Poett chaired purchasing, Mrs. Lewis Hobart had the laundry and Miss Germaine Levy continued as Secretary.⁷⁴

At this first meeting the establishment of an emergency hospital was mentioned, but according to Rochex, the discussion was tabled due to "the lack of a suitable building and the difficulty of obtaining nurses." To the surprise of many, the next day these barriers seemed to melt away.

Previous to Mrs. Scott's appointment, Mrs. Thomas Breeze, Hillsborough "society woman and war worker,"⁷⁵ issued a call for volunteers to make influenza jackets and hoped to find women to step forward as nurses aides at Camp Fremont and also at Menlo Park and Daly City which seemed hard hit by the disease.

Almost instantly, organizers signed up to help recruit



Red Cross workers near Palace Market, South San Francisco during World War I.

in South San Francisco, Colma, Daly City, San Bruno, Belmont, Burlingame, Lomita Park (unincorporated area near San Bruno), San Mateo and Half Moon Bay. The Half Moon Bay volunteers seemed especially dedicated. Miss Belle Vallejo, Mrs. Mary Helhena, Mrs. Mary Furtado and Mrs. Jack Quinlan not only said they would risk their health as nurses aides for coastside victims but would offer laundering and even housekeeping assistance as well.⁷⁶

Local newspapers ate up this generous female response. The *News-Leader* headlined how local women were in a "...Rush to Aid...Families Stricken Down by Spanish Influenza." The newspaper noted how willingly the "smart set" ladies took on responsibilities: "Society Leaders, School Teachers, Mothers, Work Side by Side in Fight Against Epidemic."⁷⁷ The *San Francisco Chronicle* headlined: "San Mateo County Red Cross Chapter Renders Efficient Service to People." The *Chronicle* reported how the Influenza Committee was furnishing masks and pneumonia jackets for locals, the soldiers at Camp Fremont and servicemen at Mare Island: "...in a quiet efficient manner, which speaks wonders for the well-trained personnel of the organization. The *Chronicle*

was not surprised that: "The Boards of Trustees of the towns of Burlingame, Hillsborough and San Mateo and the Supervisors of the county of San Mateo have all cooperated with money assistance [for] the women of the county in their emergency work of caring for the sick of the county."⁷⁸

Even as far south as Santa Barbara, the activities of the San Mateo County Chapter gained notice. The *Santa Barbara Daily News* of November 2, 1918, reported:

Members of the fashionable set in the north have no time or inclination for social pleasures these days, but are devoting instead every minute of their spare time to various sorts of relief work. Preparing and distributing delicacies to the needy, sick and poor, and assisting at Red Cross headquarters, are popular pastimes.

The article went on to give details of the women's work in running the soup kitchen, Motor Corps and Emergency Hospital.

Camp Fremont Work

In its initial burst of activity, the work at Camp Fremont seemed most daunting. Here the nursing shortage was acute. By the fall of 1918, the Army was paying nurses \$75 a month, plus \$4 per diem, room and two meals a day, something like twice what it had offered at the beginning of the War. However, the need was so great that nurses could ask for much more. Barbara Wilcox in her book about Camp Fremont tells us these women earned their keep, with many soldiers crediting their "intensive" care for saving their lives. She quotes one of the soldiers who was in a 75-bed infirmary: "The nurses in this ward are 'at it' from six until six at night and they are on 'double-quick' all the time."⁷⁹

Hard work was one thing, but this was also a perilous situation due to the "slack" hygiene and "doubtful cleanliness" of the hospital facilities. The flu infected medical personnel all too frequently. Wilcox quotes one nurse: "So far as the danger is concerned, it gives you



Chief nurse and patients at Camp Fremont, c. 1918. Courtesy Menlo Park Historical Association.

