

Robert Overmann
Honors Thesis Abstract

Title of Project: “Ill in the ‘Ville: The Events and Culture during the 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Kirksville, Missouri as Viewed Through Kirksville Newspapers”

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Abstract:

The 1918 Influenza Pandemic affected more than 500 million people across the world and killed an estimated three to five percent of the world’s population. This project seeks to examine the pandemic’s impact and influence in Kirksville, Missouri as reported in the city’s public forums — the *Kirksville Daily Express*, the *Kirksville Normal School Index*, and the *Kirksville Journal* — using a cultural studies lens to comment on the varied ways Kirksville’s community and institutions reacted to the disease.

The pandemic’s impact is assessed both quantitatively (such as numbers of sickened and dead, and associated financial costs) and qualitatively (such as rhetorical accounts of the pandemic in newspapers) using the periodicals published in Kirksville during the time period. The project incorporates data gleaned from 1918-19 Adair County, Missouri death certificates. The dead in Adair County are assessed quantitatively by demographic information (age, sex, race, occupation, etc.) The stories of selected dead will be incorporated to humanize those who died of the pandemic in Kirksville. The pandemic’s wider impact on both Missouri and the United States is discussed briefly to offer readers a sense of context.

The project aims to localize this worldwide tragedy to Adair County, and, via the city’s public forums, details the diverse experiences and associated reactions of Kirksville residents, the Kirksville State Normal School, the American School of Osteopathy, Kirksville businesses, and the Kirksville public schools. It investigates and recognizes efforts by the Kirksville community to both live with and actively combat the pandemic.