Death In the Redwoods
The Effects of The Spanish Influenza on Humboldt County

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Introduction/Thesis:

In 1918 Humboldt County, California, the United States, and the whole world was faced with one of the deadliest pandemics in history. The Spanish Influenza, or the Spanish Flu, was this pandemic, in less than one year it killed around 600,000 Americans and millions around the world.¹ Not even isolated Humboldt County could escape the disease. Humboldt County and the nation as a whole were unprepared for such a pandemic due to lack of medical staff, tight quarters in the military training camps, and the increase in traveling during the war.

This paper examines the impact the Spanish Flu had on Humboldt County in different ways. First examining the home front and how the flu impacted the towns and cities in Humboldt County. Next the military training camps where the Spanish Flu hit hard is examined to see what men from Humboldt were facing. Finally the influenza's impact in Humboldt is compared to Philadelphia and San Francisco which were two of the worst hit cities in the U.S. by the influenza. While the influenza affected each place differently, in the end all cities and camps were likewise unprepared for the flu and played down the danger of the influenza with disastrous consequences. Humboldt County’s cities and towns were no different than most of the United States as they were unprepared and many of the newspapers played down the danger. Like every city, town and camp, Humboldt County was short staffed when the influenza hit, had a press playing down the dangers and was consumed with war fever which was a distraction from the flu. The local governments of Humboldt County however, did take action faster than many other local governments. Even so, the Spanish Influenza had a major impact on Humboldt County, resulting in over 200 deaths and thousands of infected citizens. It would take another generation for Humboldt County, as well as the many areas in the United States affected by the pandemic to recover.

Source Materials:

Though research on the Spanish Influenza is plentiful, not much research has been done on the Spanish Influenza’s impact on Humboldt County. There are two noted secondary source journal articles on the subject, both written by, local Humboldt historian, Matina Kilkenny entitled “Missing Faces” and “Speaking Collections.” While these articles are short, they provide crucial information on the Spanish Influenza’s effect on Humboldt County. Kilkenny focuses on some specific case studies, including the narratives (or stories) of some of the soldiers who fought in the Great War. There are several secondary sources which are useful in analyzing the impact of the Spanish Influenza on a macro level in the United States, including John Barry’s *The Great Influenza*, Alfred Crosby Jr.’s *Epidemic and Peace* and Richard Collier’s *The Plague of the Spanish Lady*. All of these resources provide information on the flu’s impact on Philadelphia, the city hit worst by the Spanish Flu in the U.S. and specifically the east coast, and how the city handled the flu compared to other cities in the area. These sources provide excellent background on the Spanish Flu pandemic, including details on how it hit the United States, which will be useful in comparing Humboldt County to other areas such as San Francisco.

Newspapers dominate the primary source materials for Humboldt County and San Francisco in 1918/1919. In Humboldt County in the early 20th century there were two major papers, the *Humboldt Times* and *The Humboldt Standard*. These papers give a glimpse into the daily life of a growing community during the pandemic and the war. Towns like nearby Arcata and Ferndale had their own papers, which are an excellent source of information on smaller

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4 *Humboldt Times* October 1918-June 1919.; *Humboldt Standard* October 1918-June 1919.
towns in the area compared to the larger county papers.\(^5\) San Francisco’s local paper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, is examined to make comparisons between life in San Francisco and life in Humboldt County.\(^6\) San Francisco is of particular interest for comparison due to its close proximity to Humboldt County, the fact that it was the hardest hit city on the west coast, and its efforts to control the pandemic, including some new techniques to stop the spread of the deadly flu. All of these primary sources will help show how devastating the Spanish Influenza was in Humboldt County in 1918, when the county moved its focus from a World War across the globe to a global pandemic, right in its backyard.

In early 1918, Humboldt County was growing with a population totaling around 37,000, and its economy focused on logging, fishing and whaling.\(^7\) Logging camps were in abundance from Scotia to McKinleyville, whaling was still common in Trinidad, and fishing dominated the coastal region. Eureka was the center of the region with around 13,000 people living in the city.\(^8\) Arcata, a small town to the north, was growing as well. Humboldt State University which was located in Arcata was in its fifth year of existence when the flu hit in 1918. The county saw new blood with Immigrants coming into the county in 1918. Most of these new immigrants were from Southern and Eastern Europe.\(^9\) The growing community was engrossed in its own world and even as the Great War began in 1914, little attention was paid to the war in the local papers the *Humboldt Times* and *Humboldt Standard*. It was not until early April 6 of 1917, when the United States declared war on Germany that things begin to change.

\(^5\) *Arcata Union*, 1918-1919; *Ferndale Enterprise*, 1918-1919.  
\(^6\) *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 1918-January 1919.  
\(^9\) Italy provided many of these new immigrants to Humboldt in search of work in the lumber industries.
World War I:

War fever gripped Humboldt County from 1917 to the end of the war in 1918. World War I, or the War to End All Wars as it was commonly known, had been going on since August of 1914. The major nations involved were the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey. These Central Powers were fighting against the combined powers of the Entente of Great Britain, France and Russia. Massive casualties for little or no gain were common in the bloody battles being fought across Europe for over two years entering 1917, and the war was dominated by trench warfare on all fronts. Up until the spring of 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had kept the United States on a straight course of neutrality, his re-election slogan stating, “He kept us out of the war.”