the creeps to think that you might never come home.”⁸⁰

The initial October 19, 1918, Red Cross letter asking for volunteers to assist sick soldiers at Camp Fremont went out to eight women. Mrs. Scott’s Committee on Influenza recognized that each candidate had by that time completed training in “First Aid in Hygiene Courses” and could ask for \$35 to \$50 a month compensation. Scott hoped some of the women would contribute their time, and two did. The dire situation was pointed out: “We are very much in need of these workers...as there are so many patients the nurses have not the time to set up the trays for lunch and dinner.” The Committee asked that these nurses aides be at the Camp by 11:45 every morning to “set up trays for the patients.” The prospect of danger was not hidden “as the trays will probably have to be carried into the wards.” The aides would serve the 5 p.m. dinners and be off at 6 p.m. Part of the value of the Motor Corps was revealed: “The Red Cross will arrange for transportation to and from the hospital if the worker is not able to get there herself.”⁸¹

While most of the Camp Fremont service by the

Chapter was performed at the hospital, during the crisis, six recovering soldiers were “boarded and lodged” by the Committee. Perhaps the largest effort supporting the Camp consisted of supplying the nurses with masks, laundry bags and pneumonia jackets. These last mentioned items were used to warm the chests of patients. They might be made of oiled silk, muslin or even consist of a system of rubber tubing. The Red Cross volunteers also catered to the material personal needs of exhausted nurses.⁸²

Casserly Emergency Hospital

Word that the San Mateo County Chapter of the Red Cross would create its own influenza hospital got down as far as Santa Maria, California, where on the day the Influenza Committee held its first meeting, the *Times* of that city ran a headline: “San Mateo Planning Emergency Hospital.”⁸³ The article spoke of efforts being made to obtain either the Frederick Kohl Mansion in the Burlingame hills or the Peninsula Hotel at San Mateo (the former Alvinza Hayward mansion).

In actuality, the Influenza Committee felt it a good idea, but, despite such musings, did not have a real place to create a hospital. However, the next day, Mrs. John B. Casserly (Cecelia Cudahy Casserly), disregarded possible disdain from her neighbors, and offered her Hillsborough mansion for the purpose. In reference to the hospital, the *San Francisco Examiner* added that Hillsborough, San Mateo and Burlingame were pledging “funds to care for the poorer victims of the disease.”⁸⁴

In Mrs. Casserly, the Red Cross had a tremendous champion. She was born in the Midwest to a family engaged in the meat packing industry. She married John Casserly, a San Francisco attorney and a founding member of the Burlingame Country Club. They moved from San Francisco to what was to become Hillsborough in April 1906, in the midst of the San Francisco

Earthquake and Fire disaster. Before America's entrance into the World War, Mrs. Casserly was already involved, helping to raise money for the American Fund for French War Wounded convalescing in hospitals in France. After America did come into the conflict, Secretary of War Newton Baker appointed Casserly director of Women's Relations for the Army.⁸⁵

By January 1918, Mrs. Casserly was fully involved with the Red Cross as its Chairman of the Women's Bureau of the San Francisco Chapter.⁸⁶ As such, that May, she led a parade, estimated at 40,000 marchers, in San Francisco, in support of Red Cross War work. She was quoted as saying: "This is a women's parade, an expression of our willingness to aid the brave men who have crossed the seas to fight for us."⁸⁷ On October 6, 1918, as the influenza epidemic was just blooming, she was chosen to lay the ceremonial last brick at the new Red Cross building in San Francisco. The *Chronicle* described her as "prominent in social charitable circles about the bay...."⁸⁸

After the War, the French government awarded Casserly a special citation along with five other prominent Peninsulans (Mr. and Mrs. William B. Bourn, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Crocker and Mrs. Francis (Harriett) Carolan for their outstanding contributions to the allied war effort.⁸⁹ During those days just after the Armistice, she took up a variety of Progressive causes, including women's rights and Prohibition. She boldly supported striking telephone company employees in June of 1919, despite the objections of her Hillsborough neighbors.⁹⁰ Casserly is credited with the creation of the Woodland Theater in Hillsborough, a 2,000-seat outdoor amphitheater that was compared to the Hollywood Bowl, while it was active.

