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Flu Season: "Moving Picture World" Reports on Pandemic Influenza, 1918-19

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Flu season: *Moving Picture World* reports on pandemic influenza, 1918–19

Richard Koszarski

As World War I came to an end in 1918, successive waves of deadly 'Spanish' influenza swept the world, the death toll far exceeding that inflicted by the war itself. In the United States alone, 675,000 'excess deaths' were attributed to the epidemic. But while the War would long be celebrated in song and story, and immediately recognized as a defining event in twentieth century history, the flu was almost too terrible to remember – 'America's forgotten pandemic', as Alfred Crosby called it.¹ The forgetting came on very quickly. With the dead still warm in their graves, the *Moving Picture World's* Kansas City correspondent reported that, 'The public is quickly forgetting that there ever was an epidemic of influenza'.

While the Spanish flu never returned, historians have occasionally revisited the epidemic as a way of addressing relevant issues of contemporary concern. In the past decade, books like John Barry's *The Great Influenza* or Gina Kolata's *Flu*, inspired by current debates surrounding immunology, public health programs, and civil rights issues, have 'followed the germs'.² They tell a medical story which focuses on medical researchers and their struggle to identify the infectious agent, care for the sick, and develop a vaccine. They offer body counts and chart the path of the infection, but are strangely silent about other significant issues, especially the economic effects of the epidemic.³ Disruption of such war-related activities as manufacture and transportation might be referred to, but few specifics are given. General Ludendorff's belief that the influenza fatally sapped German troop strength during the final

1918 offensive, thereby affecting the outcome of the war, is duly noted. Frivolous activities, like the motion picture business, are seldom even mentioned.

But for film historians 1918–19 is a crucial period for a different set of reasons. With many of the nation's key exhibitors already uniting in the First National Exhibitors Circuit, Adolph Zukor's production behemoth, Famous Players-Lasky, prepared to counter with an exhibition wing of its own. The so-called 'battle of the theatres' which followed was not pretty, with threats, intimidation, and (perhaps) violence all part of a corporate plan to coerce the weaker exhibitors. As Mae Huettig put it, 'Descriptions of the period sound like a journalist's account of war'.⁴ And not only was the relationship between producers and exhibitors changing forever, but when Zukor turned to Kuhn, Loeb to finance this spree, the relationship between producers and bankers changed as well.

Did the epidemic, striking at a crucial moment in this developing contest, affect the future of the American motion picture industry as well? Like the rest of the public, subsequent film historians seem to have forgotten all about it. Considerable attention has been given to the economic and industrial mechanics of this struggle in recent years, but the flu epidemic is no longer identified as having a role of

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any consequence. This is revisionist history of a high order, because earlier historians (and the reporters chronicling the plague in the pages of trade journals like the *Moving Picture World*), had no doubt that the effect of the epidemic was crucial.

The first generation of film historians, who had experienced all this at first hand, tended to rate the impact of the influenza epidemic much more highly than those who followed them. Benjamin Hampton, who played his own role in the battle for theatres, felt that the flu epidemic 'shook the industry to its very foundations'. He remembered that the disruptions of the war and the censorious agitation of 'Puritans' were 'as nothing' compared to the epidemic. 'Studios closed entirely, or operated on part time, and pessimists croaked that this was the beginning of the end.'⁵ He quotes Walter Irwin's testimony to the Federal Trade Commission, during its anti-trust investigation of Zukor's business practices, in which Irwin recalled having advised Zukor that

Paramount could destroy First National if it would go into each one of the First National cities and build, or threaten to build, the finest and largest theater in the city, as the industry had been through the influenza period, in which all exhibitors had lost money and many of the houses closed entirely for weeks.⁶

A few years later Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, in *The History of Motion Pictures*, began their discussion of post-war American cinema in a similar vein. 'The end of the war coincided with a crisis in the American film industry. Most of the companies had undergone radical changes during 1918. Towards the end of that year the influenza epidemic swept the country; many of the cinemas closed, and it was difficult to get anyone to rent a film.'⁷

Lewis Jacobs, who as a boy of twelve saw the epidemic kill 5,000 of his Philadelphia neighbors in a single week, says pretty much the same thing in *The Rise of the American Film*. Jacobs describes the revolutionary development of the film industry in the post-war years in a chapter called 'Big Business', which begins as follows: 'In 1918 the movie industry was shaken by a serious loss of patronage because of the influenza epidemic and the absence of millions of men at the front in training camps'.⁸ But subsequent histories (including one by this author), fail to even mention the epidemic, much less assess its impact on the development of the industry.

Historians born long after the influenza epidemic can hardly be accused of amnesia, but their inability to see the consequences of this disaster (which was covered by dozens of articles in *Moving Picture World* alone over a four month period) is harder to explain. The excerpts which follow trace not just the progress of the epidemic, but the way in which the most influential motion picture exhibitors' journal chose to cover it. Rather than following the germs, the *World* chose to follow the money. It ran obituaries (of which those included here are only a small sample), but it also tracked the impact of the epidemic on the box office.

In its most virulent phase the epidemic broke out in Boston in September 1918 and rolled westward across the country, burning itself out in each locality in six or eight weeks, until essentially expiring on the west coast in January 1919. Reports in the *World* indicate that a similar pattern was repeated in city after city as the epidemic moved on. Attendance would decline on its own as the flu leapt through a community; audiences in San Francisco had already fallen by 50 per cent before local authorities took any action. Health officials would eventually order the closing of movie theaters along with other places of amusement, as well as schools, churches and (more rarely) stores. At first the exhibitors patriotically agreed to go along with the closure orders, but as 'a week' turned into 'a month', they began to make common cause with ministers and saloon-keepers, challenging the logic of these decisions. Why not close crowded public transportation facilities, or department stores? Friction also appeared within this front, because these closings were not uniform throughout the country. Some towns which closed theaters allowed churches to remain open, while Louisville, for example, closed theaters and churches but allowed saloons to operate. New York City never closed at all.

Some theaters succeeded in having their quarantines lifted, while occasional exhibitors disregarded the authorities and opened anyway. They were arrested. When theaters did reopen business was not always as good as expected, especially if a resurgence of the epidemic kept frightened audiences away. *World* correspondents from around the country predicted that many exhibitors would never reopen, while others seemed to be holding on just long enough to be 'swallowed up' by 'the first man who offers them a profit on their investment'. That man would soon be coming around with a check.

Towards the end of the epidemic the use of gauze masks – so common in photographs documenting the disaster – spread to the theaters, or at least tried to. Some exhibitors resisted masking their audience and orchestra ('a joke', one called it), preferring to seat the public in staggered rows, or even stay closed altogether. Others feared being labeled 'mask slackers'. Although exhibitors were reasonably compliant in September and October, by November and December their patriotic acceptance was turning into exasperated defiance. Pushed to the wall, exhibitors were now standing on their constitutional rights and appealing to the courts. Most of these suits remained moot with the collapse of the epidemic, but if the plague had not ended when it did the ensuing legal battles would have tested the power of the government over private business enterprises in historic fashion.

Exhibition and distribution were hard hit, but the *World* also cited the effects on producers, especially those handling newsreels and serials. The National Association of the Motion Picture Industry decreed a four-week shut-down of production, not for health reasons, but because economic chaos would have resulted from attempts to release new features while most theaters were under quarantine. In comparison to its coverage of the theater situation, the *World's* Hollywood reporting was almost comic, although very, very dark. Staff at the Mack Sennett

studio tried to insure their health by stringing bags of camphor around their necks, while security desks at other studios routinely sprayed every visitor with disinfectant. 'Everyone' seemed to have the disease, which was still killing between 3 and 10 per cent of those infected, depending on what segment of the population one monitored.

It is difficult to quantify the ultimate financial impact of this string of events, although weekly reports like these certainly offer clues. Seven weeks of theater closings in Los Angeles, for example, must have pushed many exhibitors to near bankruptcy.⁹ One report notes that towns which prohibited attendance by children under fourteen caused neighborhood houses to suffer far more than downtown theatres, further exacerbating the problems of marginal exhibitors. And which producers could best ride out the extended and unpredictable closure of their marketplace – those releasing a full program schedule, or those still marketing individual titles? Finally, while the body count itself was horrendous, can we ever know the significance to the industry of the loss of a single life? Obituaries tell us who died, especially if they were important people like Harold Lockwood or John Collins. If a couple of unknowns like Rudolph Valentino and Erich von Stroheim had succumbed to their bout with the disease, the American cinema of the 1920s would certainly have been different. But who, in 1918, would have noticed?