Up until 1917 many Americans had been split on their opinion of the war in Europe and many had opposed getting involved. However, two factors emerged that would change the American stance on the war. First, the sinking of the Lusitania, a passenger ship with a large number of Americans onboard, by German boats in 1916 first caught the attention of the U.S. which, coupled with the unrestricted submarine warfare used by the Germans, convinced Woodrow Wilson and his cabinet that war was inevitable. Still, Wilson needed something to get the people fully behind the war effort, which came in the form of the Zimmerman Telegram. The Zimmerman telegram was the second factor in getting America into the war. After the contents of the telegram were made public, the majority of Americans clamored for war. By

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10 Turkey is only made an ally of Germany and Austria after Italy left the alliance.
11 Trench warfare was a common defensive technique used by both sides and was very effective defensively throughout the war.
13 In the U.S. there was still large German and Irish populations both of whom felt a connection to their old homeland more than the U.S.
14 The Zimmerman telegram was a decoded message from the German government to the Mexican government offering them territory in the southwest and west if they were to attack the United States.
April 6, 1917, a State of War was declared and war fever gripped the nation, including the people of Humboldt County.

On April 6, the day war was declared, Eureka city councilmen Dan Hallaran, Tom Langford and Chairman Mel Engles hoisted “old glory” over city hall in jubilant, patriotic celebration. Advertisements for patriotic meetings sprang up and calls for men to enlist were heard all over the county. There were very few that voiced a different opinion about the war. Councilman Bredsteen was one of the few public officials in Humboldt County who publicly opposed a resolution that supported Wilson’s request for Congress to declare war on Germany. But besides Bredsteen’s opposition, patriotism for the war effort reigned supreme among the citizens of Humboldt. The war fever was not only felt among the adults in Humboldt County, but within schools as well. In Eureka High school the study of the German language, which had been extremely popular, was abandoned and quickly replaced by French. Recruitment gatherings and naval visits occurred constantly to try and drum up support and enlistments among all ages but particularly among the youth. The Humboldt Times went so far as to highlight the story of a German immigrant who was celebrated for denouncing Germany and signing up to join and fight for the United States.

This was the picture of Humboldt County when the Spanish Influenza hit: a community consumed by the war effort and the World Series, which was the only issue to ever trump war news headlines on the front pages of the local newspapers. Baseball was still the national pastime and nothing rivaled it. Like Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco and the rest of the nation, pro-war patriotism reigned supreme in Humboldt County. Meanwhile, a deadly disease had begun to

15 “Old Glory Waves over City Hall,” Humboldt Times, April 1, 1917, 1.
16 “Council of City Votes to Approve War Action: Despite Opposition of Bredsteen on Council,” Humboldt Times, April 4, 1917, 1.
17 “German loses its Charm in School,” Humboldt Times, January 15, 1918, 1.
18 “German Born, He Loves France and Flights for the U.S.A.” Humboldt Times, June 17, 1918, 1.
show up in Kansas, but had not gotten much press coverage. This influenza was spread rapidly across the United States and the world, eventually killing millions. It was only a matter of time before it spread to Humboldt County.

**The Influenza/Origins, First Wave:**

It is important to look at not only the history of the Spanish Influenza but the science behind the influenza in order to understand what a general influenza is and what effects it has on humans. An influenza is a virus most commonly known today as the flu. Viruses have one primary purpose: to replicate, grow, and spread within their hosts with great speed. There are generally three types of influenza viruses, known as A, B and C. Out of the three only type A is strong enough to be dangerous to humans and spread rapidly causing Pandemics. Type C is not dangerous as it lays dormant and at worse can be a minor head cold. Type B can be dangerous to humans but does not spread and become a pandemic. The Spanish Influenza was an airborne disease that had all the symptoms of the common cold. Like all influenzas, the Spanish Influenza was a respiratory disease attacking the cells in the throat, lungs, nose and trachea. What makes influenza cases deadly is the weakening of the immune system. Many cases of deaths during the Spanish Flu, at least in Humboldt County, were due to patients catching pneumonia after contracting the Spanish Influenza. Beveridge estimated that, “about 20 per cent of cases developed pneumonia and a considerable proportion of these-up to half-ended fatally.” The death rate of the Spanish Influenza is significant even by today’s standards.

Early on, most Americans did not worry about the disease because it was thought to be a common cold or another case of the Grip which was a common term for the ordinary influenza at

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21 Beveridge, *Influenza the Last Great Plague*, 15.
the time. Advertisements were filled with suggested medications to cure the flu and added to the indifference by playing down the influenza as nothing more than a normal cold. For example, in the *Humboldt Standard* Vick Vapo Rub was touted as the sure fire way to fight off any case of the influenza. The ad was created to appear like a public health announcement and led the reader to believe that this new influenza was no different or more dangerous than anything in the last two decades.²² Some of the first cases would prove deadly but the virus would mutate and become fairly tame as it spread across to Europe in the summer of 1918. It wasn’t until the virus mutated again through Europe and traveled back to the United States that people were confronted with the deadlier pandemic.

The Influenza’s origins remain debated to this day. Most histories of the Spanish Influenza focus on Fort Riley or Camp Funston in Kansas as the origin of the pandemic in the United States. However, some historians theorize that the origins of the flu are found overseas, in China or Russia, and not in the United States. John M. Barry argues against this second theory, stating that the flu was seen in Haskell County Kansas in early February of 1918, months before it spread throughout Europe.²³ Still the origin is unknown. In almost all the works on the Spanish Influenza, authors such as Crosby state that the origins are so confusing and messy that it is a waste of time to try and explain them. The first serious cases sprang up in Haskell County February of 1918. Loring Miner, a local doctor in the region, came across an influenza that was striking down even the healthiest and strongest people in the county. These early cases, as described by Barry, were quite serious and life threatening. After a few months, most of Haskell’s citizens started to recover from the influenza and eventually things went back to normal. Miner was shaken though, and reported the cases in a weekly medical journal, *Public\[22\] “Spanish Influenza-What it is and How it Should Be Treated,” *Humboldt Standard*, October 14, 1918, 2.

Health Reports, believing that he had witnessed a deadly disease with the potential of spreading. This was a big deal for the early 20th century as influenza was not considered a reportable disease like pneumonia or the measles. However, Miner knew that the influenza like the one that had plagued Haskell County would be deadly if it spread.

