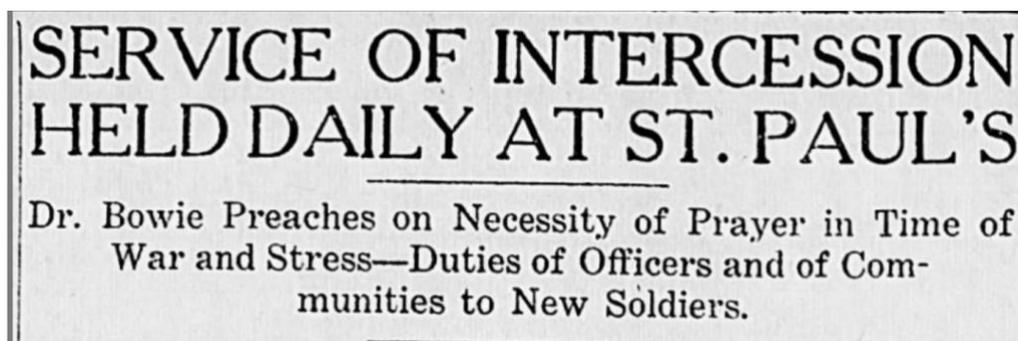


## St. Paul's and the 1918-1919 Flu Pandemic by Anne Hayes

As we face the challenges of COVID-19, a look back at how St. Paul's parishioners dealt with similar issues during the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic is helpful and in many respects inspiring.

### I. Supporting Servicemen During World War I

When the flu pandemic struck Richmond in the fall of 1918, the United States was already contending with a global conflict, having declared war against Germany and joined Allied powers in April 1917. Over eighty men from St. Paul's served in World War I, including Rector Walter Russell Bowie, who departed for France in September 1918 as chaplain of hospital Base Unit No. 45, referred to as "the McGuire unit" after its director Dr. Stuart McGuire. St. Paul's provided spiritual support for the community, holding midday prayer services and welcoming soldiers on Sundays. During the war, an American flag stood to one side of the chancel while another large flag flew from the portico with blue stars for church members in service and gold stars for those who had died. St. Paul's parishioners enthusiastically supported the war effort. John Kerr Branch, Maude Stokes Williams and Estelle Marguerite Anderson led Liberty Bond and War Savings Stamp campaigns. While chairing the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense, Mary-Cooke Branch Munford mobilized countless women to help the troops. Many St. Paul's women volunteered with the Red Cross to make hospital supplies or care for soldiers at Camp Lee in Petersburg. Kate Pleasants Minor coordinated food and fuel conservation efforts. Other women enlisted with the Women's Munition Reserve at Seven Pines, including Gertrude Skelton Hobson and Lucy Swann Tunis who were among flu cases at the facility resulting in cancellation of an October 12, 1918 Liberty Day Celebration. Even before the flu pandemic arrived, Richmonders were urged to take responsibility for their health because of nurse shortages with many health professionals overseas caring for troops.



*Richmond Times-Dispatch, 24 Sept 1917, 2*

## II. Outbreak, Service, Sacrifice, and a Memorial Window

The so-called Spanish flu virus, which likely originated at a Kansas military base, quickly spread to Richmond from Camp Lee, where nearly 48,000 soldiers were training during World War I. After initially taking a conservative approach, Richmond's chief health officer, Dr. Roy K. Flannagan, instituted social distancing measures by banning public gatherings and closing churches, schools, and some businesses. Due to fuel shortages, streets were mostly empty of traffic other than vehicles transporting patients, and health officials urged people to wear masks in public. To ease patient overload in local hospitals, John Marshall High School was converted into a 500-bed emergency hospital in October 1918. Accommodating strict segregation practices, African American patients were initially relegated to the building's poorly ventilated basement. With the urging of banker and philanthropist, Maggie L. Walker, the state provided funding to set up a separate hospital in Baker School. Opening in November, that facility was staffed by black doctors and nurses.

St. Paul's parishioners stepped up to help in a variety of ways during the highly contagious and deadly pandemic. Women who had initially sewn uniforms and other supplies for the war effort switched to preparing hospital materials as the virus spread. At the John Marshall Hospital, Dr. Stuart Michaux served as chief of staff while Drs. Herbert Mann, Beverley Randolph Tucker, and Douglas Vanderhoof treated patients -- all communicants at St. Paul's. With nurses in short supply, St. Paul's women also cared for patients at John Marshall Hospital, including recent registered-nurse graduate Juliet Dushane Talcott, who succumbed to the flu and died in October 1918. As a captain for the Red Cross Motor Corps, 22-year-old Frederica Scott Campbell ensured nearby soldiers stricken with the flu were transported to Westhampton Hospital for treatment. Moreover, at the direction of the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association, St. Paul's and St. Peter's Catholic Church opened a soup kitchen together to feed the sick as well as health care workers and those who had lost income. The initiative provided 1,218 quarts of soup in 21 days. St. Paul's Parishioner Edwin Browne Thomason wrote to Rector Bowie, proudly informing him that "everyone was willing and anxious to help all [the] sick in need or in distress." Thomason credited the young, progressive rector for inspiring this activity through a ministry which had awakened the church and city to the importance of "practical Christianity."