Notes

1. Alfred W. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
2. John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza* (New York: Viking, 2004); Gina Kolata, *Flu* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999).
3. Previous histories, including Crosby's (first published in 1976 as *Epidemic and Peace, 1918*) and A.A. Hoehling's *The Great Epidemic* (New York: Little, Brown, 1961), did give more attention to cultural and economic issues. To a degree, Hoehling even uses the motif of theaters closing and reopening as a structuring device.
4. Mae Huettig, *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), p. 37.
5. Benjamin Hampton, *A History of the Movies* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1931), 201.
6. Hampton, 242.
7. Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, *The History of the Movies* (New York: W.W. Norton and the Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 199.
8. Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), 287.
9. In a summary article published even before the end of the epidemic, *Photoplay* estimated that 80 per cent of the movie houses in the United States and Canada had closed for between one and eight weeks, losing \$40,000,000 in revenue and putting 150,000 employees temporarily out of work. Production in California was said to have been cut by 60 per cent, while the eastern studios 'ceased completely'. 'The Spanish Invasion', *Photoplay* (January 1919): 76, 97.

FLU SEASON: MOVING PICTURE WORLD REPORTS ON PANDEMIC INFLUENZA, 1918

INFLUENZA DECREE CLOSES MANY NEW ENGLAND HOUSES

Boston, due to the large increase in new cases and deaths resulting from Spanish influenza, through an official order signed by Health Commissioner William C. Woodward and approved by Andrew J. Peters, mayor of Boston, closed all theatres in that city, to remain so from midnight 26 September until 7 p.m. 7 October, unless the order is altered or extended. Similar action has been taken by officials in nearly every city and town in Massachusetts.

At a meeting in Boston 26 September, which was attended by members of the Massachusetts and Rhode Island branch of the Motion Picture Exhibitors League, Association of Theatre Managers of Boston, and managers of attractions now playing in that city the following statement was issued:

'The managers of the theatres and attractions now playing in Boston readily and unanimously voice their willingness to obey the authorities to close all theatres and places of amusement during the period between Thursday midnight, 26 September, and Sunday midnight, 6 October.

'The present calamity of the influenza plague which inspired the authorities to this action calls for drastic treatment, and though we regret exceedingly the deprivation of employment which this suspension inflicts upon so many working under us, there is only cheerful compliance with orders to be consideredBut though we submit cheerfully to this dictum, we claim the constitutional right to protest should any further legislation be aimed at our proper conduct of a legitimate business, which has equal rights with institutions of trade, to exist.'

12 October 1918

INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC CLOSES ALL PHILADELPHIA THEATRES

An epidemic of contagious influenza and pneumonia having caused the death of 1,191 persons in Philadelphia during the past week resulted in the closing of all places of amusements, schools, churches and liquor establishments. Orders were issued on Thursday, 3 October ... notifying all motion picture theatres and playhouses that no performances be permitted to take place during that evening and to

remain closed until further notice, which is officially understood to mean Monday, 14 October. This, however, seems to be a matter of grave concern as the death rate is increasing at an alarming rate while cases of influenza are rapidly spreading in all parts of the city. Influenza cases in Philadelphia are estimated at between 30,000 and 50,000. Every hospital is besieged by grip victims desiring beds and hospital careLate reports received up to the present writing show that the epidemic is also playing havoc with the employees of the motion picture industry, one death having already resulted in the office force of the Stanley Company. Among the exchanges along film row many films had to be laid aside and could not be inspected owing to most of the rewinders having contracted this disease.

19 October 1918

PRODUCERS DECIDE TO CLOSE UP SHOP

Shutting of Theatres in Districts Where Grip Is Spreading Leads National Association Members to Take Action – Reports from Affected Communities

Because of the deplorable epidemic of influenza that has gripped the entire country, even unto its most remote corners, the clock of the motion picture industry has been stopped as of 14 October. This decision was reached at a series of meetings held by members of the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry in this city during the past week.

Friday it was finally decided to abandon production as far as possible, stop the release of all new feature subjects and confine exchange activities to the immediate circulation of serials and news weeklies. In territory where theatres are still open exchanges are depending upon features already in stock to keep showmen supplied. This supply will make available pictures that are suitable for 'repeats', and will afford theatre managers access to pictures they have never played

In the Eastern studios and factories various conditions exist thus early in the first weeks of the shut-down. Some factories are tightly closed; others are not as yet affected. The same applies to studios. Our information from Los Angeles indicates almost

an absolute shut-down save in the matter of productions actually under way.

It is believed the productions now being made will be finished, but nothing new will be started anywhere until 9 November unless the great, good fortune shall come before then, when the epidemic may be halted and conditions returned to normal ...

As for the exhibitor who is forced to close, here will be a good time to apply soap and water, fresh paint, and 'slick up a bit' in order that theatres may be fresh and clean to welcome back the crowds who will surely flock back to the theatres, eager to be entertained.

26 October 1918

ALBERT FLINTOM VICTIM OF INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

Albert D. Flintom, district manager of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation at Kansas City, and one of the most successful and best known film men in the United States died at Kansas City Thursday, 10 October, of pneumonia following an attack of Spanish influenza. He was ill just a few days, having contracted influenza in St. Louis while on a business trip to that city ...

26 October 1918

INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC WORKING WEST

Boston Theatres Opening, While Chicago and Mid-West Close – Houses in San Francisco Capitulate, Making the Coast Practically Restricted in Amusements

The 'peak' of influenza's deplorable havoc seems to be passing west, as Boston, the first great center to be affected, opens its theatre doors after protracted darkness. Last week the first comforting word from the army camps originated in Camp Devens, Ayer, Mass., where it was declared that the epidemic was under control. It was in this camp that the disease first broke with appalling results ...

The attendance at local theatres has generally been 'off', save in the case of a few conspicuously popular dramatic attractions. The picture houses have been greatly affected, a marked falling off in business having been noticed in moving picture houses of all types and classes.

Death's harvest in the ranks of picturedom has been conspicuous and appalling. Players of prominence have been stricken down; prominent exhibi-

tors and members of their families have passed away, and the gloom that has overshadowed the industry has been made more intense by the ravages of the grim reaper.

2 November 1918

EPIDEMIC OF INFLUENZA DARKENS CHICAGO HOUSES

Pending the abatement of Chicago's epidemic of Spanish influenza every theatre in the city closed its doors Tuesday afternoon, 15 October, by order of City Health Commissioner John Dill Robertson ...

The result is a condition which reminds older theatrical men of the weeks that followed the Iroquois Theatre fire. Many exhibitors are facing serious financial losses which may amount to bankruptcy. A very few welcomed the closing orders as the best possible solution to the losing business to which they were playing previously on account of the disease. In almost all cases theatre employees and professionals are suffering severely.

A disposition to accept the commission's measure cheerfully is evident on the part of the greater number, however, and many are taking advantage of their leisure to work, might and main, for the Liberty Loan. Bond posters and loan propaganda have replaced announcements of attractions in front of nearly every theatre, and a number are using their electric signs to flash Liberty Loan appeals. Fully half of the exhibitors, moreover, are continuing their accustomed advertising space in the newspapers with pleas for the purchase of bonds.

The decision of the commission to permit the holding of church services, however, has caused a certain amount of discontent in view of the fact that the average theatre nowadays is far better equipped than the average church with hygienic devices. Motion pictures, furthermore, it is felt, have played a not inconsiderable part in the maintenance of war time morale and in the furtherance of Government propaganda.

'The committee scarcely realizes, I think, the far-reaching affects of the step it has taken with regard to the theatres', Mr. [Peter] Schaeffer says. 'It means much to the motion picture industry and theatrical business, and furthermore, it means a serious diminution in Chicago's total purchase of Liberty Bonds, since the theatres were the most effective agents in bond selling ...'

2 November 1918

ST. LOUIS SUFFERING LOSS OF OVER \$200,000 A WEEK

St. Louis picturedom has passed through its first week of closed business. The result of the influenza closing order has thrown hundreds out of work and spelled a loss in dollars and cents that already reaches well into the \$150,000 mark, independent of a sum of perhaps half that size, representing the loss of the exchanges. How far the actual damage goes cannot be estimated, and there is at present no indication as to how long the ban will run ...