Miner’s predictions came true when Camp Funston, a nearby military training camp, was hit hard by the disease. Like most military camps at the time, Funston was overcrowded and, due to the close quarters and lack of medical supplies, the disease spread rapidly. According to Barry the influenza spread somewhere between February 28 to March 2 as the first reported cases in the camps arrived soon after. Within a few days the camp would be filled with soldiers sick with the flu.

It is most commonly believed that a man with a mild case of the influenza spread the disease upon visiting the camp. The early cases in the camps were minimal. Most soldiers would get sick and be out of duty, but would recover in a short time and return to their stations. The Influenza continued to spread, shadowing the soldiers all the way across the sea to France and onto the battle fields. According to a variety of sources, cases of the Spanish Influenza first appeared in France in April and quickly spread throughout Europe. From the battlefronts, the Influenza spread east to India and made its way around the entire globe. Spain would later gain recognition for the name the “Spanish Influenza” because most of the American media had not paid attention to Miner’s discovery of the influenza in Haskell. Additionally, the Spanish press was not censored like most other European nations, who at the time were at war and focused on the war front. Due to the free press, Spanish newspapers were filled with stories of the

24 Barry, The Great Influenza 96.
Influenza, making it appear to be centered in Spain. The flu was spreading around the world and, by the late summer of 1918, the influenza arrived back in the United States through American sailors and soldiers who had been stationed in France. The second wave of the influenza mutated and was deadly when it came back to the U.S. and cities across the United States were not prepared for a major pandemic. Boston was the first city to be hit by the second wave of the flu which, in a few short weeks, traveled across the United States all the way to Humboldt County.

The Second Wave:

When the Influenza came back to the United States it hit the American population much harder than the first strain. The city of Boston had always been known as a major sea/naval port which meant that people were constantly traveling through the city and thus it became a major point of re-entry for the second wave of the Spanish Influenza. On August 27, there were two reports of sailors contracting influenza. Doctors in the city did work to contain the influenza from spreading by quarantining the sailors who had contracted the flu but despite all attempts to halt the spread of the flu; by September 3 it was too late. The first Boston civilian was admitted to the Boston city hospital, and the disease spread quickly. In a matter of days thousands of cases would develop in Boston and the flu spread to the countryside and other large cities such as New York. Camp Devens, which was thirty five miles to the northwest of Boston, was hit extremely hard. Philadelphia was hit soon after and was devastated more than any other city in the U.S. by the Spanish Influenza.

The city of Philadelphia, unlike many other places around the U.S., was only hit by one wave of the influenza rather than multiple waves, but was devastated more than anywhere else in

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29 Barry, *The Great Influenza*, 183-86.
the U.S. by the flu. Like many cities around the nation Philadelphia had sent a large amount of its male population, roughly twenty six percent, to fight in WWI. Due to the large number of citizens enlisted, the hospitals around the city were understaffed and unprepared for any major outbreak of the disease. The war fever of the time also helped spread the influenza in the city. Huge war bond rallies were held often with thousands of citizens attending. Like Humboldt County, Philadelphia was focused completely on the war effort and defeating Germany, and took little interest in containing the outbreak until it was too late.

By late September thousands in Philadelphia were reported sick with the flu. So many were sick that the city began to shut down. In one case the Bell Telephone Company of Pennsylvania reported that on October 7, 850 employees stayed home from work sick due to the pandemic. Because of the loss of so many employees, Bell had to make an announcement that no calls other than ones about the flu or the war could be made that day.\(^{30}\) Other professions were hit just as hard, and even public servants such as the police and fire departments found their numbers were devastated by the flu. Soon pneumonia set in and the deaths began. The city faced a huge problem when the bodies began to pile up faster than they could be buried. Philadelphia faced over 10,000 deaths as a result of the flu. That was roughly half the deaths of the whole state of Pennsylvania that fall.\(^{31}\) The influenza continued to travel west and the second wave hit San Francisco in early October, a couple of weeks after Philadelphia's first wave.

Before the flu reached Humboldt, it hit the larger areas of Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Out of all of the cities on the west coast, San Francisco was hit the hardest. San Francisco had been growing in population again after a flood of new immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia came into the city. In 1918, San Francisco had a population of just around

550,000 people, less than one third of Philadelphia but still large for a city on the west coast.\textsuperscript{32} San Franciscans read all of the news stories about the flu coming out of Philadelphia with alarm, but not action. There were some local doctors who tried to get the city prepared to face the flu but most citizens could have cared less. Many read the local \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} which played down the Spanish Influenza and urged citizens to worry more about the fight against Germany. When the flu hit San Francisco, it devastated the city and the fight against the flu made mandatory flu masks law for the first time. Anyone not wearing their mask in public was subject to arrest and a fine. Although the masks would be loathed and mocked by many, they helped prevent the influenza from continuing to spread. Even with prevention and new treatments, the influenza affected thousands of people and 3,557 citizens of San Francisco died between October 1918 and January 1919.\textsuperscript{33} Some of the sick had family members in Humboldt County who came to visit and care for them, only to return home bringing the flu back with them to Humboldt County.

\textbf{The Flu in Humboldt:}

Much like the rest of the United States, Humboldt County was consumed by the war effort in October of 1918. Liberty Loan drives were still occurring frequently in Humboldt county and the \textit{Humboldt Times} and \textit{Standard} were filled with war time news.\textsuperscript{34} Although the Great War was still the main focus in Humboldt County, more and more citizens were beginning to take notice of the spreading pandemic. In preparation, Red Cross stations across California called for volunteers. Miss McMillian, a local nurse at Sequoia hospital, was responsible for organizing local nurses and recruiting new ones in preparation. Her efforts helped prepare

\textsuperscript{32} Crosby Jr. \textit{Epidemic and Peace}, 91.
\textsuperscript{34} Liberty Loan drives were patriotic meetings where civilians purchased liberty loan or bonds to support the troops.
Sequoia for the onslaught of cases to come. News reports were filled with stories of military camps being overrun by the flu and warnings that it was still spreading quickly. By October 10th, local newspapers started writing precautions to take to avoid catching the flu and the Red Cross began to hold meetings to inform people on how to prevent spreading the influenza. The main prevention tactics that were discussed were staying away from crowds, keeping dry, protecting your nose and mouth, and not to neglect a case of the gripppe. These meetings and daily articles were not enough to catch many citizens attention though, as many were focused more on the war and their daily lives, so liberty bond sales, rallies, meetings and other crowded events continued.