After Casserly made the commitment of contributing her home for a hospital, the Infuenza Committee immediately went into action. Mrs. Scott appointed a six-member House Committee to make the necessary transformation happen. By 1 p.m. that first day, October 23, work began. Mrs. Casserly's home furnishings were moved out into a cottage on the grounds.

Then the mostly donated or loaned equipment was moved in. Incredibly, Rochex tells us that by 6 p.m., "Mrs. Casserly's home had assumed the air of a real hospital."⁹¹ The first four patients were received that very night. Two days later, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported 20 sick people were there being cared for by professionals and volunteers. Rochex indicates the policy of the hospital was to take in "only patients for whom Hospital care was stated by physicians to be vitally necessary...."⁹² It was also to be a facility "for people who could not be nursed in their own homes and for whom there was no space available in hospitals."⁹³ In fact, the Casserly Emergency Hospital became the County's primary station where influenza patients were brought, while nearby San Mateo Red Cross Hospital (Mills Hospital) took in an additional 14 patients during the worst days (of which three died).

Mrs. Gomes, a nurse from San Francisco "sacrificed her vacation" to act as General Supervisor at Casserly. She was supported by two other professionals, Miss Wedgwood who assumed responsibility as Day Superintendent and Mrs. E.J. Taylor the Night Superintendent. A volunteer Nursing Committee made up the schedules for nurses and aides. Some of these women took sick people into their own homes, and according to Rochex, worked "far into the night in answer to desperate emergency calls."

The House Committee continued its support by providing a volunteer each day to check in patients and assist with their departure. These volunteers also inventoried medicine and materials.

In the beginning, the hospital operated with four trained nurses and five aides. However the needs required much greater help. The average staff on a daily basis was 26 nurses and aides working in eight hour shifts. On its busiest day, November 3, 1918, there were eight nurses and 22 aides on duty. On the last day of the hospital's operations, November 13, the staff was down to one nurse and one aide. The hours between paid and volunteer staff were fairly equal. Ten nurses and six aides received compensation for a total of 161.5 days of



Cecilia and John Casserly's home on Bridge Street in Hillsborough served as the Casserly Emergency Hospital.

work. Three nurses and 25 aides contributed 158 days. In addition there were three "health officers" and ten doctors "on call." The hospital received prepared meals from many additional volunteers working at the Diet Kitchen in San Mateo.⁹⁴ During the crisis the hospital paid for 35 ambulance calls which cost \$146.

The danger of working in the hospital for paid staff and volunteers was made apparent when day-time superintendent Wedgewood contracted influenza and had to be replaced. During the time of the hospital's operation three aides also became ill, but fortunately, all of them recovered.

According to Rochex, the Casserly Emergency Hospital stayed open for three weeks and "refused no real emergency case." Altogether it cared for 57 patients, 22 men, 16 women and 19 children. Total service days for the adults equaled 250 days, while those for children amounted to 205. During the three weeks, nine patients died. Geographically, the cases broke down this way (note this compilation somehow increased the total to 59):

Redwood City	8	Burlingame	2
Daly City	14	San Mateo	18
Colma	8	Hillsborough	1
South San Francisco	2	Belmont	3
Millbrae	2	Palo Alto	1

The Motor Corps

Mrs. Harold L. Mack and Mrs. Leslie Whitney were the leaders and keys to success for the Motor Corps. According to Rochex they worked day and night to organize the unit and keep it efficient with all-volunteer workers, driving their personal automobiles. The Corps had its own truck for heavy work. Mack as "Commandant" of the Corps received a particular amount of notoriety. Known as a crack golfer at the Beresford County Club before the War, Mack was drawn to the Red Cross and war relief work, in part, because of her husband, who was in the army, a major and Assistant Chief of Staff for the 91st Division of the American Expeditionary Forces. He was at St. Mihiel during the bloody Meuse-Argonne Offensive for which he was decorated for bravery by both the French and

