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by Andrew R. English

Tales from fragmentary facts connected with stories of early Hattiesburg appeared strangely reactionary and exaggerated regarding the threat of disease. Accounts of trains running through the town at full speed and conductors holding handkerchiefs over their mouths to avoid catching a fever or illness seemed a bizarre but quaint precaution. These local legends did not sound rational or even relevant to the recent world of vaccines and technology. This assumption changed abruptly with the outbreak of COVID-19, as the ingredients of dread and disbelief, when added to the detail-starved earlier stories, brought deeper understanding and perhaps a closer empathy. Panic was a genuine reaction to the threat of disease in those long-ago years. In the present day, precautions taken by those forebearers no longer seem quaint and unnecessary. Panic had suddenly reemerged, and in this century talk of quarantines and miracle cures echoes the fearful actions of late nineteenth century Americans. As the onslaught of COVID-19 continues to spread fear, panic, and an unsettling dread, it reminds us of the epidemics of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Few contagions were as feared as yellow fever.

Yellow fever, "Yellow Jack," "His Saffron Majesty," "The Saffron Scourge," or "Bronze John" as Southerners also knew it, were all variations on the jaundiced appearance or yellowed skin of the more acute cases. Black vomit, brought forth in the final stages of the sickness, was another dreaded sign of yellow fever.[1] Less color-related metaphors were also used such as the "enemy," "ardent fever," and "malignant fever," describing an outbreak in more ambiguous terms, but alarm still followed.[2]

Fever and sickness appeared in the Piney Woods area of Mississippi with both an increased frequency and fervor when the railroad boom

[1] Jo Ann Carrigan, *The Saffron Scourge: A History of Yellow Fever in Louisiana, 1796-1905* (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2015), 8-9.

[2] Ibid., 9.

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of the 1880s created new settlements in the virgin pine forests. Those outbreaks and the responses by the local citizens among the informed and cautious, together with the disbelieving and reactionary, were haphazard and predictably human. It is chilling to compare the reactions of those living with the scourges over a century ago to our responses to COVID-19 today, as they are unnervingly similar.

Rails, Timber, and Towns

By the early summer of 1883, the New Orleans & Northeastern (N.O. & N.E.) Railroad was reaching into the interior of the Mississippi Piney Woods through two building efforts—one northeast from New Orleans, the other southwest from Meridian.[3] By June 1883, the construction of a trestle across the Leaf River was completed in the hamlet that would become Hattiesburg, and the first work train rolled across the river to supply the crews laying the rails southward.[4] Work slowed on the southern leg of the route, as construction near the swamps of the Louisiana and Mississippi boundary at the West Pearl River Bridge (trestle) was delayed due to a smallpox outbreak among the work crews at the site.[5] On October 15, 1883, the first through train traveled south from Meridian to New Orleans and with its arrival in the Crescent City, the N.O. & N.E. railroad was officially completed.[6] The new settlement of Hattiesburg was soon a bustling community, with several hundred souls and material signs of progress, including a local newspaper. That chronicle, the *Hattiesburg Herald*, was a short-lived venture as D. W. Bouie, one of the editors and part owner, died in the town on September 1, 1884, a victim of typhoid fever.[7] Other newspapers followed and regrettably so did fatalities, because as the township grew into a city, disease reappeared among the inhabitants, dispelling the population's illusions of safety from outbreaks experienced in the larger cities.

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[3] "Letter from Halloo," *St. Tammany Farmer* (Covington, LA), May 26, 1883, p. 2; "Work Begun on the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad-Interesting Initial Proceedings," *The Weekly Clarion* (Jackson, MS), January 4, 1882, p. 2.

[4] "Rev. L. E. Hall, "Something Remembered of Hub City,"" *Hattiesburg American* (Hattiesburg, MS), May 20, 1919, 34.

[5] "Letter from Halloo," *St. Tammany Farmer*, May 26, 1883, p. 2.

[6] "The First Train," *St. Tammany Farmer*, October 20, 1883, p. 2.

[7] *The Pascagoula Democrat-Star* (Pascagoula, MS), September 5, 1884, p. 2.

Pestilence, Laws, and the Civic Good

In 1888, the rudimentary law enforcement in Hattiesburg took on an urgent duty as yellow fever appeared. On August 30, the Mississippi Board of Health ordered that "no person will be permitted to enter the State unless they possess a certificate from a health officer that they have not been exposed to Yellow Fever."[8] To insure the town was protected from those exposed to the dreaded "Yellow Jack," the town marshal organized ten guards, appointed to impose a "Shotgun Quarantine." These guards watched the trains coming into and out of town, ensuring no one got on or off.[9] In 1879, the U. S. Government created the National Board of Health in the aftermath of the great Southern 1878 yellow fever outbreak, and regulations concerning railroads were initially enforced during the early stages of the 1888 outbreak. Any train leaving an infected area had to be fumigated with sulfur, and trains traveling into an infected area could neither stop nor slow below ten miles per hour.[10] By September 1888, the guards were undoubtedly on alert as fever was reported in Jackson, and that month local guards in towns and cities across the region halted all rail traffic in the Mississippi Valley for about a week. Pressure from the railroads loosened the hold of the deputized blockaders and cooler temperatures soon ended the outbreak. By October, the first shotgun quarantine in Hattiesburg was suspended when the yellow fever scare subsided.[11]

The rule of the shotgun returned on August 9, 1890, this time in response to an outbreak of smallpox. Some sixty people fled before other villages along the N.O. & N.E. imposed a quarantine against anyone coming from Hattiesburg.[12] By late August, the outbreak, termed as a "panic" in several Mississippi newspapers, had concluded and the refugees returned to their homes.[13] Though smallpox had claimed only

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[8] "The Fever Record," *The Greenville Times* (Greenville, MS), September 1, 1888, p. 2.