As to the men out of employment as a result of the closing order, it might be pointed out that there are idle 2,400 ushers, 2,400 ticket sellers, 2,500 piano players, 150 other musicians and more than 115 operators.

In the exchanges a 'stagger' plan of management has been initiated to help cut down expenses. The managers are being paid one week in some instances, while the assistants take a vacation. The next week the managers 'vacate', while the assistants draw pay, and so on down the line.

With the patriotic motive back of the closing spirit, however, both the exchanges and the exhibi-

tors are trying to keep a stiff upper lip and a hope for the better. It is expected also that the rush for films after the closing order will to some extent make up for the lost time and money.

2 November 1918

LOUISVILLE SHUTS DOWN EVERYTHING BUT SALOONS

Louisville is indeed a dead place since all the theatres were closed and, in fact, all amusements stopped. The saloons are still open, and the thirsty are still able to secure liquid refreshment. They represent about the only thing that is open, and has driven home to many what prohibition will be during epidemic periods. The prominent hotels have moved every chair from their lobbies, so that chair-warmers will have to stand up or hunt new fields for loitering. However, the crest of the epidemic appears to have been reached. The death list is still heavy, but it is reported that the trouble is checked, although there are several thousand cases at Camp Taylor and a large number in the city. Some of the hospitals have been so short of nurses that only emergency cases are being accepted ... Even fraternal lodges, including the Masonic lodges, have closed up shop for the time being. Churches and schools have been closed for a week or more.

2 November 1918

PNEUMONIA CLAIMS HAROLD LOCKWOOD

Leading Metro Player Succumbs After Illness of Few Days – Had Been Eight Years on Screen

Harold Lockwood, leading player of the Metro company, died at noon Saturday, 19 October, at his apartments in the Hotel Woodward, New York City. Mr. Lockwood's illness was of brief duration, he having been present at the Motion Picture Exposition at Madison Square Garden and active in Liberty Loan work the week before, but pneumonia quickly developed. The body was taken to Campbell's funeral church, Broadway and Sixty-Sixth Street, where the funeral was held on Tuesday, 22 October, at 2 o'clock ...

2 November 1918

FLOSSIE A. JONES DIES ALONE AMONG STRANGERS

One of the innumerable results of the epidemic of Spanish influenza among members of the moving picture fraternity was the death of Flossie A. Jones,

Fig. 1. Prior to closing the theaters in Chicago, Commissioner John Dill Robertson requested voluntary compliance with public health guidelines. [National Library of Medicine.]

INFLUENZA
 FREQUENTLY COMPLICATED WITH
PNEUMONIA
 IS PREVALENT AT THIS TIME THROUGHOUT AMERICA.
 THIS THEATRE IS CO-OPERATING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH.
YOU MUST DO THE SAME
 IF YOU HAVE A COLD AND ARE COUGHING AND
 SNEEZING. DO NOT ENTER THIS THEATRE
GO HOME AND GO TO BED UNTIL YOU ARE WELL
 Coughing, Sneezing or Spitting Will Not Be Permitted In The Theatre. In case you must cough or sneeze, do so in your own handkerchief and if the coughing or sneezing persists leave the theatre at once.
 This Theatre has agreed to co-operate with the Department Of Health in disseminating the truth about Influenza, and thus serve a great educational purpose.
HELP US TO KEEP CHICAGO THE HEALTHIEST CITY IN THE WORLD
JOHN DILL ROBERTSON
 COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

an exhibitor of Waukesha, Wis., under particularly sad and distressing circumstances.

Miss Jones made her first trip to New York as a visitor to the NAMPI Exposition at Madison Square Garden. There she caught cold and took to her bed at the Hotel Webster. Influenza developed and as a climax pneumonia set in. On Wednesday night, 16 October, Miss Jones died among strangers, her only comforters being the trained nurses in attendance at her deathbed.

Shortly before she started East Miss Jones was elected vice-president and state organizer of the Motion Picture Exhibitors Association of Wisconsin and was planning to apply her great energy to the task of building up the state organization as soon as she should have returned to Waukesha. Miss Jones started in the picture business in her home town, developing her holdings from a dilapidated old house into three up-to-date picture theatres that had become famously prosperous under her management.

2 November 1918

INFLUENZA DELAYS AMERICA'S ANSWER

Dennis J. Sullivan, manager of domestic film distribution of the Division of Films, Committee on Public Information, announces that, owing to the epidemic of influenza throughout the country and the fact that in many states the pre-release showings will be stopped by the closing of the motion picture theatres, the release date of *America's Answer*, the U.S. Official War Picture, has been changed from 28 October to 11 November. This will simply suspend the bookings until the situation has been cleared.

2 November 1918

FIGHTING THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

How Managers Meet the Country-Wide Condition of Quarantine Which Now Confronts Them

Everywhere the spread of the Spanish influenza is hurting business, even where the city or state authorities have not declared an actual quarantine. In many sections this quarantine seems arbitrary and perhaps a bit unjust, but we have yet to hear of a house manager who has attacked the ruling of the authorities, though some must feel sorely tempted to do so. Most of them have accepted the situation gamely.

It cannot be denied that many of them have

cause for complaint. For example, theatres, saloons and churches are closed in Pittsburgh, but department stores are crowded, the sale of soft drinks has not been interfered with, and the public transportation systems are permitted to crowd their patrons into far closer and less sanitary contact than ever existed in the motion picture houses. Throughout the country similar moves have been made, and always it is the motion picture house that is the first to suffer . . .

For towns where the theatres have been closed, Butte, Mont., offers an excellent line. The Rialto, managed by Ralph Ruffner, was the hardest hit. For nineteen weeks he had been booming *The House of Hate* serial, and just when he expected to clean up with the last installment he had to close with a single day showing. He took advantage of the wording of the ordinance to keep open until midnight to give all a chance to see the climax of the serial, but in his advertising he takes good naturedly the closing down. Even before the closing order came he noticed a falling off in attendance, and he ran three comedy slides to lessen the tension. They may help others.

Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard
To get her poor dog a stew.
But when she got there she tore her hair,
For the stew had the Spanish Flu.

Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffett,
The tuffett was covered with dew.
Along came a spider and sat down beside her
And they both caught the Spanish Flu.

Hark! Hark! The dogs do bark
The Flu is coming to town.
'We'll close the shows until it goes',
Said the hell-th board.

The poetical value is slight, but used on the slide and in advertising they will help reduce the strain . . .

2 November 1918

SAN FRANCISCO HOUSES CLOSED BY ORDER OF HEALTH BOARD

(San Francisco, 18 October) A date line is almost necessary in connection with anything written concerning the moving picture industry at the present time, for what is true today may be far from representing the situation tomorrow. A week ago theatres were being operated as usual in this city, with attendance but little below the normal. Within the week the

cases of Spanish influenza increased from about two hundred to more than three thousand, and theatre attendance dropped more than 50 per cent. Less than a week ago theatre owners expressed the opinion that their places of business would not be closed, but of late conditions have taken such a change for the worse that drastic action on the part of the health authorities was regarded as a foregone conclusion.

A meeting of the San Francisco Board of Health was held on the afternoon of 17 October, and a resolution was passed closing all theatres, moving picture houses, concert halls, dance halls, churches, schools and places of public gathering, the order being effective the following day . . .

9 November 1918

MICHIGAN'S HEALTH BOARD SHUTS THEATRES INDEFINITELY

Spanish influenza has finally dealt its death sting to the amusement business throughout the entire state of Michigan. Up to a week ago the epidemic was raging in sectional parts of Michigan only. The Governor and the State Board of Health held a meeting on 19 October at the state capitol, and after a two-hour discussion, at which were present the Detroit city health officer and several prominent doctors, it was decided to close all theatres, dance halls, skating rinks, churches, and pool rooms, effective from 20 October, for an indefinite period.

Dr. Inches and the Detroit doctors bitterly fought against closing the theatres, arguing that keeping them open did more good than harm not only because of their latest ventilating systems, but because of their educational value. Dr. Inches, of Detroit, up to the very last was opposed to a theatre closing order. He had before him at this meeting charts showing that in cities and towns throughout the country where theatres had been closed the number of influenza cases increased after the closing rather than decreased. The epidemic had caused a dropping off in the attendance at theatres of from 33 to 50 per cent., no theatres had been crowded, and every theatre was opening its show with a slide instructing people that if they cough or sneeze they must use a handkerchief. Several persons have been put out of theatres because they failed to do this. The theatre owners were taking every precaution, some going so far as to disinfect their floors and taking up their carpets before and after every matinee and evening performance . . .

