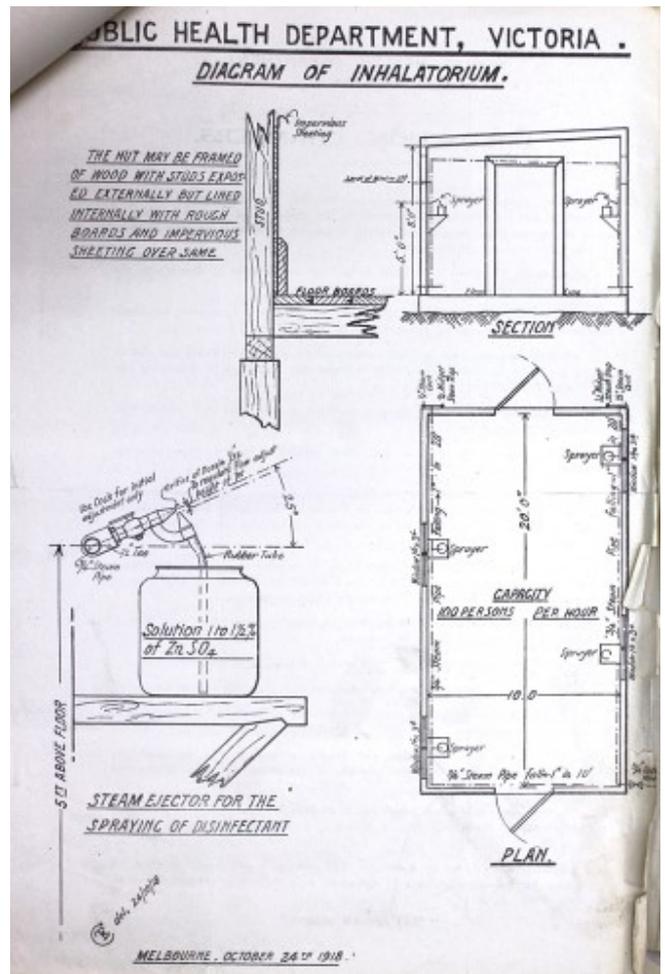
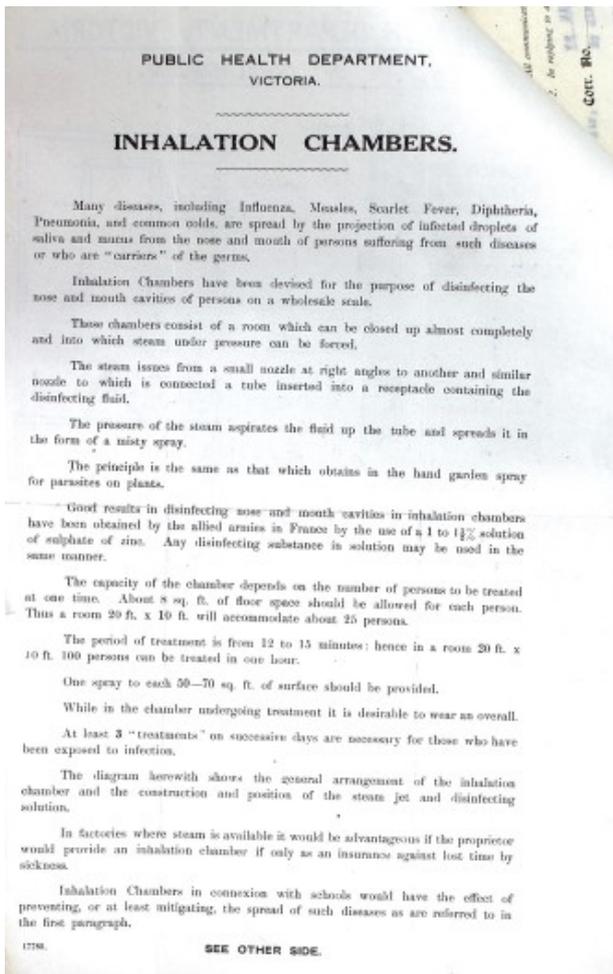
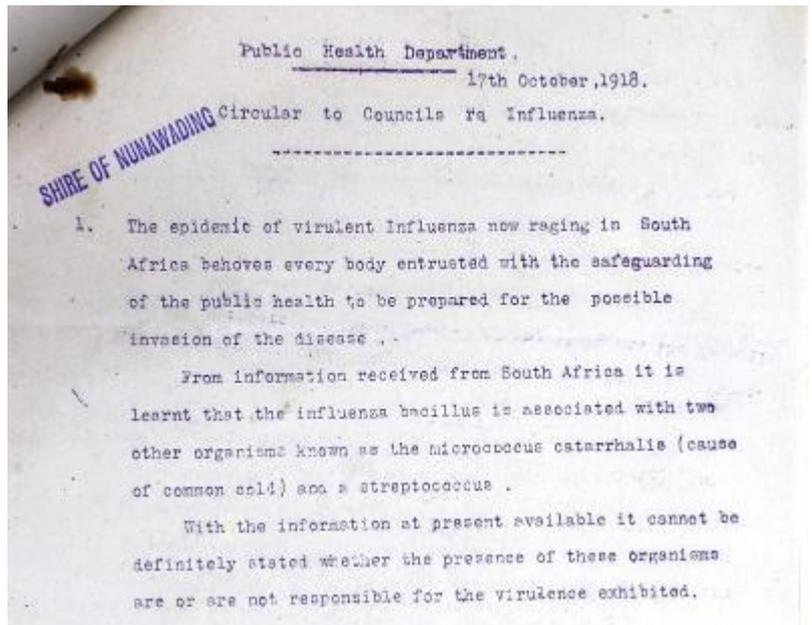