[9] Otis Robertson, *Facts About Hattiesburg* (Hattiesburg, MS: Progress Book & Job Print, 1898), 15.

[10] R. Scott Huffard, Jr., "Infected Rails: Yellow Fever and Southern Railroads," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 1 (February 2013): 97, 108-109.

[11] George R. Watson Sr., *Historical Hattiesburg* (Hattiesburg, MS: privately printed, 1974), 14.

[12] Robertson, *Facts About Hattiesburg* (1898), 15; "Smallpox in Mississippi," *The Evening Star*, (Washington, DC), August 12, 1890, p. 6.

[13] "The small pox panic at Hattiesburg is about over," *Oxford Eagle* (Oxford, MS),

one life, Hattiesburg and the surrounding area continued to live under the threat of seasonal outbreaks of disease. In early 1894, an Ellisville newspaper provided a brief account of thirty-five-year-old William Jenkins, who died at the sawmill village of Eastabuchie in early January. Jenkins, described as "A good citizen, upright Mason and a member of the Baptist Church," died from typhoid on January 10, 1894.[14]

Reports of disease were not always sufficient to halt the railroads. In October 1897, one Pascagoula newspaper noted that work on the Mobile, Jackson & Kansas City Railroad, then building near Hattiesburg, was "progressing notwithstanding the Yellow Fever scare."[15] Nevertheless, incidents of fever forced suspensions of some rail travel in the state. In mid-September, the partially completed Gulf & Ship Island Railroad halted travel from the coast to Hattiesburg following reports of yellow fever in Biloxi, on the orders of Dr. H. S. Gulley, the State Health officer.[16] A rumor related to a reported outbreak in Hattiesburg sparked a skirmish in area newspapers. The Ellisville newspaper hotly denied that citizens of that town had deliberately created a false claim in order to hurt business in Hattiesburg. "Hattiesburg cannot make Ellisville the victim of their folly," the irate editor from the offended town proclaimed. Not content to let the issue go without another blast, the Ellisville editor demanded the name of the accuser with the challenge to "put up or shut up."[17]

The fever outbreak and restrictions imposed by quarantines injured more than journalistic decorum and civic pride. The press of business needs led to strident criticisms of health authorities and demands for a return to normal life, even before the fever had completely abated. In

August 28, 1890, p. 2; "We have a private letter from Hattiesburg," *The Pascagoula Democrat-Star*, August 22, 1890, p. 2.

[14] "Died at Eastabuchie, Wednesday, January 10, of typhoid fever," *The New South* (Ellisville, MS), January 13, 1894, p. 3.

[15] "The Hattiesburg Citizen says that work on the Mobile, Jackson, and Kansas City Railroad," *The Pascagoula Democrat-Star*, October 29, 1897, p. 2; quoting from an undated story provided by the *Hattiesburg Citizen*.

[16] "Ordered to close traffic," *The Austin Weekly Statesman* (Austin, TX), September 16, 1897, p. 12. By this time, the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad linked Hattiesburg with the coastal city of Gulfport. See: "To Formally Open the G.& S. I. R. R.," *The Grenada Sentinel* (Grenada, MS), September 26, 1896, p. 3.

[17] "That Hattiesburg Circular Again," *The New South* (Ellisville, MS), October 16, 1897, p. 2. The Ellisville newspaper reported that the Reverend L. E. Hall had traveled from Hattiesburg to visit a friend suffering from yellow fever in nearby Augusta, but stopped short of accusing him or the town of Augusta as the source of the rumor.

Brookhaven, *The Leader* admonished: "the merchants want their mails, the people want business, and the time for harassment has passed. Jack Frost is now standing quarantine and he is the greatest conqueror of Bronze John in all the land. The people have more confidence in him than they have in a cowpen full of doctors."[18] Jack Frost won out, but Bronze John proved capable of fighting with renewed stealth and strength when warmer weather returned.

The growing towns and cities of south Mississippi made incremental urban improvements during the final years of the nineteenth century; however, outbreaks of fevers and sickness continued to occur without warning. On September 20, 1898, Hattiesburg hired an extra policeman to assist the lone police officer, Thomas Beverly (described as "a Jolly Good Fellow and a splendid officer"), to patrol the streets at night. The new man assigned to the police watch was not named but was likely a welcome member, as Beverly was required, in addition to his constabulary duties, to light and trim the street lamps.[19] The new patrolman may have served as a deterrent to crime, but Bronze John was able to slip in unseen beneath the flickering lamps and beyond the gaze of the policemen.

Later that week, lumberman Charles Rich stepped off the train from New Orleans with more than his baggage. He had been exposed to yellow fever while on a trip to the Crescent City and may have been among those who brought the illness with them.[20] Rich returned to Hattiesburg to examine the remains of the saw mill he managed, the Leaf River Lumber Company, which burned on September 24, 1898, leaving only the boiler and engine salvageable.[21] Despite the immediate needs to recover his business, the "Yellow-winged Monster" was now in the city and brought its own version of destruction. By October 9, Hattiesburg had twenty cases of yellow fever and the N.O. & N.E. ordered its trains to pass through Hattiesburg at full speed.[22] The yellow fever

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[18] "The Picayune's Mississippi Bureau observes that the State is growing," *The Leader* (Brookhaven, MS), November 10, 1897, p. 4.