9 November 1918



EXCHANGE MANAGERS WORK IN SHIPYARDS

With such a state of affairs the Seattle exchanges, which serve the entire Northwest, have practically nothing to do. Consequently, at a meeting of the Northwest Film Board of Trade late last week it was decided to offer the services of its members as a body to work in the shipyards of the city, which are so pressed for men. The offer was gratefully accepted by the shipbuilding companies, and at 4 o'clock each afternoon the film managers doff their high-brow, shell-rim spectacles and natty business suits for flannel shirts and overalls . . .

9 November 1918

Fig. 2. Harold Lockwood, one of the most popular new screen stars, on the cover of *Motion Picture*, September 1917. [Richard Koszarski Collection.]

JOHN H. COLLINS DIES OF PNEUMONIA

Talented Young Metro Producer and Husband and Director of Viola Dana Ill Only a Week

John H. Collins, Metro director, husband of the Metro star, Viola Dana, died of pneumonia at the Hotel Marie Antoinette, New York, 23 October, after an illness of less than a week. He was probably the youngest director of note in the country, having been born in 1890. He not only directed Miss Dana in practically all of her Metro productions, but was the author of many of them, supplying the scenario versions of all

Mr. Collins had a keen appreciation of his young wife's screen values and did everything possible to bring these out. *Blue Jeans*, a picturization of Joseph Arthur's famous old melodrama, is considered to be the best work ever done by star and director . . . John Collins was beloved by all the members of the Metro staff of players, directors and officials. He was considered a young man of vision and rare ability, and his loss is keenly felt. His wife was with him at the end.

9 November 1918

NEWS OF LOS ANGELES AND VICINITY

Coast Studios Curtail Production. Few Plants Will Stop Altogether, While Some Will Continue Operations Without Interruption

By A.H. Giebler

While all the west coast studios will have to slow down on production because of the general shut-down of theatres by the Spanish influenza, very few of the plants will stop production altogether.

The plan of curtailment put in operation at the Lasky studios will be followed by most of the other producers. When the theatre shut-down came all players not cast or working in a production at Lasky were given a four weeks' vacation without pay. By the time the first vacations are over the people now working will be through with their plays and ready to take a month's lay-off, while the returning players will be put in new productions. By this means, unless the situation grows very serious and leads to an extended tie-up all over the country, few studios in Los Angeles will be shut down absolutely.

The Metro, Universal and Fox forces, with the exception of the Lehrman Sunshine Comedy com-

panies, who will not stop at all, and most of the organizations with a number of producing units, will follow the four weeks' vacation plan.

The Chaplin, Clara Kimball Young, Griffith studios and the different stars producing at the Brunton plant, which includes Sessue Hayakawa, Bessie Barriscale, Kitty Gordon and Little Gloria Joy, will continue work without interruption

A Month Off at Fox

Only one company is at work at present at the Fox studios in Hollywood during the influenza epidemic that is ravaging the west coast. This is the company headed by Madlaine Traverse, who recently came from the east to make pictures at the western plant. Her director, Frank Beall, expects to have the production completed inside of two weeks, when the company will be laid off as required by the order sent out by the national producers. The Gladys Brockwell company finished *Quicksands* before the closing order came, and no other play will be commenced for another month. The Tom Mix company was in the middle of a picture, but Tom had to undergo an operation for an old bullet wound, so the picture will be finished after the ban is lifted and Tom is well. Jane and Katherine Lee, who arrived on 16 October, will not begin work for four weeks

Closed Theatres Cleaning House

All the big moving picture theatres and all the little ones are undergoing a thorough housecleaning during the 'Flu' closing order. Some of the houses are only being carefully cleaned and brushed and polished up; others are being entirely overhauled; new carpets are being laid in others, and all are being thoroughly disinfected. It will be a husky 'Flu' germ that will find itself alive in any of the Los Angeles theatres after the opening order is given by the Health Department.

Tally's Broadway is being treated to a coat of fresh paint and otherwise being polished up inside and out, and new draperies are being hung at the Kinema.

9 November 1918

CHICAGO NEWS LETTER

Quarantine in Chicago Holds Tight. Influenza-Pneumonia Epidemic reaches Crest - No One Can Foretell Reopening of Theatres

During the ten days ending 22 October there were 4,051 deaths in Chicago from the influenza-

pneumonia epidemic. The official record in City Health Commissioner Robertson's office shows that the crest was reached Thursday, 17 October, when 1,918 new cases of influenza and 477 of pneumonia, or 2,395 cases in all, were recorded. Friday, 18 October, showed a total of 2,372 cases and Saturday, 19 October, a total of 2,136, the latter figure showing a decrease of 236 cases from the total of the preceding day. The combined cases for Sunday and Monday, 20 and 21 October, reached 2,700, a daily average of 1,350, affording a most assuring sign that the epidemic is on the wane . . .

9 November 1918

RUBBERNECKING IN FILMLAND

Filmland is full of gloom and germs. Everyone you meet has a different cure for the Flu, or a cure-for-certain, double-back-action, ball-bearing preventative for the Flu, and in spite of this, everyone you meet has either just gotten over an attack of the Flu, or is just getting down with it.

Broadway is full of actors taking enforced vacations, eucalyptus oil, and discussing the latest thing in gargles.

Three or four thespians will foregather on a shady corner and just as it looks as if a friendly little party has been established, one of them will squint his eyes, wrinkle up his nose and remark, 'A-ka-chool!' in a loud tone, and the others will forsake him and rush to the nearest Owl drug store and demand 'Some of that stuff you sniff up your nose'.

And no movies to go to!

I didn't half way begin to realize what it would mean to have no movies – until we had none. I tried to think back behind a long gone date when I walked three miles to see a New York central train come busting out of a bed sheet tacked on the wall of the town hall, and tried to remember what it was we did for amusement – and I couldn't think of a thing but pitching horseshoes! And as automobile tires have taken the place of horseshoes, and nobody wants to pitch auto tires, I decided to go out among the studios and see what I could see . . .

9 November 1918

CONDITIONS CAUSE FOR HOPEFULNESS

Epidemic of Influenza Is Breaking Way in Many Sections, Permitting Picture Theatres to Resume Active Operations – Philadelphia and Chicago Important Centers of Renewed Activities

Quarantine in Illinois Outlined by Dr. Drake

The arrangements outlined in our issue of 9 November regarding the reopening of theatres in Chicago were carried out to the letter, with the additional provision that all theatres should close at 10 o'clock p.m. On Friday, 1 November, the closing time was extended to 10:30 p.m., as the latest reports showed a rapid decline in the daily death rate and in the number of new cases of influenza and pneumonia.

It is lamentable to state that quite a number of picture theatres were ordered closed, after being reopened, the requirements of the State Health Director had not been observed by the owners. These requirements insist on the following:

1. All premises must be thoroughly cleaned, kept clean and well ventilated at all times.
2. Conditions of crowding must be strictly avoided.
3. Extraordinary diligence must be exercised to exclude from the audience possible infection bearers, such as persons showing evidence of colds or those residing on premises on which a case of influenza or pneumonia exists.

On Friday, 1 November, 370 picture theatres were in operation in the city. The attendance showed that the people were hungry for screen entertainment from the first day of reopening (Wednesday), when the theatres on the north side as far south as Diversey Boulevard were opened, until Friday, when the entire city was included, with the exception of South Chicago . . .

Government Losing \$40,000 a Week

Theatre owners are not alone in feeling the effects of the ban on amusements, Uncle Sam also suffering a financial loss. Internal revenue Collector Justus S. Wardell estimates that the Government is losing \$40,000 a week in the San Francisco district through the closing of theatres and cabarets.

'Within a few weeks we have the holidays, which with the exception of a week or so mean poor business. Then comes midwinter with its storms, traffic tieup, and other troubles; and then Lent. You can see that the best weeks of the year have passed and gone without anything in the treasuries of the theatres upon which to build future business.'