With schools closed, students volunteered as well. At the suggestion of Boy Scout and St. Paul's communicant, John "Jack" Langbourne Williams (1903-1918), Richmond Boy Scout troops organized an ambulance corps to help transport patients to John Marshall Hospital. Fifteen-year-old Jack attended Chamberlayne School (later named St. Christopher's) where he was captain of the Cadet Corps, which regularly drilled and prepared for future military service. He was the recipient of the school's highest leadership award. In accepting the Boy Scouts' offer of aid, Assistant Director of John Marshall Hospital, Dr. E. C. L. Miller, cautioned he could not guarantee the teenagers' safety while noting that "real service involves risk," like that undertaken by doctors and soldiers.

Jack's parents, St. Paul's parishioners E. Randolph Williams and Maude Stokes Williams, were understandably worried about their son, as evidenced by a letter Jack wrote to a friend detailing his experience at the hospital:

Mother and Father have just finished blowing me up for working all day yesterday in a big school which the city turned into an influenza hospital. Hereafter I don't crave stretcher bearing. You see some awfully sad cases, one I noticed especially. There was a poor little orphan boy, three years old, not a friend in the world, brought to the hospital by a man who left the poor little boy alone with strange doctors and nurses, His name was "Jack", that was all, and he had light hair and blue eyes. Probably his name attracted me, but I think anybody would have been touched, regardless of names, had they seen this poor little boy, stricken with a bad case of pneumonia, gazing with tearful eyes upon a crowd of bemasked doctors and nurses. Spanish "flu" is no respecter of persons and people of all races, nationalities and walks of life. My ambulance hauled nine people from one family.

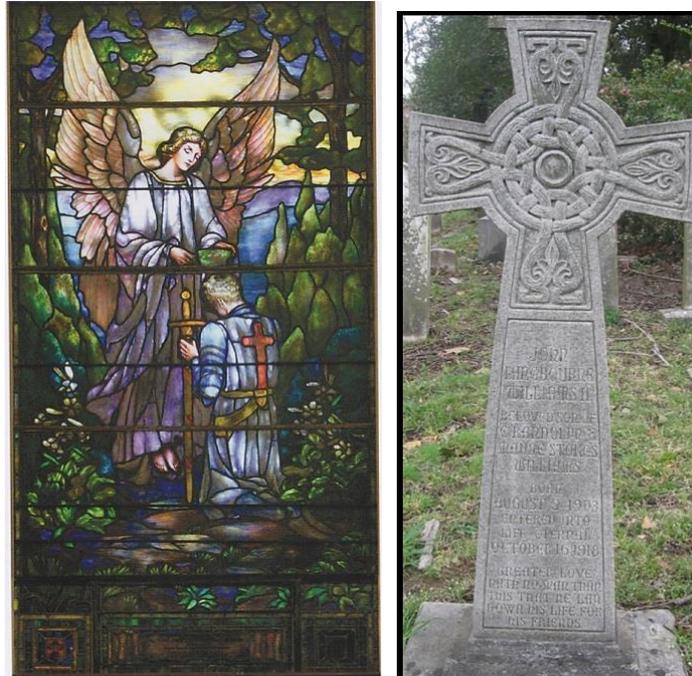
There was cause for concern. The estimated number of infected Richmonders topped 10,000 in October. Shortly after volunteering with the ambulance corps, Jack contracted the flu and died on October 16, 1918. His fellow Boy Scout troop members attended his funeral at Hollywood Cemetery and afterwards continued volunteering throughout the Fall of 1918, providing transport to more than 700 patients. For Jack's school newspaper, Headmaster Rev. Churchill G. Chamberlayne eloquently wrote about the tragic loss of such a promising and inspiring youth:

The end came, an end sudden and tragic, but one in perfect keeping with his life. On the outbreak of the present epidemic he volunteered, and was accepted, for work among the stricken. His service though short was effective—"he saved others," but like the Master in whose steps he followed with unquestioning faith, himself he did not save. A short illness—only five days—and then through peaceful sleep he entered into the presence of his Maker. . . . Separated from us for a little while he may be, but gone from us he can never be. Living now in the presence of his Lord and King, he is also living and will live in our memories; and though dead he yet speaks, and will continue throughout our lives to speak, inspiring tones to us all.