It was on the morning of the 12 of October that the Humboldt Times printed that four cases were reported and all of the patients were moved to a “safe house” on 8th street where they could be quarantined and cared for. Fear and rumors certainly spread which caused Mayor Cousins to try and play down the danger. In public remarks the mayor stressed the danger but also that the disease was contained and he assured his fellow Eureka citizens that if more cases should develop he would announce drastic action to curb the spread of the pandemic. Aiding Cousins in calming the public was physician Dr. Lawrence Wing, who took firm action and stated that, “We are watching the cases very closely and each new development will be dealt with.” The four early cases seemed fairly mild but within the next two days the reported cases climbed to nine. Seeing the rise of the influenza in Humboldt, many nurse applications were rushed or ordered to be rushed so that hospitals would have adequate help available against the spreading flu. All of the new cases were reported to be under close observation and the board of

36 “Precautions to Prevent Influenza: Red Cross Issues Instructions and Orders Great Care to Prevent Spread on the North Coast,” Humboldt Times, October 11, 1918, 1.
37 “Influenza Makes It’s Appearance in Eureka,” Humboldt Times, October 12, 1918, 1.
38 “Influenza Appearance in Eureka,” 1.
health for Eureka issued statements about what people should do. Debates about closing public meeting places were discussed as was closing the local schools. Mrs. Foster of the Fraternal Hospital in Arcata organized ten emergency nurses and sent them out to help influenza patients all over the county. These nurses worked night and day to help their patients and many contracted the Influenza themselves. It became clear that despite the best efforts of Dr. Wing and other doctors and nurses, the Influenza was spreading. Schools and public meetings were to be closed until further notice.

The next day, October 15, official announcements were made that all public meetings were to be closed. Schools had been part of this proposal early on, however, both the *Humboldt Times* and *Standard* reported that schools would remain open for various reasons. The editor of the *Times* argued that schools were to open because, “it is safer in the schools than the streets.”

It was believed that the students would be in a safe environment in the schools where they could be observed and safeguarded against the disease running rampant on the streets. The *Humboldt Standard* had different reasoning when it came to schools the newspaper reported that the influenza was simply a disease that infected adults so children needn’t worry. The reasoning behind this was that the influenza only truly attacked adults and was not known for being a children’s disease. Both papers would continue to focus on the flu in different ways. The *Humboldt Times* reported daily cases and influenza news primarily about Eureka but also contained a few larger news stories about the flu as it hit the rest of the nation. Meanwhile the *Humboldt Standard* reported daily news from the big cites of Boston, Philadelphia and San Francisco along with news of Eureka and southern Humboldt. The reason for the different coverage is most likely because the newspapers were from different times, one in the morning.

39 "Ten Nurses Respond to Urgent Call," *Humboldt Times*, October 14, 1918, 4.
40 "Schools Not to be Closed Now," *Humboldt Times*, October 15, 1918, 6.
41 "Schools of the City Will Not Close," *Humboldt Standard*, October 15, 1918, 1.
one and night, and so they received different information and reported different stories. As the
days went by the two papers would report growing numbers of the infected and the horrors to
come.

Eureka reported hundreds of cases over the next weeks in October. According to the
_Humboldt Times_, Mrs. Garber Dahle was the first person in Humboldt County to die from the
deadly virus on October 22. It was reported that she had flu like symptoms around October 17
and died of pneumonia a few days later on October 22. 42 The _Humboldt Times_ also reported that
there were roughly 150 cases in Eureka by the 22\textsuperscript{nd} and hospitals were short staffed. Doctors
were so busy they did not have time to report new cases or treat the majority of their patients.
Many of the streets were flushed with water in an attempt to wash away the virus. Calls for local
citizens to become involved were everywhere and many of the Eureka citizens would pitch in to
help. So many came to fight the flu that when Mrs. White, the head Red Cross nurse in San
Francisco asked for volunteers to help down in the flu stricken city Red Cross officials in
Humboldt had to tell her they could offer no support.43 All of their volunteers were working
around the clock trying to take care of the sick.

Very quickly the influenza in Humboldt County became deadly. You see, the Spanish
Flu was an influenza that did several things including weakening the human immune system so
the sick would catch other diseases like pneumonia. Pneumonia was one of the deadliest diseases
of the time and was very common. It was hard for doctors and nurses to tell what was really
afflicting the sick. It was hard for doctors to know if the flu caused some cases of pneumonia or
if other factors were involved. This is why it is hard to find accurate records of numbers of
Spanish Flu cases in Humboldt County or anywhere for that matter. Not only did the flu lead to

42 "Mrs. Garber Dahle Dies of Influenza," _Humboldt Times_, October 22, 1918, 1.
43 "Influenza Calls for All Means of Fighting," _Humboldt Times_, October 22, 1918, 1.
other diseases but it spread rapidly. The influenza spread to almost every family in the city of Eureka within the first weeks and was a long way from stopping. By October 23, Dr. Wing publically suggested that the reason for the increasing number of infected, which jumped from 125-182 between the 22 to the 23 of October, was that the influenza was spreading through families. It was also around this time that logging camps and small towns were informed by newspapers and from local physicians that they would have to face the Spanish Influenza on their own as all of the county hospitals were completely full. The logging camps, similar to the military camps with their close quarters and lack of medical attention, would prove a perfect place for the influenza to gain a foothold and spread.