Another well-known exhibitor said: 'I look for

Fig. 3. The flu epidemic's effect on the studios treated in humorous fashion in *Motion Picture*, January 1919. The pun in the headline refers to World Film Corp. employees in the Fort Lee studios. [Richard Koszarski Collection.]

the biggest season in years. The public has been shut in by sickness and the grip scare and has reached the point where they must turn to amusement to relieve their minds of the strain. It will be a quiet holiday season in the way of giving gifts, and I look for a liberal expenditure for amusements. The new increased wage schedules have put more money in the class of people who attended picture houses then [sic] they have ever known before. They are going to spend this money, and the motion picture manager who books good strong attractions is going to reap a harvest.'

Business Slump in Boston

There has been a sudden slump in the tremendous

business which followed the reopening of theatres in this section on 20 November [sic]. The weather has been a leading factor in this slump.

Following the reopening of the motion picture houses after a three-weeks' closing because of the grip epidemic there was a record breaking attendance. Every manager reported large audiences with a prospect of one of the best seasons in years. Then the weather man stepped in with some of the warmest October days known in years, and after the depression of the epidemic, people flooded into the public parks and out-of-door places in preference to attending the theatres.

While for the past ten days the slump in business following the reopening has been heart-breaking to the theatre owners and managers, a cold snap would probably bring the record attendance that followed the first reopening.

There is a wide diversity of opinion as to the future of the business in New England this winter. One prominent exchange man said today:

'The houses will never recover from the losses they have sustained from the grip epidemic. My salesmen report a number of small houses which will not reopen this winter. The five best weeks of the year are those following Labor Day. The grip ban came in the midst of this rushing business, and the loss can never be recovered.'

16 November 1918

HAROLD EDEL SUCCUMBS TO INFLUENZA

Managing Director of the New York Strand Dies Suddenly at His Home in This City Mourned by Hosts of Friends

At seven o'clock Saturday evening, 2 November, Harold E. Edel, managing director of the New York Strand, died at his home in this city a victim of influenza ...

The death of Harold Edel was a shock to the motion picture and theatrical profession. News had come that he was ill of Spanish influenza, but there was no inkling that his condition was serious ... At the time of his death he was the youngest man on Broadway, and perhaps in the United States, holding a position of similar prominence and importance ... His transfer to the New York Strand was made when S.L. Rothapfel resigned the position of managing director at that theatre to take a like position at the Rialto.

16 November 1918



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RUBBERNECKING IN FILMLAND

Los Angeles Correspondent Personally Conducts Our Readers Through the West Coast Studios

Filmland is still full of Flu, but we are doing things to it, and taking things for it. Yeast, for instance. The wagon of a rising and progressive yeast maker, decorated with the slogan, 'A Yeast Cake a Day Keeps Influenza Away', parades the streets of Hollywood and does a thriving business.

And we have stopped stretching our gum. Although this reprehensible habit has been frowned on in our best circles since we were struck by the wave of correct social usage that put the taboo on full dress in clubs and made it underigeur for leading men to shoot their cuffs upon entering a drawing room, it still persisted among the younger juvenile and ingénue set. Since leading germicidists have pointed out that anything the fingers touch may be the lurking place for germs, however, gum is being kept in the mouth, where it belongs. It is an ill wind, etc.

Tom Ince has furnished all of the employees at his studio with flu masks, and while they interfere to a considerable extent with cigarette smoking, and give the voice a tomb-like tone, they are being worn with resignation, fortitude and the help of two strings that tie behind the ears.

Mack Sennett has equipped his forces with little bags of powdered camphor asafetida and other sweet smelling unguents. The bags are worn around the neck just south of the wishbone, and everyone on the place, including Teddy the dog, Pepper the cat and her seven kittens, are wearing them ...
16 November 1918

11 NOVEMBER TENTATIVE DATE FOR MINNEAPOLIS OPENING

Picture men of Minneapolis considered as a joke the proposal of Dr. H.M. Guilford, city health commissioner, to reopen all theatres if proprietors would compel patrons and attendants to wear influenza masks ...

'I'd just as soon hang out a smallpox sign', said I.H. Ruben, president of the Ruben and Finkelstein chain of ten Minneapolis and six St. Paul theatres, commenting on the chance to resume business with a masked audience and orchestra. 'The idea is too absurd to give it serious consideration.'

Mr. Ruben declared that his Minneapolis theatres were losing \$30,000 worth of business weekly

on account of the ban. It is estimated that the loss in business to all Minneapolis exchanges will run close to \$100,000 a week.

'The only thing the exhibitors can do now is to wait until the All Clear signal is given publicly and driven home by the health authorities and the press', he said. 'The public is thoroughly alarmed, and it would be folly to reopen before that time. The idea to require patrons to wear influenza masks is a joke.'
23 November 1918

BUSINESS POOR IN WILMINGTON

(Wilmington, N.C.) Picture theatres are finding conditions materially changed since the theatres were allowed to reopen on 21 October, and fear a dull season at least for the next two or three months. Attendance at the local picture houses has been away below par since reopening, not even keeping up to the hot weather records for attendance. The epidemic is entirely wiped out here, and the only cause to which poor business can be attributed is the fact that many have found that they can enjoy their own fireside of evenings, and have become more or less detached from their habit of attending the movies by the closed period, which extended over four weeks' time.

Heavy newspaper advertising failed to bring the crowds upon the reopening and, after three weeks of poor business, the managers are looking around for a solution to the problem. Pictures of higher than ordinary quality have been offered in an effort to tempt the stay-at-homes back again with but poor results.

23 November 1918

RUBBERNECKING IN FILMLAND

Los Angeles Correspondent Personally Conducts Our Readers Through the West Coast Studios

The epidemic situation has not improved much. Many of us who have suspected all along that Spanish influenza was none other than our ancient enemy, La Grippe, sailing under a new name, are now convinced that such is the case.

But unmasking the 'Flu' has not allowed those of us who have been wearing masks to unmask ourselves.

We are still watching and spraying. Aunty Septic is on guard everywhere. It is impossible to get into any studio in the film colony without first checking your germs at the gate.

In addition to the general disinfecting that goes on at every studio, many of the players carry their own private germ exterminators. Get in nasal distance of almost any bunch of actors and you'll think you are approaching a delegation from the retail drug clerks' convention.

Wednesday, I went out to the Brunton plant. After explaining to the Red Cross nurse with the atomizer and the firm manner that, since I had already been sprinkled and sprayed with Chlorotone, Dobell's Mixture and Alkaline Antiseptic Solution to such an extent that no germ of the coccus family could find a boarding place anywhere inside or outside of my physical premises, and that there was no use in her using her anti-flu dope, I submitted to the spray and went on

I found them still wearing masks at the Ince plant. Ince is the only completely masked studio in the colony, but since Dr. Woods Hutchinson has arrived in our fair but 'flu'-ridden city and told us that masks are the only sure-fire method of putting the 'flew' in influenza, it may turn out that they were only just a little ahead of the general adoption of the gauze protectors at Ince

After Ince I wandered over to the Sunset works, and had a most pleasant surprise by finding Allan Dwan at work again . . . Dwan was looking kinda 'peak-ed', as we say back in Missouri, but he was glad to be at work, and was chortling over a cast he had just gotten together for the screen adaptation of *Cheating Cheaters* which he was getting ready to film. . . .

'Where', I asked, 'and how did you get 'em all?'

'Flu', said Dwan. 'Many of the studios are closed, and as all of the players would rather work than not, I had the pick of a big flock.'

Verily, it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, but just the same, I'd hate to foot the payroll for *Cheating Cheaters*. All of the actors Dwan picked would rather work than not, but none of them will work for small salaries – decidedly not – 'Flu' or no 'Flu'.

23 November 1918

PROTECTIVE MASKS FOR 'FRISCO

Californians Must Look At Pictures From Behind Shields, While Influenza Elsewhere Is Gradually Coming Under Control – Sunday Closing Agitated in Some Localities

The gloom cast over the nation by the plague

of Spanish influenza is being penetrated by rays of hope and brightness in many sections. That the epidemic is, generally speaking, within control may be accepted as applying to the greater section of the country.

Several strange features are developing in the news that comes to us from our correspondents. For the first time gauze masks are mentioned – San Francisco opened 16 November with these protectors exacted as necessary to admission.

In some places, Richmond, Va., in particular, churches are closed, while theatres are allowed to open. In Boston, as a side issue, the demand for Sunday closing of picture theatres is agitated. Showmen in other sections will have a 'Sunday closing' fight upon their hands because of the opening the epidemic made for such discussion.

