

The following was previously published in **“Lenox Hill Hospital Essentials”**.  
Volume 12 Issue 9 October 2009

### **Flu, Nohing New: Lenox Hill Hospital in 1918**

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*We are working very hard to prepare for this year’s challenging flu season. We have found this account from the Lenox Hill archives of what the environment was like here in New York and in the Hospital during a much earlier, infamous flu season....*

It was 1918, and as the United States and the rest of the world were celebrating the end of hostilities of World War I, they soon were in the midst of the great influenza pandemic.

New York and Lenox Hill Hospital (previously the German Hospital and Dispensary) were not immune from this outbreak. One ward of the newly renamed hospital was set aside for the sole use of the nurses who became ill.

During the year, the shortage of space and nurses required the reduction of the surgical service to emergency cases only. One surgical suite was re-equipped for confinements to insure surgical cleanliness and safety during deliveries. In addition, all visitors were banned from the hospital during the peak of the epidemic.

By year’s end, Elizabeth Lindheimer, RN, the Superintendent of Nursing, reported the untimely deaths of 2 nurses on staff: Estelle Mairs, RN Class of 1918, held the position of Assistant Night Supervisor for only a few days before she became ill and succumbed; and Novice Helen Wiggins, Class of 1921, died of pneumonia in December.

In July 1918, Frances Moeschel, RN Class of 1915, was newly arrived at American Base Hospital 42 in Bazoilles-sur-Meuse, near the Western Front. After becoming ill with influenza and pneumonia, she died on September 7<sup>th</sup> and was buried with military honors in the hospital cemetery in recognition of her service to those soldiers in her care. She was later reburied in Greenwood Cemetery in 1921.

Times have certainly changed since 1918 – here are some facts about Lenox Hill Hospital.

- 1) Notables on the Board of Trustees:
  - \*Fritz Achelis was Board President. He and his wife completely funded the construction of the Lenox Hill School of Nursing.
  - \*Charles Engelhard, noted industrialist and investor in gold and gold mining. He was the inspiration for “Goldfinger”, the James Bond novel written by his friend Ian Fleming. Engelhard Court at the Metropolitan Museum bears his name.
  - \*Rudolf Schaefer, President of Schaefer Brewing. (note: a portion of the hospital’s early support came from the families involved in the brewing industry then located above Gracie Mansion.)
  - \*Rudolph Erbsloh, noted investor. In 1907, he was a member of a party flying the world’s then largest balloon that traveled from Philadelphia to upper Manhattan via Broadway.
  
- 2) The annual budget for the hospital was \$458,752. Ward patients were charged \$17.50 per week, though charges were waived for the many who could not afford to pay. There was no charge for medical and surgical services. The Steinway and FAO Schwartz families were among many who endowed patient beds for free care. Private patients were charged \$35.00 per week including board. This did not include physician and surgeon fees. (Fun fact: The Private Patient Pavilion was earlier named for Kaiser Wilhelm II.)
  
- 3) In 1918 the estate of William Schlemmer (President of Hammacher and Schlemmer) donated over \$96,000 to the hospital.