Belgian governments.⁹⁵

While the Motor Corps was active before the influenza epidemic hit, it became indispensable when the crisis was at its worst. The Corps converted its truck into an ambulance which conveyed the stricken to Casserly Emergency Hospital. Volunteer drivers meanwhile ran supplies and medicine from San Francisco to the San Mateo County Chapter's operations centers. They also delivered food to families not able to care for themselves. Altogether the Corps consisted of 24 cars, nine on call at the Hospital. One driver had the specific responsibility of daily transporting General Supervisor Gomes from San Francisco to Casserly. According to Rochex, the Corps made 109 emergency trips and delivered food to 540 families.⁹⁶

Home Care

At the Influenza Committee's organizational meeting of October 22, 1918, the Red Cross volunteer leaders discussed the need to create a home care committee. Rochex indicates that this need became evident as visiting professional nurses found families so ill from influenza that they were cooking meals and doing housework during their visits. Recognizing that nurses could serve more people if volunteers could step in to provide those functions, the Chapter went to work. For some communities, teachers, out of work because their schools had shuttered, volunteered for this merciful duty. Altogether 51 women volunteered for Home Care. Weeks after Casserly Emergency Hospital stopped operations, in mid-November, these volunteers continued to help families until well after January 1, 1919.⁹⁷

The Diet Kitchen

The Diet Kitchen (also known as the Soup Kitchen) was run by Mrs. Henry Dana and Mrs. Walter Anderson. It operated out of a building at 152 Second Avenue in San Mateo. While it functioned before the influenza crisis, the Diet Kitchen proved to be of immense value, during the epidemic.

It supplied food for both Casserly Emergency Hospital and for the Home Care Committee. Food was largely donated – mostly roasts, milk, ice cream and ice. The Diet Kitchen's leadership, when asking for donated food, pitched for "delicacies," and especially not soup, since that was already being prepared. Instead it called for custards, puddings, fried chicken, pies, fruits and jellies. Among the 179 Peninsula people who donated food was a virtual who's who of San Mateo County families, including the Ames, Amphlett, Bourn, Bovet, Carolan, Crocker, De Salba, Hobart, Howard, Latham, Levy, McAllister, McLellan, Mack, Parrott, Poett, Scott, Sinton and Wisnom families.⁹⁸

Among the Diet Kitchen volunteers, were, again, a number of thrown-out-of-work teachers. At least seven women made up the daily work staff, which averaged cooking 19 gallons of soup. The Diet Kitchen was ably supported by the Motor Corps, running lunches and dinners to Casserly and to about 20 victims at home every day. During the influenza epidemic, the Diet Kitchen prepared 1,377 hospital meals and 2,160 dinners for 540 at home families for a total of 3,537 meals. The average cost for feeding each person was 20 cents.⁹⁹



Mrs. Harry Dana with Dr. Raycroft in 1946. Mrs. Dana operated the Diet Kitchen with Mrs. Walter Anderson.

A Dangerous Service

The San Mateo County Red Cross Chapter continued its other projects through the crisis such as sending holiday packages to servicemen and operating a shop salvaging clothes for the Belgian people.¹⁰⁰ However, its greatest effort was helping the community weather the epidemic. The amount of service hours and funding generated by the volunteers were impressive, especially considering this was dangerous work. As mentioned previously, the November 7, 1918, notice of the death of 35-year-old Mrs. A. Sweetser, the wife of the *San Mateo News-Leader* Secretary, hit the community particularly hard. Her work for the San Mateo County Chapter included many hours assisting the afflicted at their homes. The idea that she would not have gotten influenza if she had not been volunteering was more than a notion.