30 November 1918

RUBBERNECKING IN FILMLAND

Everybody Feeling Better, the Flu Is On the Wane, and Humorous Stage of Epidemic Is Reached

Filmland is feeling better. We are getting over the Flu. The number of new cases reported to the health officers is growing less and less all the time. The news coming in from other points of the map, to the effect that the germs are fleeing like the Germans, fills us with joy.

With the exception of those who are suffering from weak chins and squirrel teeth, few people are now wearing masks.

Everybody feels that the worst is over. Bugles that have been blown in the service of the enemy are now being tooted with notes of victory. We have arrived at the humorous stage of the epidemic. Local Joe Millers are kidding the Flue [sic] along with jest and merry quip. The poets have busted loose. Richard Willis is said to have a list of words that rhyme with epizootic.

All of which is very good. A people who can joke and sing about as serious a situation as the Flu can never be vanquished by such a tiny thing as a germ, no matter how bad the jokes and verses may be

Louise Fazenda says that several persons have tried to rhyme her name with influenza.

Roscoe Arbuckle declares the story that he is afraid to go down Broadway for fear of being taken for a crowd and dispersed is in bad taste

30 November 1919

TWIN CITIES AUTHORITIES LIFT EMBARGO ON THEATRES

The Twin Cities are open towns again as far as moving pictures are concerned, and business, especially in Minneapolis, has started off with a rush that is bringing cheer to the film interests of this territory.

St. Paul opened Thursday, 14 November, after a comparatively brief closing period of ten days. Minneapolis enjoyed its first good, hearty laugh, and its first 'weepy sobs', in more than a month on the following day, because the movies there had reopened, too.

After thirty-six unhappy days, the influenza ban on Minneapolis moving picture houses, theatres, schools, public dance halls, billiard and pool halls, at 11:30 a.m., Friday, 15 November, was lifted by the city health department.

The public at large, which had not been at large for more than a month, became aware of the lifting of the ban at just 11:31 a.m., when a downtown moving picture house opened its doors to the passing throngs.

And the passing throngs stopped passing. They hesitated, still uncertain as to whether or not

one huge joke was in the process of being played, walked up to the cashier's cage, and then, satisfied that it was all true, entered joyously.

By noon scores had learned the glad tidings. By 4 p.m. thousands knew. By night moving picture houses downtown and in the residential districts were going full blast. The thirty-six days drouth [sic] had ended, and cash drawers gulped thirstily [sic] as the drip of nickels, dimes and quarters began flowing again through the little crescent opening in the glass cage.

Picture exchange managers stood on the sidewalks and rubbed their hands as they watched the files of eager fans pass in. House managers stood just inside the door and registered happiness, their faces wreathed in smiles.

Rejoicing at the lifting of the influenza ban spread to all parts of Minneapolis' theatrical world. Musicians, ushers, operators, ticket sellers, ticket takers and all the rest had visions of a real pay envelope once more.

Strand Gets Rather a Slow Start

Just thirty seconds after the board of health passed the motion raising the influenza ban, the lights

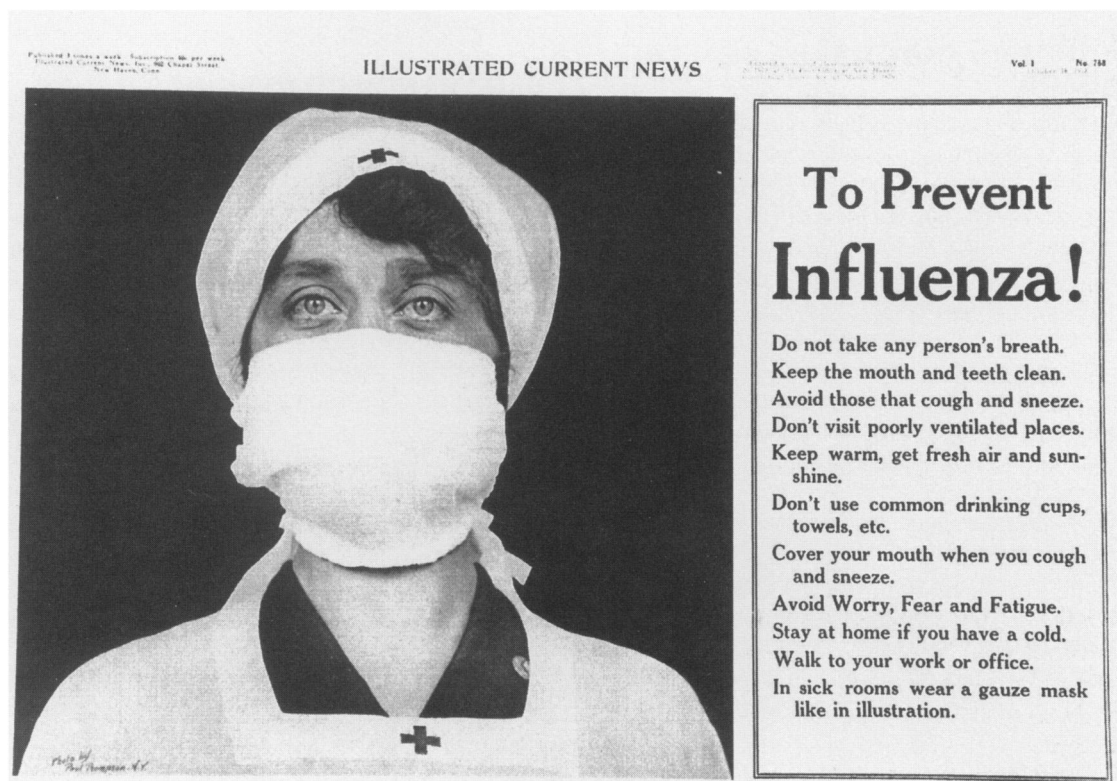


Fig. 4. Widespread use of masks during the later stages of the epidemic had no effect on the filterable virus responsible for the disease. Courtesy of miscman.com.

flashed on at the Strand, the operator started the motion picture machine and the show was on.

All during the week Charles Branham, the manager, felt certain that the theatre ban would be raised and he didn't want to lose a minute after action had been taken by the board of health. So on Monday he ordered the complete house staff to report daily at 11:00 a.m.

Every day during the week the employees reported, only to be dismissed a few minutes later. On Friday, however, with the board in session, Mr. Branham held his assistants at the theatre. Chester Bass, head usher, was sent to the city hall with instructions to telephone the theatre the moment the board had acted.

The machine operator threaded the first reel of *The Man From Funeral Ridge* into the machine and all was ready.

At 11:30 a.m. the motion to lift the influenza ban was passed. And one minute later Bass, using the automatic telephone to prevent delay due to the strike of telephone operators, was informing Mr. Branham that he could open ...

7 December 1918

CONDEMN FORT WAYNE HEALTH BOARD

Angered because the closing ban has not yet been lifted, a delegation, seventy strong, consisting of owners of all motion picture theatres in Fort Wayne, Ind., along with representatives of the motion picture operators' union, the musicians' union, and various other organizations, representing some 12,000 persons, met at the city hall last Friday night and drew up resolutions condemning the health board for its action.

The ban at Fort Wayne was to be lifted on Saturday, 9 November, but at the last minute announcement was made it would be continued for at least another week.

The resolutions, among other things, declared that those present were of the opinion that conditions in Fort Wayne did not warrant the continuance of the order, which has been in effect for nearly five weeks, but that if conditions are as bad as the health board says, the closing orders should be extended to include all business houses where people congregate...

7 December 1918

BUSINESS POOR IN KANSAS CITY

The ban on theatrical exhibitions has been generally lifted in Kansas City territory. The public is quickly forgetting that there ever was an epidemic of influenza. Business is not coming back with a rush, however – few managers report full houses. It is expected the public will have to have its enthusiasm for pictures revived, and must again be got in the habit of going to the show.

7 December 1918

LOS ANGELES THEATRES OPEN AT LAST

After Seven Weeks' Darkness, 2 December Marks Revival of Theatergoing, with Good Business – Other California Towns Still Under Ban, But Most Sections Are Released

The influenza ban was lifted by the Los Angeles Health Board on 2 December. Theatres opened after a darkness of seven weeks, the longest closed period suffered by any city of this size. People are still nervous about crowds, but houses are doing good business. Exhibitors look for a big increase in the next few days. Santa Barbara, Riverside, Pomona and several nearby towns are still under ban.