By October 18 the Influenza had spread to many lumber camps, especially around Scotia and southern Humboldt. Logging was big business back in Humboldt County in the early 20th century and camps could be found all over the county. These camps were hit hard primarily because they lacked the medical staff required to take care of the sick and secondarily because many of the loggers were immigrants whose immune systems were more susceptible to the particular flu strain. It would not be until the third week of October that the safety engineer had set up a makeshift hospital in the Scotia Men’s Club and the infected loggers in Southern Humboldt were finally separated from the healthy population. Carson’s logging camp which was near Fieldbrook closed down after a dozen of its workers, mostly immigrants from Croatia, came down with the flu and traveled to Arcata to seek rest and treatment at Mrs. Malevich’s boarding house on the eastern part of Arcata. Another logging camp on Korbel Hill had a Red Cross station set up for its loggers and their families. During the fall of 1918 there were 23 cases

44 “Influenza Increases Alarmingly in Two Days,” Humboldt Times, October 23, 1918, 1.
of the Spanish Influenza with three deaths. Other logging or camps of wood workers were more fortunate because of preventative measures.

Cal Munther was the superintendent of the California Barrel Company in McKinleyville California, which was between Arcata and Trinidad. Munther developed a quarantine system to keep the flu out of his camp. Workers who went into town were required upon return to sleep in a separate tent, eat meals separately and work alone so they would not infect the other workers. Because of these rules, authors like Kilkenny point out that many of the workers chose not to leave the camp and so the flu never made any impact. Unfortunately camps like Munther's were a rarity. Besides the logging camps and Eureka, local towns such as Arcata and Ferndale were also hit by the flu.

Arcata had avoided the flu for most of October with only a few dispersed cases. Like Eureka and other places in Humboldt, the Red Cross issued warnings and advertisements in the paper warning Arcata’s citizens of the coming pandemic. By October 20, the Arcata Union reported that the flu had reached Arcata, infecting twenty people. It is thought that many of the neighboring loggers who became sick traveled to Arcata in order to get help and treatment and infected the local population. On October 23, Arcata became the first city/town in Humboldt to pass a mask ordinance. This law made it illegal not to wear a protective mask in public, similar to San Francisco. Ferndale followed with a mask law of their own on November 6 and the whole county of Humboldt was required to wear masks by November 7. Arcata was still a growing community in 1918 and the flu would hit it particularly hard. Just seven days later the weekly Union announced that the 100 mark had been passed and that 125 cases existed in Arcata. As Dr. Wing had pointed out in meetings with Eureka’s government, the influenza spread quickly

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48 “Spanish Influenza Reaches Arcata,” Arcata Union, October 24, 1918, 1.
through family members and that is the main reason for dramatic rise in the number of cases. 49

The masks were a strong prevention tool but many people hated the masks and would try and not
wear them unless the police were nearby.

After it was clear that the flu was dangerous and was having an enormous impact on the
population, local emergency hospitals were established along with the mask laws. From Korbel
to the bottoms, Blue Lake and the town of Arcata, local government officials established these
emergency hospitals to treat and contain the influenza. 50 The hospitals were short staffed like
everywhere else in the county, and were overcrowded. By winter, the town of Arcata had lost
four citizens, the only causalities from the flu Arcata saw during the whole influenza scare.

At the same time Ferndale, another town in Humboldt County, was working to keep the
flu out and limit the number of cases. Unlike Arcata which did not take much action against the
second wave of the Spanish Influenza, Ferndale worked hard to keep the flu out. October 2,
early two weeks before Arcata, it was reported in the Ferndale Enterprise that Ferndale was
making masks mandatory and many stores and public places were fumigated. 51 According to the
Enterprise, these tactics were effective and had prevented new cases of the influenza.

By the first of November there had been no deaths and few cases in Ferndale. The town
paper highlighted the work of a local couple from across the river in Fortuna, Mr. and Mrs. A.G.
Campbell, who made their home into an emergency hospital. The couple’s actions were patriotic
in the view of the editors of the Enterprise. Patriotism was a common theme that Ferndale kept
alive during the flu no matter what the story was about. There was always a way to connect day
to day life with the war effort. Another patriotic story incorporated protective flu masks and
patriotism, the article reading, “Wear a gauze mask and thus show your true Humboldt spirit.

49 “Hundred Mark Reached,” Arcata Union, October 31, 1918, 1.
50 Kilkenny, “Missing Faces,” 10
51 “Town Authorities Take Swift Action To Prevent Epidemic,” Ferndale Enterprise, October 25, 1918, 1.
The mask is not a sign of fear—it is a badge of honor that you are helping your city and country stamp out an epidemic. So wear one today.\textsuperscript{52} Due to advertisements like this Ferndale’s fight against the influenza in the fall of 1918 proved quiet successful. Eureka meanwhile was getting worse and worse with hundreds of cases being reported daily. The influenza began to make an impact on the city.

No place in Humboldt was hit as hard as Eureka was by the flu, with hundreds of cases being reported daily. On October 24 there were appeals by Dr. Wing and the health board to the city of Eureka, to use gauze masks like S.F. was for the first time. Arcata had passed such a law the day before the article came out and Eureka hoped to follow soon behind. To try and gather more support for the idea the \textit{Humboldt Times} ran articles on both Red Cross workers who supported masks as well as local business men.\textsuperscript{53} Dr. Wing’s and the \textit{Times} suggestions were not popular and citizen reaction was mixed. To try and ease fears local health board members such as Dr. Wing who suggested the reason for the daily rises in the number of cases was due to the fact that the influenza was spreading through families and the flu would soon pass. Over the next few days fewer and fewer cases were reported and it looked like Dr. Wing had been correct in his assessment. After a week Wing’s words faced criticism when the local \textit{Times} and \textit{Standard} newspapers apologized for not giving accurate data to the public. Both papers had written that the numbers of new flu cases were decreasing when in fact they increased. This is mostly because the local physicians were handling so many cases they did not have time to announce many of them. By October 28 it was reported that the flu’s backbone was broken and that

\textsuperscript{52}“Mask’s Big Part in Curbing Influenza,” \textit{Ferndale Enterprise}, November 1, 1918, 1.
\textsuperscript{53}“Businessmen Appeal For Use of Mask by Everyone,” \textit{Humboldt Times}, November 1, 1918, 6.
residents of Eureka had little to fear.\textsuperscript{54} Death reports started to rise in early November with many of the patients dying of pneumonia.