[19] Watson, *Historical Hattiesburg* (1974), 15; "Hattiesburg's Efficient Police Department," *The Hattiesburg News*, September 9, 1909, p. 6. Aside from his being considered "a Jolly Good Fellow and a splendid officer," Beverly was also regarded as "a natural born policeman."

[20] "Yellow Fever in the South," *The New York Times,* October 10, 1898, p. 3.

[21] "The plant of the Leaf River Lumber," *The Free Press* (Poplarville, MS), September 29, 1898, p. 2.

[22] Huffard, "Infected Rails," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 1 (February

scare mysteriously subsided, but five days after the railroad issued its order prohibiting trains from stopping in that city, Hattiesburg reported cases of smallpox.[23] By October 19, there were no new cases of the pox in the city, although there were five suspicious cases outside the cordon area.[24] The fever and pox departed almost as quickly as they came, and both would return without apparent pattern and with varying degrees of intensity.

Citizen Soldiers, Pox, and the Public

During the Spanish-American War of 1898, Americans rushed to enlist and some Hattiesburg citizens volunteered for service in Company L of the First Mississippi Infantry Regiment.[25] Captain Archie Fairly commanded the body of raw recruits mustered under arms as Hattiesburg's first fighting unit.[26] Fairly did not obtain the requisite numbers of troops from local sources, but was able to round out his company with volunteers from Columbia in neighboring Marion County.[27] From their temporary bivouac on the courthouse lawn in Hattiesburg, the troops marched to the station and boarded the train for Jackson, en route to their cantonment site at Camp Pat Henry on May 1, 1898.[28] While in Camp Henry, the Adjutant General ordered the distribution of a circular, outlining the physical requirements for those seeking active duty. The men had to have physical attributes to include lung capacity, good vision, be between eighteen and forty-five years of age, stand at least five feet four inches in height, and weigh at least 125 pounds but not more than 195 pounds. The men had to be "sound."[29]

After passing the medical screening, on May 30, 1898, the

2013), 95; "Yellow Fever in the South," *The New York Times,* October 10, 1898, p. 3.

[23] "Yellow fever is officially reported," *Greene County Herald* (Leakesville, MS), October 13, 1898, p. 3.

[24] "Mississippi Matters," *The Leader* (Brookhaven, MS), October 19, 1898, p. 2.

[25] *WPA History of Forrest County, Mississippi* (Works Progress Administration Federal Writer's Project, 1938), 260.

[26] Dunbar Rowland, "Military History of Mississippi 1803-1898," *Register of the State of Mississippi (1908)* (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1978), 559.

[27] *WPA History of Marion County, Mississippi* (Works Progress Administration Federal Writer's Project, 1938) "Assignment 18."

[28] Rowland, "Military History of Mississippi 1803-1898," 559.

[29] James Malcolm Robertshaw, "History of Company 'C' Second Mississippi Regiment, Spanish-American War," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, vol. 1 (1916), 432.

troops moved to a point near the Georgia and Tennessee line at the Chickamauga battlefield park, for more training and larger formation drills.[30] While in this Georgia training center dubbed Camp Thomas, some of the recruits contracted typhoid fever and were furloughed home. The Army senior officers at Camp Thomas had failed to organize their cantonment properly for the long-term training and safe care of larger bodies of troops.[31]

Lieutenant Colonel Alfred A. Woodhull, deputy surgeon at Camp Thomas, described the shockingly unsanitary conditions in the camp—"The refuse from the thousands of animals and other insoluble debrisof the camp add to the aerial and indirectly to the aqueous pollution."[32] The equipment available for hospital staff was woefully insufficient for such a large gathering of troops. Not one microscope was on hand.[33] Poor drainage, inadequate sanitation, and compromised water sources led to sudden occurrences of typhoid that decimated the ranks.

Camp Thomas had approximately sixty thousand volunteer soldiers by early summer 1898, and the facilities could not provide sufficient supplies and care for that large number of men. The encampment had only a moderate appreciation of hygiene. Some local farmers sold their goods to the soldiers without adhering to the restrictions imposed by permits authorizing them to sell within the camp and without oversight regarding cleanliness and quality. They vended their questionable produce to the unsuspecting young recruits apparently without much conscience. One senior officer in the camp complained of vendors selling "indigestible pie, green fruits, pop, manufactured milk, and slop of every name and every deleterious nature."[34] Caution from the men and their officers was almost non-existent at the camp, and hundreds of the men paid for it with their lives. One writer noted the average volunteer soldier of the Spanish-American War "had little discipline, and a slight knowledge of sanitation." The typical soldier "did not accept in full faith the germ theory of disease, and was skeptical about the existence of bugs he could not see." In regards to the vendors dispensing their

[30] *WPA History of Forrest County, Mississippi*, 260.

[31] David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (New York: MacMillan Publishers, 1981), 151, 160.

[32] Ibid., 160.

[33] John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza* (New York: Viking, published by the Penguin Group, 2004), 136.

[34] Gregory Dean Chapman, "Army Life at Camp Thomas, Georgia, during the Spanish-American War," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (Winter 1986), 646.