14 December 1918

SAN FRANCISCO RESCINDS GAUZE MASK MEASURE

The theatres of San Francisco, which were recently reopened, following a closed period of four weeks, are rapidly getting into their former stride, and business is expected to be normal again within a very short time. During the first week following the reopening business was a little below expectations, but this is attributed to the fact that the wearing of gauze masks on the part of the public was still insisted upon, as well as to the fact that heavy rains fell during this period.

While theatre owners suffered heavy losses as a result of the epidemic, the opinion is expressed that these would have been much heavier had their places of business not been closed. Rentals have formed the chief source of loss, but in some instances property owners have shared this loss with their tenants. Theatre men generally voice the belief that the masking ordinance has also proved its worth and has been a factor in bringing the epidemic to a speedy close with a minimum loss of life and permitting houses to reopen at an earlier date than other-

wise would have been possible. They point to the fact that the Pacific Coast cities which enforced the gauze mask rule have speedily recovered from the scourge, while those which did not are still fighting the disease and theatres are still closed.

14 December 1918

ARREST TERRE HAUTE MANAGERS FOR VIOLATING CLOSING ORDER

Managers of fourteen theatres – practically all of them motion picture houses – at Terre Haute, Ind., were arrested by the police there Thanksgiving Day for having opened their amusement places in violation of the order issued Wednesday by the city board of health because of the prevalence of influenza.

Six of the number, after being released on bond, again attempted to go on with their shows, and as a result were rearrested. Bond was denied them for several hours, but was finally accepted by the sheriff

When they appeared in city court Friday, 28 November, all refused to enter pleas of guilty on the ground that the ruling of the health board was invalid. The defendants all asked that the evidence be heard by a jury and the request was granted by the court. The date for the trial has not been decided on

Soon after the closing order was issued Wednesday morning the theatre men, their attorneys, Mayor Hunter, and several business men of the city met with members of the board of health advisory board to try to find the reason for the closing of the theatres and stores and not churches and schools.

John Hickey, attorney representing the theatre and moving picture interests, told those who attended the conference that the whole ruling was based purely on a guess by the city board of health.

14 December 1918

ALTERNATE ROWS CAPACITY FOR DES MOINES THEATRES

A situation almost approaching epidemic proportions has resulted in Des Moines theatres permitting patrons to sit only in every other row. It was with considerable difficulty that the places of amusement escaped closing altogether. After a lull the epidemic broke out badly in Des Moines and immediately the usual agitation of 'close the theatres' was started. First the use of influenza masks as a compulsory measure was tried out, with poor results, as patrons either regard the use of the mask as an imposition

or a joke. The measure fell through after one day's trial, and then the agitation for a closed town started. Special committees were appointed for and against closing by the respective parties interested and a merry battle followed.

Finally it was decided to permit the theatres to remain open by using half capacity, spreading the seating arrangements through alternate rows. This is working out with fair results and managers say is far better than closing altogether. Programs have been considerably curtailed and less expensive features offered for the time being.

21 December 1918

BUSINESS HEALTHY AROUND NEWARK

Following Recovery From Epidemic, Jersey Houses Are Slowed Up By High Cost of Turkey, but Patrons Now Flowing In – Many Houses Lack Lobby Displays

From what we have observed in our itinerary in that part of Jersey in and around Newark that we have visited and recorded, business is in a very healthy condition. The Thanksgiving holiday had a tendency to lessen patronage, shopping for Turkey at 45 to 65 cents a pound naturally absorbing the attention and considerable of the loose change that might have found its way into the coffers of the movies

One thing that impressed us very forcibly: that was the lack of dress in a great many of the theatres. It was somewhat of a disappointment to find that those places that evidently needed it most had not taken advantage of the four weeks shutdown to freshen up a bit. The same comment could be made of screen settings – they were woefully plain and neglected

We ask ourselves, are the managers showmen with a lasting or permanent interest in pictures? Are they simply taking a chance to make money, regardless of showmanship, or are they simply in the business on speculation, to sell to the first man who offers them a profit on their investment?

The Real Theatres Swallow Others

There is no science in discerning the difference in the places that are in the exhibition business to stay and those in it as a speculation only. There is no wonder so many are swallowed up by the honest-to-God theatres.

21 December 1918

LOCKWOOD'S DEATH BRINGS HEAVY CALL FOR HIS WORK

The question as to whether the death of a star would affect the popularity of his picture productions seems to have been settled for all time by the case of the late Harold Lockwood, the first player of prominence to die at the height of his career in many months.

Not only is the photoplay work of the young actor in greater demand than ever, but his admirers are flooding the offices of Metro with requests for the reissuing of Lockwood favorites. The greatest interest, however, lies in the seven-reel super-features Mr. Lockwood completed for Screen Classics, Inc., shortly before his death

E.M. Sanders, special representative of Screen Classics, who handled the record-breaking bookings, attributes the increased demand on the part of exhibitors and the public for Harold Lockwood productions not only to the popularity and ability of the star and the unusual quality of his productions, but to the fact that his death has aroused interest in his work

21 December 1918

SCOURGE REVIVING IN MANY STATES

According to report received by the *Moving Picture World* from its correspondents, the epidemic of influenza which was apparently on the wane a week or two ago has broken out afresh in a number of states. There is a decided recrudescence of the plague in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Missouri, Washington, D.C., Michigan, in the Northwest and in a number of southern states. Many of the cities in Arkansas and Oklahoma are closing again, and the first big city to close for the second time in Texas is San Antonio. Portland, Ore., which has been open for but three weeks, is in danger of having the ban restored.

28 December 1918

MAJORITY OF THEATRES SHUT IN KANSAS CITY DISTRICT

More than 75 per cent. of the moving picture theatres are closed in Kansas City territory. For every show that opens – and one does occasionally open in a town where the epidemic recedes – a dozen are closed.

There is a possibility that many of these thea-

tres will not reopen until after the holidays. It will be several weeks before any general reopening takes place.

Conditions affecting moving picture exhibitors are almost as bad now as when the epidemic was at its worst several weeks ago

A Suit in Wichita

At Wichita, the churches, schools, and moving picture houses co-operated to resist an order closing them because the board of health did not at the same time close the stores – referred to as prolific means of spreading the contagion, if the contagion is mostly spread that way. Judge R.E. Bird of the district court of Sedgwick county granted a restraining order against the city of Wichita and its health officers on the ground of discrimination. But the health board continued to enforce the orders – and naturally the preachers and exhibitors did not care to go too strong in violation.

28 December 1918

INDIANA EXHIBITORS PROTEST AGAINST BAN EXTENSION

If the ban of public gatherings at Gary, Ind., is not lifted by 21 December there no doubt will be 'something doing' on the part of the Gary motion picture exhibitors and theatre managers. The theatres in Gary have been closed the greater part of the time during the last eight or ten weeks because of different outbreaks of influenza and pneumonia, and there was some talk last week that the ban, which has been in effect – for the third time – about two weeks, may be extended again

28 December 1918

MAY PLACE BAN ON LOS ANGELES VISITORS

While the influenza epidemic in the San Francisco territory is gradually subsiding, moving picture theatres are not being reopened as rapidly as was expected. In some places houses were reopened only to be closed again, and it is doubtful if the new year finds all in operation

New cases of influenza are commencing to appear in San Francisco Bay communities, and the wearing of gauze masks has been resumed by the faculty and students of the University of California at Berkeley. In almost every instance these cases have been traced to recent arrivals from Southern California and city councils in Berkeley and Oakland are

considering placing a quarantine against visitors from Los Angeles . . .

28 December 1918

ALTERNATE ROW CAPACITY FOR OMAHA THEATRES

Omaha, Neb., like other cities, has suffered much from the influenza epidemic. Closed for three weeks prior to 11 November, the motion picture theatres since that time have never done a full season business. At present they are handicapped by an order from Health Commissioner Manning of Omaha, permitting them to seat patrons in only every alternate row – or half the capacity of the house.

On a recent Sunday Manager Wilfried Ledou of the Empress Theatre turned away hundreds of patrons, while half of his house remained empty. Exhibitors are hesitating to pay big money for the large, new attractions, because with only half their seating capacity to fill, they face a loss even with 'capacity' business. Their advertising has been restricted, too, as it is futile to bring out a big crowd.

In the meanwhile the health commissioner has placed a ban on public dances, has closed the pool halls, has ordered the street car company to fill their cars only to seating capacity, has prohibited all unnecessary gatherings, and these constant occurrences, given big publicity in the newspapers, have made people so fearful they are afraid to attend the theatres . . .

