



"Not to live in the past, but to have the past live through us."

West Pittston Historical Society Newsletter

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www.westpittstonhistory.org

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Our Next Program

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2009 4:00 PM
WEST PITTSTON FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
EXETER AVENUE

**EXETER SHAFT MINING DISASTER
NOVEMBER 5, 1898**

featured speakers:

Robert Wolensky and William Hastie

This presentation will feature Robert Wolensky from the University of Wisconsin and local historian and former miner, William Hastie. Our speakers will offer historical background and discussion regarding the tragic Exeter Shaft mining disaster of November 5, 1898.

This program is free and open to the public.

FRIGHTFUL ACCIDENT AT EXETER TO-DAY

**Seven Men Meet Instant Death
While Descending to Their
Work This Morning.**

**Three More in the Hospital, Only One of
Whom Can Recover---The Accident
Was Caused by a Misplaced Switch,
Which Allowed Three Loaded Cars to
Plunge Down the Shaft, Catching the
Men on the Descending Carriage.**

This headline regarding the accident
appeared in the November 5, 1898
Wilkes-Barre Times.

New York City Holiday Bus Trip

Thursday,
December
10th

\$25

For more details see
the brochure enclosed
with this newsletter.

You may also call
654-9847 or email
info@westpittstonhistory.org



All proceeds benefit the
West Pittston Historical Society
and the
West Pittston Library

MEMBERSHIP

Membership renewals will be mailed to your home in early January. Your support of WPHS activities and projects is greatly appreciated.

For additional membership information please contact Drew at 655-1776.

www.westpittstonhistory.org

Check out our web site for program information, vintage photos and historical info. You can also participate by joining in our forum discussion.



PITTSTON GAZETTE MICROFILM PROJECT

Due in large part to the success of our Fall Home Tour, WPHS has been able to complete our research collection of available Pittston Gazette microfilm and we are now working on a plan to have the film digitized and made available on the web. Stay tuned to our web site for updates.

Recent concern regarding H1N1 influenza virus this year has inspired us to check our historical Pittston Gazette files to see just how the borough was affected by the much more deadly 1918 Spanish Influenza. The following article and story give us a good idea of how frightening things must have been.

Pittston Gazette - Monday October 14, 1918

LARGE INCREASE IN EPIDEMIC CASES IN WEST PITTSTON BOROUGH

Today's report shows a total of 197 cases of Spanish influenza in West Pittston, an increase of 84 since Saturday. Health Officer Welch also reported that several people in the borough have recovered from the disease and that quarantines have been lifted from their homes. Among the latest cases are: Miss Ruth Stephens, French teacher at High School; Miss Mary Cooley, Second grade teacher at public schools; Mrs. Robert Hepburn, Parke Street; Foster Wills, Salem Street; Mrs. William Vollrath, Maple Street; Eleanor Jacobs, Philadelphia Avenue; David Yonelli, wife and four children, Maple Street; Ada and Arch Reed, Luzerne Avenue.

The West Pittston Health Board held a special meeting yesterday afternoon and discussed the situation. The disease seems to be more prevalent at the upper-end of town owing to the fact that the people of quarantined houses have mingled with their neighbors regardless of consequences. The board instructed Health Officer Welch to confer with Captain Smith of the State Constabulary and as the result of the conference two troopers were stationed at the upper end of the borough yesterday. These troopers prevented people from congregating on the streets and made the people discontinue going from one house to the other. The borough hereafter will have a special officer stationed at that end of town to see that all of the health laws are enforced. The board also took steps to furnish assistance to afflicted families who are in need.

Considerable excitement was caused in the vicinity of Boston Avenue last evening about 6:30 o'clock. A woman who had come words with her husband ran from the house and upon reaching an open field fell in an unconscious condition. Dozens of persons congregated about, but no one offered to pick up the poor woman as it was the general belief that she had been stricken with Spanish influenza. Chief of Police Welch responded to a telephone call and drove the woman in his auto to her home on Wyoming Avenue.

The following story regarding the 1918 Spanish flu in West Pittston was taken from the CDC's website dedicated to the pandemic. This particular story was submitted by WPHS member Linda Krause. You can read more historical accounts of the flu at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/about/panflu/index.html>

My mother, Helen Morrison Brown, was born in 1911 in West Pittston, Pennsylvania. In the late 1950's she told me the story of the illnesses and deaths of the 1918 pandemic. She explained that many healthy people become ill and began dying suddenly. Families were soon overwhelmed with the sick and the dead. At that time, the deceased was tended to by family and "laid out" in the family parlor where friends and family gathered, since there were few funeral homes.

During the pandemic, the local authorities closed public schools to prevent contagion. But at least one school, (the former West Pittston High School) was put to another useful purpose — displaying the recently deceased. The window shades of the school were kept closed as bodies in coffins were brought into the school. My mother said, at the appointed time, one window shade would be pulled up and a body in its coffin would be shown, propped-up in the window for viewing. Grieving family and friends would be assembled to pay their respects from the safe distance outside on the sidewalk. The opening and closing of the window shades continued until all bodies were shown for that day.

My mother was only 7 or 8 years old at the time, but she had vivid memories of those times. I was about 10 years old when my mother told me about the 1918 pandemic flu and her story was quite shocking to me. I can only imagine what it must have been like to have lived through such a sight. Fortunately, no one in my mother's family became ill with the flu back then.