The Replacement: Corporal Phillip J. Toomer, Company B, 3rd Regiment, Mississippi Volunteer Infantry. Enlisted at Hattiesburg, July 3, 1898. Image courtesy of Andrew English.

foods within the camp, the average ill-trained soldier "resented as an invasion of personal rights, any attempt to dictate what he should eat or drink."[35]

By late July some regiments had departed, but approximately forty-five thousand troops remained in the filthy camp, as recommendations of the medical officers were "dismissed as unrealistic or unnecessary fads."[36] Typhoid fever was the major killer of soldiers in the Spanish-American War. Of the 20,738 recruits who contracted the fever in the Army training sites, 1,590 died. Other camps suffered sickness, but not to the extreme of the encampment at Chickamauga. Camp Meade in Middletown, Pennsylvania, had the lowest number of deaths (150), but Camp Thomas suffered higher rates in part due to command indifference.[37] An Army inquiry in 1900 blamed the inexperienced line officers, many anxious for popular approval from their men, as they did not enforce latrine restrictions, and the soldiers answered nature's call without discretion. Company mess tents were sometimes only 150 feet away, and the results were disastrous.[38]

Typhoid hit with full force in August. The sick inundated the hospital, and staff could not respond with adequate care. Some patients were left in their own filth for up to twenty-four hours due to the lack of clean linens.[39] America suffered 379 combat deaths in the war with Spain, but by September 30, 1898, 425 soldiers had died on the

[35] Ibid., 651.

[36] Ibid., 651; Vincent J. Cirillo, "'The Patriotic Odor: Sanitation' and Typhoid Fever in the National Encampments during the Spanish-American War," *Army History*, no. 49 (Spring 2000), 20.

[37] Cirillo, "The Patriotic Odor," 17-18, 20.

[38] Ibid., 19-20.

[39] Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company Inc., 1994), 273.

Chickamauga training site.[40]

Camp Thomas was the most hazardous duty location of the war. An article in the *New York Herald* called it "a perfect hell on earth." Soldiers from the First Maine regiment invalided home in late August, stepped off the trains "a yellow and thin-faced lot."[41] They were among the more fortunate. Of the one hundred troops sent out from Hattiesburg, eight died from typhoid fever.[42]

Their duty ended at Columbia, Tennessee, on December 20, 1898, when the First Mississippi Regiment, U. S. Volunteers mustered out of service. Mississippi guardsman T. B. Birdsong remarked somewhat bitterly that his service, and that of his comrades, also comprised of "taking care of their own sick in camp" and by showing the nation the military weaknesses concerning the mobilization, training, and care of its volunteer soldiers.[43] This lesson was not fully heeded and would have to be relearned in a future war.

In July 1899, typhoid killed William D. Poate and his son in Hattiesburg.[44] Records are limited, but the next quarantine in Hattiesburg occurred in early 1901, when the city hired guards to seal off a residence in response to an outbreak of smallpox. The city paid C. S. King $5.12 for his three and one-half days on guard duty.[45] Locally deputized guards like King proved somewhat effective during limited incidents with a few patients requiring isolation, but a larger scale event required a more direct measure by the state.

In addition to supporting national defense, another duty performed by the Mississippi National Guard during this era was the enforcement of quarantine during periods of broad area fever scares. In the summer of 1905, towns along the lower reaches of the Pearl River were suddenly, and once again, in the clutches of yellow fever. Governor James K. Vardaman responded to the growing panic by calling out the State Guard to enforce a quarantine of the area. The State Guard planned an annual training encampment in Gulfport on August 2, but Adjutant

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[40] Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (1981), 160.

[41] Chapman, "Army Life at Camp Thomas Georgia, during the Spanish-American War," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (Winter 1986), 651, 654.

[42] *WPA History of Marion County, Mississippi*, "Assignment 18."

[43] *WPA History of Forrest County, Mississippi*, 256.

[44] "Wm. R. Poate and son, Percy, of Hattiesburg, died Tuesday," *The Magnolia Gazette* (Magnolia, MS), July 22, 1899, p. 2.

[45] *Hattiesburg Municipal Records*, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

General Arthur Fridge postponed the assembly to respond to the crisis.[46] Soon after receiving the mobilization order from Jackson, troops arrived and sealed off the towns of Pearlington and Napoleon.[47] Neighboring Logtown, "the prosperous and enterprising little burg," was also cordoned off by the soldiers.[48] The troops patrolled the roads, the river, and the gulf beaches, preventing anyone from entering or leaving the region. This quarantine was so severe that even the mail was halted before it reached the towns.[49] Yet despite these precautions, the fever spread further afield.

By early August 1905, a fourteen-year-old boy in Sumrall, a "prosperous and rapidly growing" sawmill town, suffered from yellow fever. Immediately upon hearing the news, the mayor of neighboring Hattiesburg placed a quarantine on any persons traveling from Sumrall on the Mississippi Central Railroad. The small nearby community of Silver Creek went further in its restrictions against Sumrall. Nothing was to offload from the trains, including passengers, baggage, or freight.[50] One careless newspaper crafted what initially appeared to be a news story, warning readers to regard the lessons of an earlier outbreak and to "Remember 1898" and acquire suitable cures. This appeal for caution was actually a thinly disguised advertisement for "Prickly Ash Bitters." Despite its claim that "half a wine glassful each morning after breakfast will keep your bowels open and healthy," there was no evidence to support the reckless claim that when used, "fewer cases of fever" were reported.[51]

More troops served on guard duty as the fever continued. In early August, Brookhaven's *The Leader,* called on Mississippians to "Meanwhile, clean up and make war on the mosquitos."[52] The first troops called out in late July, comprised about three hundred soldiers positioned

[46] "Encampment Postponed," *The Port Gibson Reveille* (Port Gibson, MS), August 3, 1905, p. 4. The encampment was to have taken place at Camp B. F. Ward in Gulfport.

[47] S. G. Thigpen, *Pearl River: Highway to Glory Land* (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1965), 73.

[48] Ibid., 73; "Pearl River," *The Sea Coast Echo* (Bay St. Louis, MS), October 1, 1898, p. 4.

[49] Thigpen, *Pearl River: Highway to Glory Land*, 73.