4 January 1919

WILL TEST VALIDITY OF CLOSING ORDER

Theatre managers of Roanoke, Va., will test the validity of the order which again closed their houses early in December when a recurrence of the influenza epidemic there assumed alarming proportions. The contention of the managers will be that the order closing theatres, while other places of business in the city where more or less of a crowd is wont to congregate is [sic] left open to do business as usual, discriminates unjustly against them. They contend that there is no statute which names the minimum or maximum number of people allowed to congregate and that on frequent occasions there are in any large department store more people than the average audience at the picture theatres . . .

4 January 1919

WINNIPEG THEATRE EMPLOYEES ASK PAY FOR FLU SHUTDOWN

T.J. Murray, solicitor, and F. Robinson, secretary of the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council, headed a deputation of the Winnipeg Theatrical Trades Federation which waited upon the Winnipeg Board of Control on 12 December for the purpose of demanding compensation for loss of wages sustained through the closing of the local theatres for a period of seven weeks because of the recent epidemic.

The interests represented included the projection machine operators, musicians and stage hands and the net loss to these employees was listed as follows: Twenty-four machine operators lost \$4,139.75; twenty-eight stage employees lost \$4,257.70; eighty-six musicians lost \$15,253.85. The total loss was \$23,651.10, according to these statistics.

Instances of personal hardship were cited, but the deputation pointed out that the men were not asking for charity. They wanted reimbursement for a loss sustained through an act of the city. Announcement was made that the unions would place a similar plea before the Manitoba Provincial Government on a subsequent date . . .

4 January 1919

FACTS AND COMMENTS

. . . This brings to [mind] a helpful bit of information secured by the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry bearing upon the influenza situation. It is the purpose of N.A.M.P.I. to place in the hands of all exhibitors means of fighting the prevailing hysteria which has been engendered by too much newspaper talk of the wrong sort. The influenza was as bad in New York as it has been in any large city, but theatres and churches were not closed. This letter from Dr. Royal S. Copeland, New York's health officer, tells why.

Department of Health
17 December 1918

National Association of the Motion Picture Industry,
Times Building, City

I am pleased to comply with your request to furnish you with my observations regarding the relation of the theatre, and the motion picture theatre in particular, to the recent epidemic of influenza in New York City. As you know I was steadfastly of the opinion that

in a city like New York it would be folly to expect to obtain relief through the closing of the moving picture theatres when the crowded transportation lines and other densely packed places of assembly were permitted to operate. There never was any doubt in my mind regarding the status of the well ventilated, sanitary theatre, but I did have serious objection to allowing the unsanitary hole-in-the-wall theatre to continue. Every place of the latter sort which our inspectors found was closed immediately and was not allowed to reopen until the necessary alterations and improvements in operation were made.

In view of our experience in New York City, where the death rate was the lowest of any large city on the coast, we are convinced that our decision to keep the theatres open was wisely made.

The moving picture theatre was of great assistance to the Department of Health in furthering the work of public health education during the epidemic. Managers of the various theatres gave relief talks before the opening of each performance, advising their patrons of the requirements of the Board of Health regarding sneezing, coughing and expectorating. In every motion picture theatre in the city messages were flashed on the screen with appeals from the Board of Health for the cooperation of the public in stamping out the epidemic. Managers limited their audiences to the number of persons that could be seated and prohibited smoking for the period of the epidemic.

My principal purpose in keeping open the theatres in New York City was to prevent the spread of panic and hysteria, and thus to protect the public from a condition of mind which would predispose it to physical ills.

Properly operated theatres were valuable factors in maintaining the morale of the city, and New York City was notably free from a hysterical sense of calamity during our epidemic, and I am firmly convinced that it would have been unwise to have closed them.

R.S. Copeland, Commissioner

Conditions are no different in any other city. Isn't it reasonable to suppose that if Dr. Copeland's letter were placed in the hands of any intelligent health officer he would understand its logic and be influenced thereby? But to make such a campaign effective exhibitors must unite; they must get together and present their claims in a businesslike manner.

4 January 1919

SECOND INFLUENZA WAVE RECEDING

San Antonio Theatres Open Under Court Order

Under a restraining order, granted by the District Court, which forbade health authorities from interfering with motion picture theatres, the theatres of San Antonio opened on Saturday afternoon, 21 December, after having been closed for several weeks under influenza quarantine rules.

San Antonio was the only city of importance in the southwestern territory which had been closed during the second outbreak of influenza.

Motion picture exhibitors of San Antonio circulated a petition among the residents of the city, asking them if they thought the theaters ought to be closed in view of the influenza situation. Some eight thousand people signed the petition and by a majority of over three to one they asked that the theatres be opened.

The exhibitors then took the closing matter to the courts, arguing that civic authorities had no right to discriminate against their line of business by keeping the theatres under quarantine while department stores, street cars and other forms of business calculated to establish crowded conditions were not molested

11 January 1919

OMAHA PICTURE FANS VIOLATE THE ALTERNATE ROW RULING

Middlewestern exhibitors are indignant over outrageous influenza restrictions that promise to go down in history as a tragical joke, so far as show interests are concerned. For weeks Omaha (Neb.) theatres were permitted to remain open only on their promise to seat patrons in alternate rows of seats.

On Christmas day the lobbies of theatres were jammed with indignant patrons, angry because of the restriction. When they found an opportunity, they rushed the aisles, climbed over into the roped-off rows, and found seats.

On the day before Christmas a committee of exhibitors, accompanied by their attorney and influential medical talent, called on the health commissioner, warned him of what might be expected from the holiday crowds, and pleaded with him to lift the ban for the special days. He said he would rather close the theatres entirely

11 January 1918

DES MOINES MANAGERS SHOW FIGHT

In Des Moines, Iowa, A.H. Blank, proprietor of two big movie houses there, headed off what might have been an epidemic of foolish restrictions all over Iowa. He entered a meeting of the Des Moines city council just as the council had about decided to allow all business houses but theatres to remain open. Throwing his hat and coat on a table, Blank leaped into the center of the meeting, waved his fists and declared their intentions were an outrage. He threatened to apply for an injunction to close every business house in Des Moines if the theatres were closed. He said the theatres had willingly done their bit when they were closed for three weeks previously, while other businesses remained open until the closing order was proved to be a joke. He won his point and the restrictions were not made.

11 January 1919

CHILDREN BARRED IN LOUISVILLE

Due to a return attack of influenza, principally among children, Louisville theatres have not been permitted to admit children under fourteen years of age for the past two weeks or more, and have been forced to limit attendance to seating capacity. This has been a blow to the outlying theatres, and has interfered with business in the downtown houses. Tickets are sold for actual seating capacity only. When four or six persons enter a theatre as a party they are not permitted to stand until the desired number of adjoining seats can be found, but must take seats wherever they are to be found. This has caused much trouble and numerous arguments. However, the doorman announces the number of seats and admits that many people. In addition, inspectors have been placed in the theatres by the board of health, and any person[s] apparently suffering from

bad colds are asked to leave. The theatres have had to pay the salaries of the inspectors assigned ...

18 January 1919

SMALL TOWN EXHIBITORS ARE HARD HIT

Influenza Situation in the Pacific Northwest Presses Particularly Hard on the Little Man

By S.J. Anderson

The influenza situation is still bad in the small towns of the Pacific northwest. The larger cities, while still reporting numbers of cases, have taken the quarantine method of fighting the disease, and there is no longer any danger of closing them. Exhibitors in the small towns are very hard hit, however, because of frequent closings. Some of the Seattle exchanges report that at least twenty of their towns have been closed as many as three times. Some of these third closings have been voluntary on the part of the exhibitors. After two closings the people were so frightened that they would not go to the theatres, and the exhibitors found that they were losing money by running the shows.

C.P. Scates, of the Paramount Theatre, Okanogan, is one of those who has closed voluntarily. The influenza trouble is not alone responsible for this, however. The Okanogan country is a fruit country where the prosperity of all the inhabitants depends largely on the success of the fruit crops. Last year the fruit was a failure and it is expected that next season will also be poor. Knowing what the future does not hold in store for them the fruit ranchers are spending very grudgingly, even when the danger of influenza is not an added deterrent. Mr. Scates saw no hope of his business picking up for months to come; so he has closed his theatre indefinitely and has gone down to Seattle for a short vacation ...

1 February 1919