About that time, Bay Area newspapers were also covering the health struggles of local sisters Marion and Kate Crocker. Both were involved in war work. Marion was on her way to France to volunteer for the YMCA when she contracted influenza in New York. Kate was in New York as well, training to become a Red Cross nurse at Lane Hospital. There the 23-year-old was caring for influenza patients when hit by the “Grippe.”¹⁰¹ She was taken back to San Francisco and died at the home of her mother in mid-November.

Mission Accomplished

The San Mateo County Chapter of the American Red Cross accomplished much during the 1918-1919 influenza epidemic through its Casserly Emergency Hospital, Motor Corps and Diet Kitchen. Beyond those programs it served the soldiers at Camp Fremont’s hospital. Another aspect of its influenza work encompassed the emergency supplies it generated for the armed services, and the local community including:

61,912	Gauze Compresses
417	Pneumonia Jackets
1,900	Face Masks
400	Bed Shirts

3,452 Sweaters

4,421 Pairs of Socks¹⁰²

The Chapter also proved to be a powerhouse fundraising organization. During its two charity drives it raised \$118,153¹⁰³ from nearly 6,500 donors.¹⁰⁴

During the War and epidemic, local newspapers steadily printed the names of the San Mateo County Chapter’s workers. One headline from the *San Mateo Leader* read: “Honor List of Unselfish Women Who Are Helping to Stamp Out the Influenza Epidemic.”¹⁰⁵ This is one example of many, but it does say much. Indeed, by all accounts, the work of these women was well-done.

Redwood City Chapter

While maintaining its independence from the County Chapter, the Redwood City Chapter of the American Red Cross achieved much as well. By the middle of June 1917, only two months after America’s entry into World War I, this Chapter had already grown to 500 members.¹⁰⁶ Leaders like Mrs. James M. (Florence Violet) Eva became quite efficient in raising money through card party benefits and other efforts.¹⁰⁷ In May 1918 the Chapter donated \$12,520 to the Red Cross Fund, a generous amount from this mostly working class community.¹⁰⁸

During the epidemic, the *Redwood City Democrat* was effusive in its praise of the Chapter: “The Emergency Relief Committee organized by the Redwood City Chapter of the Red Cross has proven an invaluable aid to the hard working doctors of the town and of the infinite help and comfort to the homes of those afflicted with the influenza.”¹⁰⁹

The Chapter’s Leader, Mrs. J.P. McAuliffe, directed her volunteers in a variety of efforts. They made 1,134 masks in one week as the disease settled in during mid-October. The masks were distributed at Ryan Drug Store and Young Drug Company. All proceeds from their sales were given back to the Chapter as a donation.

The *Democrat* was particularly taken by the home care the Chapter provided: “The committee has been in close touch with every single case of illness; and

whenever in need of help of any kind it has been furnished.” This included large quantities of food delivered by the “warm-hearted women.” While the Redwood City Diet Kitchen was run by Miss Edna Trumen, special acknowledgment went to the “wonderful work” of Mrs. E.E. Honn, who was active:

...day and night whenever and wherever she was needed. She has daily distributed two gallons of soup, besides custards and gelatins.

The San Carlos Dairy donated all the milk distributed during the crisis. By the first week in November the Chapter had furnished aid to 90 individuals within 19 families. In most cases, groceries and fuel were provided. Sometimes a person might require “very particular care.”¹¹⁰

When the women discovered five of the sick people needing more than home attendance, they arranged for their transportation up to Casserly Emergency Hospital. All five of these patients recovered.

While the Emergency Relief Committee shut down active service by November 7, 1918, the importance of the Redwood City Chapter to the community continued. Calling on supporters from outlining areas such as Woodside and Portola Valley, by mid-January 1919, it had 1,957 members.¹¹¹

Some Conclusions

As mentioned in the introduction of this article, what happened in San Mateo County during the Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919 was at once a microcosm of things happening all over America, and also a story about a far from ordinary, altruistic response by the women of the Peninsula through two chapters of the American Red Cross.