It was in late October, early November that most residents of Humboldt County believed that they were in the clear and the worst was over. Boards of health all over the county reported fewer and fewer new cases of the flu each day. The problem was that even though there were less new cases, many people continued to die. On the 1st of November, 6 deaths were reported to the public from the Spanish Influenza and just four days later 12 new deaths were reported.\textsuperscript{55} The deaths numbers began to rise taking over a 150 citizens of Humboldt County. By Thanksgiving the fears of the flu had passed from many peoples’ minds. With the war over and the flu for the most part gone, Humboldt County began to get back to normal.

**Ferndale and the Third Wave:**

Most of the county was able to get back to normal mask free lives, but a few areas were not in the clear just yet. Ferndale is an interesting case because it was one of the few towns in Humboldt County to avoid the second wave of the Influenza but the only town in Humboldt to suffer from the flu the next spring even after having taken extreme precaution to keep the flu out. The city of Ferndale and the Eel River Valley had escaped disease and death in the month of October due to civilian vigilance and swift action taken by everyone in the town. However they were hit the next year in January and February, by the third wave of the disease. Most of Humboldt County had already gone through the flu and was now immune from the deadly disease. However, most of the citizens of Ferndale had not been affected by the flu during the first two waves because of precautionary measures, so the population had no immunities to it. This time there were no precautions set up for the disease since it was commonly believed that

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item[\textsuperscript{54}] "Backbone of Epidemic Believed to Be Broken," *Humboldt Times*, November 3, 1918, 1.
  \item[\textsuperscript{55}] "Influenza is Slowly Abating as Death Grows," *Humboldt Time*, November 5, 1918, 6.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the threat was over. A few cases here and there during the month of December did little to get the
attention of Ferndale. In early January the Ferndale Enterprise noted that the flu seemed to be
returning to Ferndale and by October 24, the editors of the paper tried to calm the civilians by
stating that, though the influenza had returned, it was at its peak.\textsuperscript{56} No hard numbers were
recorded by the newspapers, but another front page article mentions that the town of Ferndale
was in need of an actual hospital to treat Influenza patients. The local doctors were few in
number and only made house visits, as Ferndale was too small for a hospital to be necessary.
There was concern not only to contain the flu but also a concern for the homeless of Ferndale
who would surely die without proper care.\textsuperscript{57} The worst was still to come.

In early February panic spread as two of the local doctors became sick with the flu. In the
newspaper printed calls came for volunteer nurses and staff to help with the growing number of
flu cases. Two local homes had been set up as emergency hospitals in Ferndale and were filled
with the sick by early February. The local schools were closed and masks became mandatory to
wear once again to prevent the spread of the flu. Dr. Marshall, a local doctor from Eureka came
down to help treat patients and took over for the two local physicians Dr. A.P Griffin and Dr.
Ring.\textsuperscript{58} By February 14, schools which had been closed for weeks were reopened and it was
announced, much to local delight, that flu masks were allowed to be removed at midnight on the
15\textsuperscript{th}. The Enterprise printed commentary that there were no facts to prove that gauze masks were
effective at preventing the flu. The editor at the time, felt that masks were useless at stopping the
flu from spreading from person to person. There was no scientific evidence to back up the claim
but clearly the masks were not popular. By February 21, the flu was all but gone from the town
and surrounding valley. During the panic in January and February, a total of 12 lives had been

\textsuperscript{56} "Influenza Reaching Peak Here," Ferndale Enterprise, January 24, 1919, 1.
\textsuperscript{57} "Ferndale in Need of Influenza Hospital," Ferndale Enterprise, January 24, 1919, 1.
\textsuperscript{58} "Shortage of Doctors to Handle Flu Situation," Ferndale Enterprise, February 11, 1919, 1.
lost to the flu. Ferndale had not been prepared for the third wave of the influenza and had to scramble to try and stop the flu from destroying the town. The shortage of doctors and no hospitals were the main reasons for the flu killing twelve and leaving hundreds sick. From October 1918 to the spring of 1919, just over 200 people in Humboldt County died from the Spanish Influenza.

After the influenza was gone, by April of 1919, the cities and towns of Humboldt, like the rest of the nation, tried to move on from this devastating pandemic. It is true that Humboldt County had not had the losses of the major cities like Boston, Philadelphia, New York and San Francisco but for a population of 13,000 spread over a wide area, over 200 dead was a big dent. It would take another generation for Eureka and many of the surrounding towns to recover, not to mention that the thousands of sick meant that Humboldt’s economy was stalled for a good portion of time. While the Spanish Flu devastated the population and economy of my U.S. cities, it did not change much of the local protocol for dealing with disease or local structures. A proper vaccine for the Spanish Influenza was created soon after the 2nd wave of the disease, modern science started to take hold in the field of medicine in the 1920’s but Humboldt did not change its medical practices rapidly. 59 Most of the emergency hospitals that were established were dismantled and businesses such as hotels went back to being hotels after being makeshift hospitals. From Kilkenny’s work it is clear that the vast majority of citizens in Humboldt County just wanted to move on and forget about the flu pandemic that caused such grief in 1918-19. 60 Kilkenny’s observation can be seen in an article she wrote a decade after Missing Faces was published. In the article, Kilkenny talked about how it had been extremely difficult to find anyone from that generation willing to talk about the flu, and most people who had lived through

59 Barry, The Great Influenza, 401.
it didn’t want to relive the experience even after almost 80 years. Memories of the deadly influenza were just too painful.