[50] "Yellow Fever Situation," *The Leader* (Brookhaven, MS), August 5, 1905, p. 1. The mayor of Hattiesburg at this time was C. W. Rich, the same man involved in the September 1898 yellow fever outbreak.

[51] "Remember 1898," *The Columbus Weekly Dispatch* (Columbus, MS), August 24, 1905, p. 2.

[52] "Happenings in Mississippi," *The Leader* (Brookhaven, MS), August 2, 1905, p. 1.

A torn photo of Hattiesburg law enforcement and probable local posse, possibly a quarantine guard. Photo likely taken at the Palace Restaurant, Front Street in Hattiesburg by D. B. Henley, circa 1905. Photo courtesy of Andrew English and the late James McRaney of Hattiesburg.

around the southern reaches of the state, including Camp B. F. Ward in Gulfport and the home for Confederate veterans at Beauvoir on quarantine detail.[53] This blockade lasted until the first frost of autumn, when people ventured to return to their homes in the heavily infected areas. The soldiers fumigated each dwelling in Logtown, Napoleon, and Pearlington with burning sulfur prior to residents returning home.[54] After three weeks of the fumigation detail, the soldiers assembled to await the demobilization order. Yet, before they left "the beautiful and prosperous little city" of Pearlington, the company staged a special drill for the citizens, and one resident described the display as "a real celebration and everybody had a big time. We had gotten to know the soldiers well and we hated to see them go."[55]

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[53] "Soldiers Withdrawn," *The Sea Coast Echo* (Bay St. Louis, MS), October 21, 1905, p. 1. Details of specific units are scarce, but a report from the August 19, 1905, edition of *The Biloxi Herald* provides some details: "Sergeant Stokes and seven troops from Ellisville's Company B, Second Regiment of the Mississippi National Guard, established 'a line of Khaki and Blue' after they relieved a civilian guard detail at the western limits of Biloxi during the fever outbreak."

[54] Thigpen, *Pearl River: Highway to Glory Land*, 73, 76.

[55] Ibid., 73, 76; "Pearl River," *The Sea Coast Echo* (Bay St. Louis, MS), October 1, 1898, p. 4.

Urban Growth, Sanitation, and the Spread of Disease

During the 1905 yellow fever outbreak, one frustrated newspaper editor remarked that "the revelations of scientific researchers have conducted to disturb the peace of mind." The editor was both confounded and irritated by the advances of medical science and continued, "Water in our whisky and the devil in us all, what is the world coming to?" Longing for a simpler time, the editor wailed, "Oh! For an age of ignorance like our fore fathers lived in and only died of old age. It is so dangerous to think about living that we are nearly dead."[56]

By 1907, Hattiesburg had grown to a city of twenty-five thousand and boasted that it was "the Future Great City of Mississippi." The municipality had grown rapidly and was proud of its five miles of paved streets, seven miles of streetcar lines, three fire stations, "sewerage," and "[f]ine artesian water." The city also professed "[h]ealth conditions unexcelled." The appeal for more persons to move to the city may have brought more families and businesses to this railroad and timber center, but the latter two claims of the water and health conditions would soon be proved wrong.[57]

In late October 1907, C. F. Larson of the Hattiesburg Commercial Club appealed to new and prospective citizens by announcing "we have no epidemics of diphtheria, scarlet fever and membranous croup." His appeal was clever, if not disingenuous, as he also admitted to occurrences of typhoid "while not as prevalent, is not of as malignant type as encountered in the North, and we have less tuberculosis." He also sounded a note of pride by exclaiming the local incidents of "malaria is fast succumbing to the improved methods of treatment."[58] These claims were more a proclamation of aspirational civic hopes than reality based upon scientific facts.

By 1908, Hattiesburg continued to develop a semblance of a more modern urban area, and proclaimed itself "the Atlanta of Mississippi"

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[56] "The revelations of scientific researches," *Greene County Herald* (Leakesville, MS), September 29, 1905, p. 2. The Leakesville editor was quoting an undated opinion from an unknown writer of Indianola, Mississippi.

[57] "Hattiesburg Has," *Hattiesburg Daily News*, October 11, 1907, p. 4.

[58] "Secretary Larson Touches on Much-Mooted Question," *Hattiesburg Daily News*, October 20, 1907, p. 5.

when the first street cars began running in the city.[59] In a move to prevent the possible spread of disease through city schools, the school board ordered in early October 1908, that all children who had recovered from scarlet fever or other infectious diseases possess a health certificate from the county health officer, Dr. Robert Donald, prior to attending school. This precautionary measure was undertaken to "remove all danger from an epidemic resulting from the occasional cases of contagious diseases developing in the city."[60]

Fevers attacked with little warning and hospital care was no guarantee of recovery. In July 1909, Miss Pearl Mais (also identified as Mars) died at the Hattiesburg Hospital from typhoid. She had traveled to the city from Purvis to attend a training class but succumbed to the fever after an apparently brief bout of illness.[61] On August 8, Miss Viola Callahan, a trainee at the hospital school for nurses, died less than three weeks after Miss Mais, after also contracting typhoid, perhaps while on her rounds through the wards.[62]

Despite improvements in transportation and some efforts at health precautions, Hattiesburg did not retain its clean streets. In May 1913, chief sanitary inspector, Dr. W. H. Rowan, urged the citizens to "[c]lean up and keep healthy," as the conditions had deteriorated to a point where a disease outbreak was likely. In an open letter to Mayor T. E. Batson, Dr. Rowan cautioned in clear and direct language, "If Hattiesburg people are having typhoid fever, bowel troubles among children, or a prevalence of tuberculosis, or an infectious disease, the cause may safely be charged to deficient sanitation." Dr. Rowan ended his letter with a pointed warning: "if typhoid epidemic this summer, it is because the town is not clean."[63]

An effort to clean up the city would also reportedly have other cure-all benefits through the eradication of vermin, especially the vile cockroach. Some thought this bug carried typhoid fever, bubonic plague, and "possibly cancer," and as such, an appeal was made to "exterminate the cockroach."[64] Other lowly creatures received blame

[59] "Mississippi is going to have real street cars," *The Hattiesburg News*, October 3, 1908, p. 4.

