INTRODUCTION

In her book *Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus that Caused It*, Gina Kolata writes about the influenza pandemic that struck the world in 1918. Her historical piece reads like a thriller, trying to locate the virus that caused a worldwide pandemic that caused unforeseen hardship. She estimated that more than 25% of the United States population became ill. Worldwide, the 1918 flu killed 20 to 100 million people. This compares with 15 million deaths for World War I. It killed 2.5% of those who caught it, and one fifth of the world contracted the virus.[1] Alfred W. Crosby, a historian, wrote the book *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* and provided much of the research for Kolata's examination. In addition, he examines the collective forgetfulness of America regarding the flu.[2] It is because the flu is so overshadowed by wars and societal woes in history books that it is so important to look at how the flu affected not only the world, or even America—but our own backyard.

Colville, Washington, is a small rural town located in northeast Washington at the intersection of U.S. Highway 395 and State Route 20, about 65 miles northwest of Spokane, Washington, 350 miles east of Seattle, and 40 miles south of the Canadian border. The *Colville-Examiner*, now called the *Statesman-Examiner,* has been in print since 1917 and it has provided news for Colville and its many surrounding small towns ever since. Colville is one of the oldest towns in its area, and thus has been a model for surrounding areas throughout history. It has always been the city seat for Stevens County, and therefore the center of activity for the area. It can be inferred that surrounding towns, such as Chewelah (located twenty-one miles south) and

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[1] Kolata, Gina. *Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 7-8.

[2] Crosby, Alfred W. *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Kettle Falls (located fourteen miles north), looked to Colville as an inspiration and example of how to create a township. Because of this prominence, it is worthwhile to see how Colville handled the 1918 flu and what examples it set for surrounding areas in dealing with the virus.

The first mention of the flu appeared in a front page story of the *Colville Examiner* on October 19, 1918, addressing the cases of flu within Stevens County. In the span of time between then and early December, reporting materialized in incredibly different ways. An ad for a church, appearing alongside an article announcing closure of all public meeting places, claimed that the Spanish influenza was the work of the devil and said that all sinners must come pray or else assume certain death. Health officials made various claims about the origin of the flu, claiming that it could be work of the Germans and really not a Spain-based infection. Local doctors administered various treatments for the flu, including a special "serum." The first flu fatality emerged in the November 2, 1918 edition with the death of Mrs. Ester Davis. Fashion commentary on gauze masks and warnings to keep the disease contained led to the last mention of the flu for the year in an article warning about exposure to other respiratory diseases for convalescents.

The aim of this thesis is to look at how the portrayal of the influenza epidemic of 1918 by the *Colville-Examiner* compares with what we know now about the virus from modern-day researchers. How did "Colvillians" think the flu started? Did they make connections between World War I militaristic tactics and the flu? How did the severity of the flu in Colville compare to that nationwide? Was the timing the same; that is, did the epidemic begin and end at the same time as it did nationally? What were the effects on the local economy? Did they make the connection between the spring wave of the flu and the fall wave of it? By answering these questions, one can begin to get an idea of what the public was thinking about the flu in 1918.

The importance of this research is twofold. In addition to writing a research paper, I plan to create a mini-exhibit for the Colville museum about my findings. Because of this, I feel one of the main aims my research accomplishes is capturing a moment of local history for perpetuity. Residents will be able to learn about an important historical event in their local history, and perhaps trace their lineage back to victims of the flu. However, I feel that my research will do more than just capture one community's story of the 1918 flu. Instead, it will act as a representation of countless small towns that were affected by the flu. My guess is that Colville's story of the 1918 influenza is one that was repeated across our nation. By learning about how the flu affected Colville, one can gain a greater picture of how all small communities were affected by the virus.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How did the town of Colville, Washington, cope with the influenza epidemic of 1918? How does the *Colville-Examiner's* first-hand portrayal of the event compare and contrast with knowledge of the epidemic today?

METHODOLOGY

An analysis of the *Colville-Examiner* newspaper from 1918 will provide the basis for my research. This primary source will be analyzed thoroughly to infer information about the flu and public opinion about it at the time. Content of stories, their placement in the newspaper, and flu coverage compared to World War I coverage will be taken into consideration. In addition, advertisements, cartoons, and other filler in the newspaper will be analyzed as well. I want to learn who was affected by the flu, how many people were casualties, what the flu actually did to people, the effect on local economy and social scene, the editor's assumptions about the origins of the flu, attitudes towards the flu, and what people were advised to do about the flu.