On December 1, 1918, St. Paul's held a memorial service to place gold stars on the church's service flag for two young St. Paul's communicants who, serving in the military, had recently died during WWI. One of them, Adair Pleasants Archer (1894-1918), died of the flu at Camp Grant Hospital in Illinois. With Headmaster Rev. Chamberlayne assisting in the service, a gold star in honor of young Jack Williams was also placed on a Boy Scout banner. After the congregation sang the hymn, "For All the Saints Who From Their Labours Rest," the flag and banner were flown together from the church's portico.

Ten years later, in March 1928, a stained-glass window was donated by Jack's parents in St. Paul's as a memorial to their son. In his Sunday sermon following the installation, Rector Beverley D. Tucker Jr. referred to the window as a "tribute to youth" that would provide inspiration to future young men and women. Designed and fabricated by Lamb Studios, the window depicts a young crusader kneeling before an angel who blesses and honors him with a laurel wreath. On the crusader's tabard is a red cross -- a symbol of medical service and

humanitarian aid. The inscription, accompanied by the Boy Scout insignia, reads: “Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friend.” A Celtic cross marking Jack’s grave also bears this inscription from John 15:13.



John Langbourne “Jack” Williams window, St. Paul’s, and gravestone, Hollywood Cemetery

## II. More Flu Victims and A Memorial Railing

The John Langbourne “Jack” Williams stained-glass window is not the only 1918-1919 flu pandemic memorial at St. Paul’s. The white marble communion rail was dedicated to the memory of Beverley Randolph (1883-1918) and Harriett “Hattie” Shields Randolph (1886-1918), a young St. Paul’s couple who tragically succumbed to the virus within a week of each other. Hattie was the youngest daughter of communicants Dr. Charles M. Shields (1856-1897) and Margaret New Shields (1883-1932). (The late Dr. Shields, who was known for his generosity toward patients, died two decades earlier of a respiratory illness at the age of 41, leaving behind his wife and four young children.) Designed by Gorham Company, the rail’s white marble columns are inset with blue and gold mosaic tiles that coordinate with the “Last Supper” mosaic above the altar. Brass gates on the communion rail are inscribed with the couple’s names as well as two other deceased honorees, Dr. Shields and daughter Caroline “Lina” Shields Draper (1884-1913). Margaret Shields and her surviving daughter and namesake, Margaret Shields Vaughan (1882-1939), donated the communion rail in 1919. Margaret Vaughan was also a communicant at St. Paul’s engaged in women’s auxiliary groups.



Brass gates of the Shields communion rail memorial

After the Fall 1918 influenza surge, which took the lives of these St. Paul's parishioners and many others throughout the city, the number of Richmond cases peaked and pressure mounted on government officials to lift restrictions. Richmond City Commissioner and St. Paul's communicant, Graham Hobson, oversaw the administrative board tasked with making this difficult decision. Health officer Dr. Flanagan favored reopening, while representatives of the medical community contended such action would result in hundreds of deaths. After lengthy debate, the commission voted to lift the ban after one member's abstention ended a lengthy stalemate. On November 11, 1918, which coincided with the armistice ending the World War abroad, Richmond churchgoers "once more sought their pews with thankful hearts." Following the brief reprieve from imposed isolation, Richmond flu cases again surged in December and through the winter. Overwhelmed with patients, local hospitals announced they could not accept more patients, leaving the sick to fight the virus at home or in private facilities. St. Paul's response was to hire nurse Henrietta McBryde Brogden to provide private care to congregants. The outbreak eventually subsided worldwide in 1919, leaving in its wake 675,000 fatalities across the United States. In the Commonwealth, more than 15,000 perished, among them just over 1,000 Richmonders.

Facing the current pandemic 100 years later, we can be thankful for modern medical research and the promise of a vaccine. Conveniences like Zoom and Facebook allow us to continue participating in activities like church services from the safety of our homes. Once again, front line workers are risking their lives while treating patients, sanitizing hospitals, stocking shelves, and performing other essential tasks. Like the 1918-1919 pandemic, many Americans are experiencing financial hardships as national, state, and local leaders struggle to gauge when to lift restrictions. As young Jack Williams and other St. Paul's members did years ago, we can all support each other and our community through prayer, volunteering, and providing financial assistance to those in need.

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