[60] "Must Have Clean Bill of Health," *The Hattiesburg News*, October 2, 1908, p. 2.

[61] "Death of Miss Pearl Mars," *The Hattiesburg News*, July 19, 1909, p. 1.

[62] "Death of Miss Viola Callahan," *The Hattiesburg News*, August 9, 1909, p. 5.

[63] "Clean Up and Keep Healthy-Board of Health," *The Hattiesburg News*, May 22, 1913, p. 1.

[64] "Exterminate the Cockroach," *The Hattiesburg News*, July 30, 1914, p. 7.

for other mysterious maladies including parasitic worms as a possible cause of epilepsy in children. One south Mississippi newspaper had recklessly filled print space with what was presented as a testimonial by cautioning fearful parents: "Delays are dangerous. Don't wait for your child to have an epileptic fit. Kill at once the worms that are making her feel so poorly by giving Dr. Ball's Worm Destroyers."[65]

In July 1916, a young child in Hattiesburg was isolated from other children after a diagnosis of "infant paralysis." Health official, Dr. Robert Donald, pointed out that Hattiesburg enjoyed conditions "as not to foster the spread of such a disease." Quick to add his opinion to tamp down fears of further cases, local physician Dr. Leo H. Martin stated that "the disease is not new to the medical profession" and claimed the illness was unlikely to reoccur. Hattiesburg was fortunate, he said, as "with its fresh air, clean streets, and the character of living of the average resident of the city, there is absolutely no cause for alarm here."[66]

Hattiesburg did not keep clean streets as promoters claimed, in part due to inadequate sanitation and garbage removal. A June 1902 story in the Hattiesburg newspaper complained, "There are more brick bats and pieces of boxes and other pieces of rubbish lying in the streets of Hattiesburg than any other city of the size in the State. We have a garbage wagon but it seldom ever tackles a brick bat or a barrel."[67]

In 1909, the day sergeant at the police department was responsible for more than law enforcement duties as he was also in charge of sending the garbage wagons "to various and sundry parts of the city."[68] By the following year, the timber boom faded and revenues declined. The city sold off the trash wagons in a budget savings drive as local businesses would not fund their costs.[69] Although the city government retained a few separate garbage wagons the push for immediate economy put the city officials at cross purposes with the local business community.[70]

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[65] "Delays are dangerous," *The Alliance Eagle* (Ellisville, MS), October 16, 1890, p. 1.

[66] "No Cause Here for Alarm Over Infant Disease," *The Hattiesburg News*, July 15, 1916, p. 1. There was also an outbreak in New York City and New Jersey at that time. The two-year-old in Hattiesburg had been ill for three weeks but was recovering.

[67] "There are more brick bats and pieces of boxes," *Hattiesburg Daily Progress*, June 9, 1902, p. 4.

[68] "Hattiesburg's Efficient Police Department," *The Hattiesburg News*, September 9, 1909, p. 6.

[69] "Trash Wagons are Cut Out," *The Hattiesburg News*, February 4, 1910, p. 1.

[70] Ibid, 1; "City's Streets to be Kept Clean," *The Hattiesburg News*, February 16,

With the mule teams previously assigned to pull the trash wagons also sold off to eliminate the expense of their stabling and feed, the issue became headline news in the city.[71] Within a few weeks, the city streets commissioner proposed that the convicts in the city jail be utilized to pick up the refuse in the business district, but this was not fully workable as the businesses had to hire private wagons to haul away the rubbish.[72] In January 1911, a trash wagon was back in service and received a "warm welcome" from city businesses, as they were relieved from having to pay for private refuse carriers.[73]

Budget woes continued, and to do away with some salaries, stabling and feed charges, and maintenance costs for equipment, the city eliminated additional positions and services. By May 1911, the city fired two policemen, two firemen, and several street workers in a cost savings effort.[74] By late 1916, budget cuts and workforce limitations reduced the sanitation department to a barely functioning component of the city. Provided with one sanitation inspector, one horse-drawn wagon, and two laborers, this single wagon and work team could not keep up with the rubbish and refuse. No wagon to wash the streets was provided, indicating that the clean streets so touted in earlier local newspaper accounts, occurred only through intermittent downpours, not by design, nor through regular city maintenance.[75] The municipality had expanded from a rough railroad work camp and depot to a city of over twenty thousand in three decades. Hattiesburg had outgrown its small-town pace and needed large scale improvements to meet the needs of a growing urban center; yet, without an infusion of cash, the city could not afford the improvements.

1910, p. 1.

[71] "City's Streets to be Kept Clean," *The Hattiesburg News*, February 16, 1910, p. 1.

[72] Ibid, 1; "City's Trash Wagon Gets Warm Welcome," *The Hattiesburg News,* January 7, 1911, p. 1.

[73] "City's Trash Wagon Gets Warm Welcome," *The Hattiesburg News,* January 7, 1911, p. 1.

