

Pandemic of 1918

Social media has played an important role in the pandemic we're experiencing. It is one way we can keep in touch with family and friends as we self-isolate and stay safe. But I was thinking of what it must have been like back in 1918 when the last major pandemic hit the world! World War I, "the war to end all wars," was finally ending and people were probably thinking things would get back to normal and then WHACK the pandemic, called "the Spanish flu" hit! How frightening it must have been not knowing what was happening around you or to your family and friends. There was no social media then – no e-mail, no computers, no facebook, etc. They had only what we call today "snail mail."

In 1918 most households still had iceboxes, like we have at the Center. It didn't hold much which meant that you would have to go meat shopping 3 or 4 times each week. The iceman brought the ice to keep things cold. The milkman brought milk products and usually eggs. In season the farmers would bring around the vegetables and fruits they grew. Most baking was done at home. Everything that had to be delivered to the house would be limited because of the flu.

In 1918, in most households, if you wanted to communicate with anyone you talked to them in person at the store or neighborhood or those too far away you would write them a letter. Because of the flu most people stayed as isolated as they could in their own homes. Most communication with the outside world was with letters. To write a letter then you would need paper, a "stick pen" also known as a "dipping pen", (the Fountain pen as you may remember it was not widely used in most households until the 1920's), an inkwell to hold the ink and an ink blotter. Because the stick pen could hold only a small amount of ink you would have to frequently dunk it in the inkwell to get more and blot what you had already written to keep it from smudging. (Take a look at the photos below.) The finished letter would be placed in an envelope, addressed and with a stamp (costing between one cent to five cents) and mailed. If lucky you might hear back in a week or so.

Aren't you glad we have social media now?



Stick (or dipping) pen and inkwell



Fountain pen



Blotter

Pandemic of 2020

In our other piece on the Pandemic of 1918 we tried to look at it from their time period. No TVs, no computers, no social media, no real way of knowing what was going on. All they really knew was that their lives were turned upside down. All they had to go by was what they saw around them and what they read in the newspapers. They had no idea how long it would last or where it would strike next. All they could do was wait and see. They did decide that wearing a mask to cover their nose and mouth might be helpful. Does all this sound a little familiar?

The pandemic of 2020 will definitely go down in the history books, and people, especially those who did not go through it, will wonder what it was like. I know my students wanted to know the personal side of history, what makes history come alive. Well, here is your chance to add your voice to history's story about the pandemic of 2020.

We at the Historic Center would like to put together a journal of what it was and it is like to be involved in something as scary as this. I think what is scary are the unknowns - When will it end? What can we do about it? Will washing our hands, wearing a mask, keeping six feet apart, and staying inside be enough? What is life going to be like once this is all over? We have no control over what everyone else does and yet our safety depends on EVERYONE following the rules! In the beginning there was so much misinformation you didn't know what to believe. As the months have gone on we are now listening to and following the advice of the scientists but we are getting impatient. We want this over and our lives back!

We would like to hear from as many people as possible across all age groups to help us put the journal together. Lets face it, kids see this differently than adults, high school seniors see it differently than senior adults, Moms see it differently than Dads, and teens have their own interpretation. You can write it out and mail it to us at Plainville Historic Center, 29 Pierce Street, Plainville, CT 06062—or you can email it to us at plvhistorical@gmail.com. Other options are to put it on a CD and send it to us or if you prefer to put it on tape, we have a cassette tape player. We would like to leave future generations as complete a picture as we can of what it was like living through the Pandemic of 2020.

If mailing your story to us at the Historic Center, please fill out and include the form below. If sending your story by email, please include the following information:

- ◆ Your name
- ◆ Your address
- ◆ Phone number (in case there is a question)
- ◆ Your age or age group

All accounts are personal, therefore nothing will be added or deleted.

We cannot accept any account without a name. Please help us leave a record for future generations of what it is like to live through a pandemic. History books will write about it, anniversaries of its ending will be celebrated, but they cannot tell the whole story.

Remember History is the story of what happened to people and how they handled it. Help us tell the **WHOLE** story.

Thank you very much!

Please print

Your name: _____

Your address: _____

Phone number (in case we have a question): _____

Your age or age group: _____