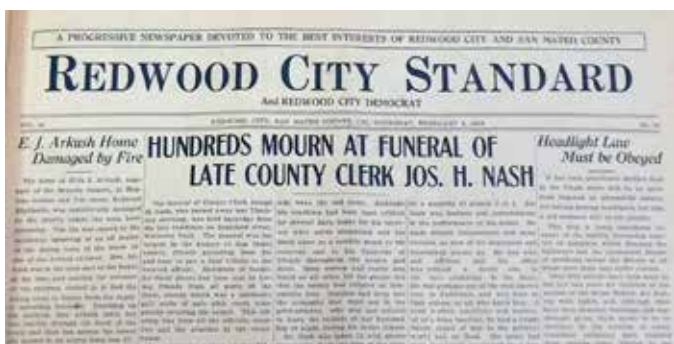
From a historical perspective, more can be surmised. Fortuitous for those currently studying the history of pandemics, just eight years ago (2012), historian Nancy K. Bristow had her book *American Pandemic* published by Oxford University Press. Her intense research into the 1918-1919 influenza crisis, focusing on local stories across the United States, allowed her to reach some

broad conclusions. For our San Mateo County story, we can derive from her work some insight into how national developments affected local people’s response to the crisis.

To begin with, Bristow reminds us that the epidemic was “often made invisible...by broader forces,”¹¹² referring, of course, to World War I, which frequently pushed influenza off the front page of the country’s newspapers. A second major factor governing the thinking of Americans at that time was the rise of the public health movement as part of the Progressive agenda. Progressivism of the 1900s grew out of a national reaction to “...the damage done to democracy and capitalism through machine politics and monopolies....”¹¹³ Progressives wanted strong national government to take on the problems brought about by industrialization. In the case of the World War, Progressives insisted that Americans accept federal control of the War effort through taxes, the draft and “enforced loyalty.”¹¹⁴ Public health, as part of the Progressive movement, was on the rise in 1918. When the influenza epidemic struck in the fall of that year, Progressives sought to use the power of government to control the disease while “educating and mobilizing the public.”¹¹⁵

The triumph of Progressivism in San Mateo County can be seen in the response of middle class and “smart set” women of San Mateo, Burlingame and Hillsborough in their efforts to battle influenza through the San Mateo County Chapter of the American Red Cross. Many of these women would go on to champion other planks of the Progressive platform, including women’s rights and Prohibition.

In more working class Redwood City, the women mobilized in a similar vein. Symbolic of the increased influence of Progressivism in Redwood City was a transformation of its hometown newspaper. On February 6, 1919, it changed its name from *Redwood City Democrat* to *Redwood City Standard* (and beneath it read, in small print, *Redwood City Democrat*). Now running conspicuously above its banner, for the first



New banner for the *Redwood City Standard*, February 6, 1919.

time, were the words: “A Progressive Newspaper Devoted to the Best Interests of Redwood City and San Mateo County.”

Bristow also writes about a “weariness” to Progressivism that set in – a reaction that would eventually help lead to the movement’s collapse. Progressives, she tells us, relied on experts to reason through and solve problems. However: “Though willing to accept public health officials guidance in the early weeks of the crisis, as weeks and months passed and these officials proved unable to contain influenza, Americans grew restive....”¹¹⁶