**Military Camps:**

Cities and towns were not the only places effected by the flu. Some of the worst cases of the flu occurred at military training camps. All the military camps from Camp Funston, in Kansas to Camp Devens, outside of Boston, were unprepared for the epidemic and were in most cases extremely overcrowded. Humboldt County had hundreds of men who were drafted, volunteered in the camps or traveling to them when the influenza broke out in 1918. Some people suggested being a soldier traveling across the U.S. en route to France was as dangerous as one dodging bullets in the Argonne Forest. Most Humboldt soldiers were sent to Camp Lewis, Washington for their training. Others would travel to Kansas, Boston, and other places around the United States. From Humboldt Country, 26 soldiers and 1 sailor would never see their homes again. All 27 would die of the flu before ever reaching the western front in Europe. There are two camps in particular that need to be looked at to understand the flu in the military camps and how the influenza spread so rapidly: Camp Devens outside of Boston and Fort Lewis near Seattle.

Camp Devens just outside of Boston was one of the camps that were supposed to have a first rate medical staff capable of handling any medical emergency. Unfortunately a pandemic was not one of the medical emergencies that they were prepared for. The first cases were reported on September 7 1918 and within a couple of days the number of cases was up to 179. But the worst was still to come. On September 22, 1,543 soldiers across the U.S. were reported

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to be infected with the influenza and roughly 75% of them had to be hospitalized. As elsewhere, Devens’ medical staff may have been capable, but they were shorthanded when it came to treating around 20% of the camp. Due to the large number of infected cases, the camp became a center for the top scientists in the United States to study the influenza and work on creating a cure. Some historians cite Deven’s as the starting point of the second wave of the Spanish Influenza because soon after Devens was hit by the flu, other camps all over the U.S. reported cases. With troops traveling constantly around the country and the world, the flu spread from camp to camp. Devens was said to have the best medical staff out of all of the military camps, so when it was realized that even they were not capable of handling such a high number of cases, the other camps knew they would face trouble.

Fort Lewis was one of the first stops for many of the Humboldt soldiers and would be devastated by the influenza. Fort Lewis also proved to be a classic case example of how not to handle prevention and treatment of the influenza. When the flu hit on September 20, there were 173 cases of the flu in the camp reported on the first day. Instead of quarantining the camp, around 10,000 civilians, mostly from the Seattle area, were invited to the camp to watch troop drills. The medical staff, unlike the staff at Devens, told the civilians that there was no need to worry. A few days later, Seattle reported an outbreak of the Spanish Flu. The doctors in the military camps were no different in approaching the flu than most doctors in the U.S. and, as stated previously, downplayed and disregarded the pandemic as nothing more than the common flue.

There are recorded cases of Humboldt soldiers in the camps who died or witnessed the death around them. One such soldier was a 22 year old named Joseph McCarthy from Arcata.

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64 Barry, The Great Influenza, 187.
65 Crosby Jr. Epidemic and Peace 1918, 92.
who left his home and family to fight as a soldier in the Great War. Both the Arcata Union and the Ferndale Enterprise had local soldiers write about their experiences in the war. McCarthy was one of these soldiers and wrote about his travels to camps from Corvallis, Oregon to Camp Meade in Kansas. It was in Meade that McCarthy contracted the influenza and by the 10th of October he died. Several soldiers never even made it to a training camp before dying from the flu. Two caught the flu on board the train from Humboldt and died before arrival. Crosby and others cite military incompetence and a general lack of knowledge for the mass cases of influenza in the camps. For many families, the flu proved as deadly for soldiers as being on the western front in 1918.

Comparisons:

General comparisons can be made looking at how different cities and towns handled the second wave. All of the cities, towns and camps mentioned in this paper were severally unprepared for the Spanish Influenza and its impact. Looking at comparisons between the two hardest hit cities – Philadelphia and San Francisco and the cities and towns of Humboldt, there are several similarities that are apparent. It becomes clear that Humboldt County was no different than these cities that were hit the hardest in Humboldt County’s handling of the pandemic.

First was the heightened war fever and patriotism that consumed everything in each of these places. Huge war bonds rallies were held in Philadelphia, such as one on September 28, where roughly 200,000 citizens lined the streets to watch the troops moving past and airplanes flying overhead. The local medical boards stated that there was no reason to fear the influenza because it was contained. Humboldt County’s media followed a similar pattern. Humboldt County had a smaller population but as can be seen earlier in this paper, the whole county was

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66 Kilkenny, Missing Faces, 7.
consumed by the war effort. The influenza was a major focus in its peak but the war was constantly front page news and often overshadowed the flu. Humboldt County’s media was no different early on. When Ferndale issued gauze masks in their town in October of 1918 they made it a patriotic affair, so that the people would be fighting not just the flu but the Hun as well. San Francisco suffered more than Humboldt and Philadelphia when it came to the war because the city government all but ignored the flu and focused on liberty bond rally’s and parades. Much of the concern in San Francisco was focused on the navy that was stationed there and making sure they would not get sick. Mixed messages are also a similarity between the three regions.