[74] "Commissioners continue to cut expenses," *The Hattiesburg Daily News*, May 30, 1911, p. 1. Charles Rich, the mayor who led the effort to cut the city budget in response to a fall in revenue, was back in office.

[75] J. A. Watkins, "Extra-Cantonment Zone Sanitation: Camp Shelby, Near Hattiesburg, Miss.," *Public Health Reports* (1896-1970), vol. 32, no. 5 (December 21, 1917), 2152-2153, 2162.

World War and the Pandemic

By 1916, the seemingly boundless timberlands of the Piney Woods nearer the rail lines had been clear cut with an industrial-scale, steam-driven relentlessness. Depressed local economic conditions resulting in part from the wastage of the now "disintegrated" once-virgin forests, pushed the timber workers to travel further afield for the now scarce jobs.[76] That same year, as the National Guard annual training events at Camp Swep Taylor in Jackson neared conclusion, an outbreak of diphtheria occurred in the bivouac. Some soldiers had received their pay and returned to their homes in Hattiesburg, where they reported the outbreak in the military camp. Soon, authorities quarantined Camp Taylor to control the spread of the disease.[77] Hattiesburg reported no cases of diphtheria after their soldiers returned, but outbreaks of disease would soon revisit the local area. These occurrences would again prove to a willfully disbelieving public that despite intermittent medical advances and preventative measures, they were not immune to ravages by both known and unfamiliar contagions.

When the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, the War Department faced the urgent task of raising a large army from America's small peacetime garrisons.[78] The American declaration of war turned out to be an economic godsend for the Hattiesburg area as construction jobs largely replaced sawmill work. On July 12, Secretary of War Newton Baker announced Hattiesburg as the location of a National Guard training cantonment for the mass production of a new American army. The military installation, erected on cutover timber land south of the city under the direction of chief engineer Alexander H. Twombly, was named Camp Shelby in honor of revolutionary war hero and first governor of Kentucky, Isaac Shelby.[79] Hattiesburg was not ready for the surge in manpower and animals needed to construct the new training center in the wasteland. The population doubled, but the infrastructure

[76] Ibid., 2155.

[77] "Five Diphtheria Case Reported at the Militia Camp," *The Hattiesburg News*, July 15, 1916, p. 1.

[78] "U.S. at War with Germany; President Signs Resolution," *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), April 6, 1917, p. 1.

[79] *WPA History of Forrest County, Mississippi* (1938), 263; "Select Last Sites for Guard Camps," *The New York Times*, July 13, 1917, p. 4; "Alexander H. Twombly," *The New York Times*, June 28, 1929, p. 15; "Name Camps after Military Heroes," *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), July 16, 1917, p. 8.

was quickly overwhelmed by the inrush.

An Army sanitary commission report from December 1917 revealed a Hattiesburg deficient in cleanliness and proper hygiene. Restaurants, barber shops, and railroad stations were not well kept. Fruit stands, sandwich shops, ice cream and soft drink vendors sold their food stuffs in an apparently unsanitary manner or as it was termed in an official report, "promiscuously."[80] The city also lacked conveniences for the newly arrived workers, as only a third of the inhabitants could access proper sewage facilities. The remainder made use of outside privies, many in "a grossly insanitary condition."[81]

Hattiesburg and Camp Shelby were situated in an area where health conditions were ripe for an outbreak of contagion. The three local meat packers slaughtered without regulation, the food service establishments were generally unclean, and the two soft drink bottling works in the city were termed in the official report "a sanitary menace." The conditions for malaria were prevalent in both Hattiesburg and Camp Shelby, and an Army report warned in language impossible to ignore: "The situation is serious." The report mentioned that the many gullies, ditches, and pools in the town and the miles of cut-over timber lands that surrounded the area between Hattiesburg and the Army encampment were natural breeding grounds for mosquitos. An expanded network of drainage ditches and oil spraying over these sites was instituted by the Army (for Camp Shelby) and by the U. S. Public Health Service for Hattiesburg and the nearby areas. On September 1, 1917, the city passed an ordinance prohibiting the retention of bottles, cans, cisterns, horse troughs, or any means to store "standing or flowing water" within the city limits unless these had wire mesh

Two bottles from the Hattiesburg Bottling Works. Unclean practices here put soldiers and civilians at risk for disease. Image courtesy of Andrew English.

[80] Watkins, "Extra-Cantonment Zone Sanitation: Camp Shelby, Near Hattiesburg, Miss.," *Public Health Reports* (1896-1970), vol. 32, no. 5, (December 21, 1917), 2156.

[81] Ibid., 2152.

to trap insects. These containers were covered or sprayed with kerosene, petroleum, or paraffin oil to kill mosquito larvae. The extensive efforts "proved satisfactory" for preventing reoccurrence of malaria and yellow fever.[82]

To improve its relationship with the Army, Hattiesburg funded another large-scale city improvement effort to expand and modernize its sanitation department. The city passed a bond to improve the sewer system and also acquired a street washer to keep the streets clean between rain showers.[83] These improvements came too late to prevent the outbreak of other diseases. Cases of meningitis, measles, and the dreaded influenza emerged in Camp Shelby and other military training cantonments across America, overwhelming the medical officers and staff members who struggled to deal with the mysterious plagues.[84]

Camp Shelby had the advantage of being built from scratch, complete with a hospital for about six hundred patients. Its capacity was about two percent of the expected training camp population, based on estimates for sick-listed soldiers provided by War Department calculations. The new hospital complex, complete with modern equipment, "miles of corridors," and initially home to "an efficient corps" of approximately fifty female Red Cross nurses, was considered state of the art. Efficiency of staff, up-to-date instruments, adequate supplies, and the physical scale of health care would nevertheless prove woefully insufficient for the outbreaks that engulfed the soldiers.[85]

In November 1917, Rose A. Young, a nurse from Winnsboro, South Carolina, died in the south Mississippi training camp, a victim of "disease."[86] By mid-January 1918, Camp Shelby had disease and non-effective rates higher than what the Army considered as "average." The encampment south of Hattiesburg reported new cases of sickness, including measles, diphtheria, and pneumonia. The rate of non-effective soldiers (those physically unfit for service from any cause) at Camp Shelby was 58.1 per 1,000 doughboys, while the national rate was 49.1.[87] The medical infrastructure at the training base was well stocked and

[82] Ibid., 2151, 2157-2159.

