

2-15-2017

# Arkadelphia quarantined to prevent flu outbreak

Wendy Bradley Richter

*Arkansas State Archives*, [wendy.richter@arkansas.gov](mailto:wendy.richter@arkansas.gov)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/articles>



Part of the [Public History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Richter, Wendy Bradley, "Arkadelphia quarantined to prevent flu outbreak" (2017). *Articles*. 187.  
<https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/articles/187>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact [mortensona@obu.edu](mailto:mortensona@obu.edu).

# Arkadelphia quarantined to prevent flu outbreak

By Wendy Richter  
For the Siftings

Flu runs rampant in many communities at this time of year, but thus far, this year's level of activity has not reached that of 1918. In that year, over 7,000 Arkansans were known to have died from the flu after the illness swept across the United States and to the battlefields in Europe during World War I. North Little Rock's Camp Pike (later renamed Camp Robinson), a major army training center, suffered greatly, with the infirmary admitting up to 1,000 men per day. Even Arkadelphia was quarantined in October of 1918 in an effort to prevent the spread of the flu. The schools and colleges closed, as did the "moving picture show."

On Thursday, October 10, the Southern Standard newspaper reported that officials of the public schools and the town's two colleges met with the city's board of health to evaluate the flu situation and consider a quarantine. As a result, "it was decided to close the public schools, the moving picture show, and to confine the college students to the campus." Additionally, the group tabled the issue of suspending church services until Saturday,

to see if conditions improved by that time.

Cases continued to emerge, and two weeks later the epidemic was characterized as "raging in this community for the past month." As with other areas of the country, it seemed to be worse in cities and towns. Illness was so widespread in Okolona, that the paper stated the town had needed "outside help to care for the sick." Large numbers of students became ill at Henderson and Ouachita, and the newspaper observed that on the campuses, "the epidemic was handled without any fatalities, and with the exception of probably one student at each college, whose cases were extremely serious, all have recovered."

By October 31, the Standard reported slow improvement. Even with "a considerable number of serious cases" things were getting better: "The average number of new cases this week has been between 20 and 30 a day." Interestingly, it said, "The picture show, after thoroughly fumigating the building, will probably be permitted to open Saturday."

And indeed, Arkadelphia's quarantine was lifted on Saturday, November 2, and activities returned to normal. The "picture



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The railroad bridge across the Ouachita River at Arkadelphia in 1918.

show" opened on that day, churches held their usual services on Sunday, and school opened on Tuesday. People were urged to remain cautious however, and those with influenza cases in their family were "barred from attending public meetings."

Normally, the flu most seriously affects the very old and the very young. Interestingly, in

1918, in contrast to the flu's ordinary behavior, young adults were the hardest hit: those age eighteen to thirty-five experienced surprisingly high mortality. Overall, many deaths in Arkansas probably were never reported or were perhaps diagnosed as something other than influenza, making it virtually impossible to accurately estimate to flu's total

impact on the state.

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum ([www.clarkcountyhistorical.org](http://www.clarkcountyhistorical.org) or 230.1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library ([www.obu.edu/archives](http://www.obu.edu/archives) or 245.5332).