Bristow documents how resistance took place in many forms across the country, but certainly, of most interest for Peninsula readers, is her description of the “waxing and waning of popular support”¹¹⁷ for health authorities in San Francisco. As we have seen, the first case reported in the City came in early September 1918. On September 27, the State Board of Health recognized that a crisis was coming. Nevertheless on September 28, San Francisco ignored warnings and went forward with its gigantic, patriotic Fourth Liberty Loan Drive parade. Conditions then deteriorated, and on October 8, officials closed schools and prohibited public gatherings. Chief of the Board of Health, William Hassler, began urging the use of masks to save lives and gained the support of the *San Francisco Chronicle* in doing so. He asked that all residents keep their masks on until a week after the last case was dealt with. Police then arrested 400 people in a single day, during

raids in hotel lobbies. On November 21, under great pressure, the City government allowed citizens to shed their masks. According to Bristow: “By this point...the masks had become not only unpopular, but an object of humor and even ridicule.”¹¹⁸ However, by the first week in December, it became apparent that the disease had not gone away, and Hassler went back to trying to persuade people to put their masks back on. He hoped that San Franciscans would voluntarily answer his call, but instead local observers reported less than 10% of the people responded. On December 16, hundreds gathered to hear a public debate on the subject, and three days later the Board of Supervisors voted down a proposed order to bring the masks back. Then the disease spiked in early January, and on January 16, the Supervisors reversed themselves again and voted 15 to one to resume masking. An Anti-Mask League formed in reaction, helping make enforcement almost impossible. On February 1, the ordinance was once more rescinded.

While not as dramatic, we can see that “weariness” set in on the Peninsula as well. Early in the crisis there was resistance to local governmental statutes. However, as the crisis became more acute in the latter part of October, there was overwhelming acceptance of the steps taken, from closing schools to wearing masks. The San Mateo County and Redwood City Red Cross Chapters gave their maximum effort during October. However, into November, laws were relaxed and both Chapters shut down most of their influenza emergency response efforts. Even during January 1919, when there was a threatening spike in cases on the Peninsula, while local restriction laws were brought back, the Chapters did not remobilize. Importantly, the local press stopped covering the epidemic the way it had. When reporting deaths in January and February 1919, the newspapers frequently cited pneumonia as the cause, but left out the word influenza. Occasionally the reports quoted family members of victims saying the killer pneumonia was not caused by influenza. Could it be that with the War over, people just wanted to get back to normal life? In this respect, it was extremely fortunate that the epidemic

was retreating on its own.

There were some important local ramifications resulting from the County's influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. Both the San Mateo County and Redwood City Chapters of the American Red Cross demonstrated a powerful ability to respond to public disaster. Redwood City continued with war related work in 1919, by sending used clothes to war-torn Europe.¹¹⁹ The County Chapter embarked on a number of causes. By the time of the Second World War, only 22 years later, it had become a solid force in supporting America in crisis, through its local efforts. Another major outcome of this period involved improvement of the County's health care abilities. All during the War and epidemic, County officials wrestled with the need for the creation of a public hospital. Finally, on March 20, 1919, the Board of Supervisors settled on a site at Beresford¹²⁰ to create San Mateo County Community Hospital – an outstanding victory for Progressive public health advocates. The Hospital's construction was completed in 1923.¹²¹

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Our author would like to recognize San Mateo County Historical Association staff members Carmen Blair, Elizabeth Silva and Sarah Phelps for their efforts in creating this article.

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For the centennial of the 19th Amendment granting women the vote, the Museum Auxiliary staged a Suffrage March in front of the History Museum in July 2020. The reenactment was set during the 1918 Influenza Epidemic as indicated by the masks. Photo Deann Dyson.

* Walgreens

* Trader Joe's

* Starbucks

* Bagel Street Cafe

* Baskin Robbins

* Jamba Juice

* Little Caesars Pizza

* Little Whale
Seafood Restaurant

* Millbrae Kebabs & Gyros

* Paris Baguette



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Millbrae, CA

		Magnolia Ave	
	Blvd	★ 	Glen Ave
Taylor		Broadway	Meadow
		El Camino Real	

* Living Spaces

* Bank of America

* Pet Food Express

* Verizon

* Diva Nail Salon

* Elsa's Studio Six
Hair Salon

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Workers with the "chow cart" in Tent Alley. Courtesy Menlo Park Historical Association.