[83] Ibid., 2151, 2152, 2159, 2162.

[84] Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 252.

[85] "History of Conception and Building of Great Base Hospital at Camp Shelby," *The Hattiesburg News*, September 21, 1917, p. 17.

[86] Ibid., 256.

[87] "Deaths Among our Soldiers," *The New York Times*, January 27, 1918, 10.

boasted of a "perfection in operating rooms." Yet, despite other features including the "special care" given to build new sewer and water systems, the new hospital was quickly overwhelmed.[88] From September 1917 to March 1918, the recruits at Camp Shelby suffered from measles, with 46.5 percent of all deaths on the post during that period a result of measles-related pneumonia.[89] As the measles epidemic subsided and the business of training soldiers regained momentum, a far deadlier pestilence descended on this training cantonment.

In April 1918, of the twenty-six thousand troops stationed at Camp Shelby, two thousand fell ill with influenza. The female nurses, whose training had gone "far in the treatment of disease," were ill-prepared for the onslaught of contagions swirling through the recruit depots, barracks, and troop trains serving America's new army. In August 1918, another nurse, Alma M. Furr (a native of Austin, Texas), became an additional casualty of the invisible killer at Camp Shelby.[90] That summer, troop trains brought 11,645 new recruits to the camp, and the slow but inexorable march of death's unseen facilitator began. By October, influenza had "scarcely touched" the more seasoned recruits, but the summer arrivals were "decimated."[91] Although the mission to train America's drafted soldiers continued with increased realism, this cantonment, like other such sites dotted around the nation, was unable to cope with the mysterious speed and virility of the diseases descending upon them. Camp Shelby, the training facility "standing in the midst of a health giving pine forest" in the Mississippi interior, was not immune to the diseases and sicknesses associated with larger, much more densely settled cities.

The Great War ended the following month, but November 1918 would prove the end of only one round of death. By late November, the workers at a pickle canning factory in Wiggins, south of Camp Shelby, donned masks in an effort to prevent the spread of influenza at the plant. One local newspaper optimistically proclaimed, "Every member of the entire workforce were (sic) well protected from the disease."[92] In

[88] "History of Conception and Building of Great Base Hospital at Camp Shelby," *The Hattiesburg News*, September 21, 1917, p. 17.

[89] Barry, *The Great Influenza*, 149.

[90] Gavin, *American Women in World War I*, 253.

[91] Barry, *The Great Influenza*, 408.

[92] "Wearing Masks at Canning Factory," *Stone County Enterprise* (Wiggins, MS), November 23, 1918, p. 3.

December, the flu returned to Hattiesburg after a mysterious absence of several months, and the city went into lockdown to prevent its spread. The outbreak was severe enough to have "necessitated a general closing order for places of public assembly."[93] The county health board ordered "moving picture theaters," schools, and other places for public gatherings "closed on account of the prevalence of influenza."[94] One Pascagoula newspaper reissued a U. S. Public Health notice from October to remind readers of prescribed precautions to take in response to the influenza outbreaks:

> Keep your feet warm and dry.
> Do not go visiting oftener than is absolutely necessary.
> Keep out of crowds.
> Keep your sleeping room windows open at night.
> If you contact the disease, go to bed and stay there until you are well.
> Cover up each cough and sneeze. If you don't, you'll spread the disease.[95]

The rules of quarantine altered patterns of life for many, including one high school teacher living in Hattiesburg who endured a "vacation enforced by the influenza epidemic." In her case, the efforts proved successful, and she recovered from the sickness.[96]

The outbreaks of diseases, primarily during the years 1888 to 1918, descended on the inhabitants of this region with both bewildering mildness and deadly ferocity. The responses by these people living under the shadows of sudden mortality serve as harbingers for the modern day. Despite enthusiastic proclamations from a 1907 Hattiesburg newspaper of "[h]ealth conditions unexcelled," this claim disintegrated when reality provided a starkly different truth.[97] Wonder cures with no legitimate medical veracity, defiance of health orders, and demands to return to normal commercial activities were completely human reactions for those in both that time and this. Nevertheless, the diseases could not be wished away. If only it had been true.

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[93] "Watch Out for Influenza," *The Pascagoula Chronicle* (Pascagoula, MS), December 14, 1918, p. 1.

[94] "Hattiesburg.—Public schools, moving picture theaters and other places for public gatherings were ordered," *Jones County News* (*Ellisville, MS),* December 19, 1918, p. 2.

[95] "Influenza Notice," *The Pascagoula Chronicle*, October 5, 1918, 5; "Watch Out for Influenza," *The Pascagoula Chronicle*, December 14, 1918, p. 1.

[96] "Miss Lorena Arledge, the accomplished music teacher at A.H.S. and the Grammar School," *The Free Press* (Poplarville, MS), February 6, 1919, p. 3.

[97] "Hattiesburg Has," *Hattiesburg Daily News*, October 11, 1907, p. 4.