Death was rampant in eastern cities and Humboldt County’s local newspapers reported on the epidemic and how quickly it was spreading. It is clear from newspaper reports that Humboldt County knew about the flu long before it reached the county. However it raises the question if there was awareness of the Influenza then why was the flu so devastating to Humboldt County? Answering that question requires looking at the early cases of the flu on the west coast. In these early days of October, news began arriving about family members, people who had moved out of the Humboldt area, or people visiting the area catching the influenza in Oakland and San Francisco. Some family and friends even traveled down from Humboldt County to visit and take care of those sick, only to return and potentially help spread the flu in Humboldt County. Even with articles and meetings from the Red Cross promoting safety measures, many people believed the Influenza to be nothing new and not dangerous at all. The Humboldt Standard had, as previously mentioned, printed a Vicks Vapo Rub advertisement disguised as an article about the Spanish Influenza and it assured its readers that the influenza was, “Nothing new simply the Old Grippe or la Grippe that was the epidemic in 1889-90. Only

69 “Lloyd Kausen of Mare Island Ill with Influenza,” Humboldt Standard, October 10, 1918, 2.
then it came from Russia by way of France and this time by way of Spain.” The ad suggested plenty of rest and, by taking Vicks Vapo Rub, the ability to beat the Influenza. Most people reading it at the time would have felt confident that the influenza was being exaggerated and was not that dangerous as long as basic precaution was taken. In many ways advertisements such as Vicks Vapo Rub were playing down the influenza and sent messages opposite to the Red Cross’ warnings to the public.

These mixed messages were not helpful and may have contributed to the spread of the disease. Philadelphia was hit by the second wave before anyone knew how dangerous it was. Humboldt and the rest of the west coast had a few weeks to prepare for the coming pandemic but even with local governments and health board warnings, the population of Humboldt could not be convinced of the dangers they faced from the flu. One of the reasons for this was certainly to prevent panic and fear which would not help in the face of a pandemic. However it becomes clear that many doctors and newspapers saw the influenza as just a common cold that had been seen before. On October 14, with 991 cases reported, an editor at the San Francisco Chronicle wrote an opinion that, “There is less danger in the Spanish Influenza than in German peace propaganda.” The flu was big front or second page news when it hit in most of the western cities, so it would be a fair assumption that San Francisco would be the same. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Even with news reports of what was happening in the East, the San Francisco Chronicle only had a small paragraph about the influenza in the city on page 7. It would not be until the number of cases really began to rise and the deaths began that the Chronicle and local media took notice and took the threat of the disease seriously.

70 “Spanish Influenza: What it is and How it Should be Treated,” Humboldt Standard, October 14, 1918, 3.
71 San Francisco Chronicle, October 15 1918, p3.
72 “Four New Influenza Cases Reported Here: 34 cases Total,” San Francisco Chronicle, October 5, 1918, 7.
As can be seen earlier in the paper, advertisements such as Vicks Vapo Rub and Uncle Sam’s Advice led the public all over Humboldt to believe that the influenza that they were hearing about was nothing but a common cold and if the people of Humboldt County just buy their products or follow general cold advice they would be fine. There were Red Cross warnings in both cities but because of the distraction of the war and the messages of the flu being nothing more than the common cold, people did not listen. It was suggested that public meetings should be avoided but it was not reported early on to be a big danger so people continued to meet in large public settings.

Another similarity among cities and a huge reason for the devastating impact of the second wave of the influenza is the lack of preparedness, especially when it came to hospitals being short staffed. In Humboldt County, San Francisco and Philadelphia, doctors and nurses never had enough time with individual patients to treat them properly because there was not nearly enough staff for the high number of cases. Calls for volunteers were constantly popping up in the papers but there were still not enough. Additionally, medical buildings and facilities were scarce and only used for the poor or special cases of disease, as most people were treated by doctors in their own homes.

San Francisco’s Red Cross was so desperate for volunteers to help the infected that in October 1918, they asked Humboldt’s Red Cross to send volunteers. Unfortunately for San Francisco, the Red Cross of Humboldt reported that they themselves were short staffed and had no one to send.\textsuperscript{73} Both of these areas should have had enough doctors and nurses to treat the sick but many became sick after helping patients, while others were entrenched in the war effort. In all cases, exact numbers are hard to come by because the doctors and nurses were treating case after case and had little time to record new cases of infection and death due to the influenza.

\textsuperscript{73} “Influenza Calls for All Means of Fighting,” Humboldt Times, October 22, 1918, 1.
Moreover, some deaths were reported as caused by pneumonia or other illnesses and were not linked with the flu, though they may have been caused by it.

Humboldt County handled the Spanish Influenza much like the rest of the United States, with some significant differences. One important difference is the fast response time in which local governments within Humboldt County reacted to the flu in comparison to cities such as Philadelphia and San Francisco. However, this difference may be due to the fact that Humboldt County and the rest of the west coast had roughly a month to prepare, while places like Philadelphia were some of the first cities and regions to be hit by the second wave of the influenza and had no real time to prepare.

A better contrast is between the governments of San Francisco and Humboldt County because both areas had roughly the same amount of time to prepare for the coming flu. That being said, the city of San Francisco had a much larger population of 550,000 compared to Humboldt County’s total population of 37,000. Due to the large and dense population, when the flu hit the city of San Francisco, the local government had to deal with more cases in an environment that was crowded and in the end deal with far more death. Even with these factors it is clear that San Francisco officials waited far longer to focus on the influenza than the governing bodies of Eureka, Arcata, Ferndale, and other areas of Humboldt County. Although there were advertisements that played down the influenza which made the public doubt the seriousness of the flu, the city of Eureka jumped to contain the influenza on October 12. 74 It took San Francisco’s board of health and government another week to take the influenza seriously. Arcata and Ferndale’s local governments acted even more quickly than Eureka, both making public announcements in the newspapers and passing laws requiring everyone to wear flu masks.

74 “Influenza Makes It’s Appearance in Eureka,” Humboldt Times October 12, 1918, 1.
Ferndale took extra precautions to keep the flu out in the fall of 1918, which prevented the flu from spreading.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion Humboldt County faced a deadly pandemic that killed millions worldwide. Like every city, town and camp around the nation, Humboldt County was short staffed when the influenza hit, had a press playing down the dangers of the influenza to the public and many were distracted by the war. Local government officials did their best but had a hard time convincing the public of the dangers. In the end the Influenza impacted Humboldt with thousands sick and over 200 dead and it would take another generation for the county to recover.
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