After this initial stage of research, I plan to use secondary sources written about the 1918 flu to compare what happened in Colville to what happened in a national context. Were the editor's assumptions about the flu correct? How did the flu affect Colville in comparison to the rest of the nation? This secondary information will help me to interpret my primary source's coverage in a non-biased manner. *Flu* by Gina Kolata and *America's Forgotten Pandemic* by Alfred W. Crosby will be the basis for this stage of my research, but other books, articles, and periodicals will be sought out and utilized to provide more information about the flu and to deduce about what occurred in Colville in 1918.

The last stage of my project will be to create a mini-exhibit for the Colville Museum about the 1918 flu in the area. I will utilize whatever materials they already have concerning this event and incorporate it with my own findings. Things that I would like to include in this exhibit are timelines of the flu (one with Colville's events and the other with the nation's events), cartoons about the flu, an explanation of what we have learned about the virus since 1918, audio of flu writings, quotes, and songs, and profiles of victims of the flu. I would also like to hold an open house for this exhibit where I could answer questions for the public about their community's encounter with the virus.

EXPECTED RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

I expect my results to show a strong correlation between what occurred in Colville with what occurred in general across the nation when the 1918 flu hit. That is, I believe that the Colville-Examiner's reporting will show a similar timeline and events that books such as *Flu* by Gina Kolata and Alfred W. Crosby's *America's Forgotten Pandemic* discuss. A good example is the occurrence of a milder flu wave in the spring of 1918. Secondary research suggests that most doctors and communities mistakenly diagnosed it as pneumonia and did not make the

connection that the same virus made an appearance in both the spring and fall of 1918 with

varying degrees of severity. I expect to find that Colville made these same sorts of assumptions

and followed the same patterns that Kolata and Crosby suggest.

Another important result I expect to see from my thesis is a connection between my

research and people's lives in Colville even today. By creating a piece for the local Colville

museum, I hope that people who lost family members generations ago to the flu can learn more

about the epidemic and its worldwide influence. I want to capture a piece of local history that is

usually looked over and make sure that those lives taken by the flu are not forgotten or their

deaths misunderstood.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kolata, Gina. *Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the
Virus that Caused It*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

Kolata offers a great introduction to the flu pandemic of 1918, relating the story in an attention-grabbing style that reads more like a thriller than a historical piece. She follows the flu from its inception in the spring of 1918 until the present, highlighting the researchers who still work to find the virus that caused the flu that may help prevent future viruses from spreading. She takes a more scientific approach, focusing more on the medical side of things rather than social. This will offer a great supplement to my more personal primary sources.

Crosby, Alfred W. *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2003.
Crosby was the main historical contributor to Kolata's book based on his research for this, his own book. He delves into the scientific side of the epidemic like Kolata, but incorporates the flu's social influence as well. He looks at the reasons the flu has seemed to be forgotten in a collective amnesic episode in our historical consciousness. He also looks at the way the flu influenced World War I, both in regards to morale at home and how it affected soldiers on the front line.

Colville-Examiner (Colville, W.A.). 19 October 1918-14 December 1918.

This primary source offers the researcher the opportunity to see first-hand how the flu was depicted in the media. In addition, it conveys the priorities of society at the time of the outbreak, which happened to be in the midst of World War I. In addition to straight-forward reporting, the paper also offers rich commentary by the way of obituaries, social events calendars, and ads that fed on the flu frenzy to advance their company's cause.

Barry, John M. The *Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*. New York:
Penguin Group, 2004.

Instead of focusing on the flu virus itself, Barry looks at the conditions that allowed the epidemic to be sidelined by other priorities in America. He looks at how World War I took precedence over the flu in U.S. politics. This same thinking trickled down to the everyday citizen, as is demonstrated in Colville's local paper—more coverage was given to the war thousands of miles away than the flu epidemic killing neighbors across the street. This book focuses more on America and how it affected different cities across the country.

Buchanan, Jess E. "The Magnesite Rush to Stevens County: 1916." *Pacific Northwesterner* 25,
no. 3 (1981): 33-42.

Because my research is focused on the city of Colville in 1918, this article is helpful in establishing a historical context. The article details the rush of miners to the area in 1916. This occurrence helps get an idea of the population makeup of Colville and its surrounding areas at

the time the flu struck two years later. It also asks a further question of my research: how did the flu affect the mining industry?