# The 1919 influenza outbreak in Whitehorse, then known as the Shire of Nunawading

In the latter half of 1918, health authorities became aware of the world-wide spread of what was termed Spanish Influenza. In Victoria, the Public Health Department commenced issuing circulars to municipal councils in October, initially explaining what had happened so far.

The Department subsequently set out various instructions that Councils were to follow in the event of an outbreak of the disease in Victoria. One circular included instructions and a diagram of how to set up Inhalation Chambers, to enable disinfection of people's nose and mouth cavities.



Circular from the Public Health Department

Another Government memo to all Councils was a request to prepare details of local buildings that could be used as a temporary hospital to house the influenza patients, compile a list of equipment that would be needed for the hospitals, and organize volunteer nurses and ambulances. As Doncaster Council wrote to the Shire however:

The Committee of this Council appointed to deal with matters in connection with the above, has interviewed the Public Health Department regarding the establishment of a temporary hospital in this district.

Owing to the lack of an adequate water supply and proper sanitary facilities, it is considered impossible to establish a hospital here, and we are advised by the Dept. to endeavor to arrange to work in conjunction with the adjoining Municipalities in connection with the matter.

I have to request, therefore, that your Council will consider the allowing of this Municipality to join with them in this matter. The cost of establishment and maintenance costs to be considered- say for establishment on a pro rata population basis, and for maintenance according to the number of patients from each Municipality - or such other basis as may be arranged. Should your Council agree to the proposed amalgamation, it is thought advisable that to save time we should be represented on the controlling committee.

Yours faithfully,  
*R. Robinson*  
Shire Secretary.

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School 3943, Mont Albert.

T. 19/16. Education Department,  
Melbourne, 8th. February 1919.

S i r,

With reference to your representations in the matter, I beg, by direction of the Honorable the Minister, to inform you that the request for the use of the above-named State School building by the local Health authorities in the event of the occasion demanding the provision of special hospital accommodation for influenza patients has been approved.

Mr. Hutchinson desires me to say that the use of the building is granted on the understanding that the Municipal authorities will undertake to exercise proper supervision over the building and Departmental property, that any damage to the building or fittings will be made good, and that the building will be left in a proper sanitary condition after occupancy.

Yours obediently,  
*C. Hutchinson*  
pro Director.

The Shire Secretary,  
Shire Hall,  
BOX HILL.

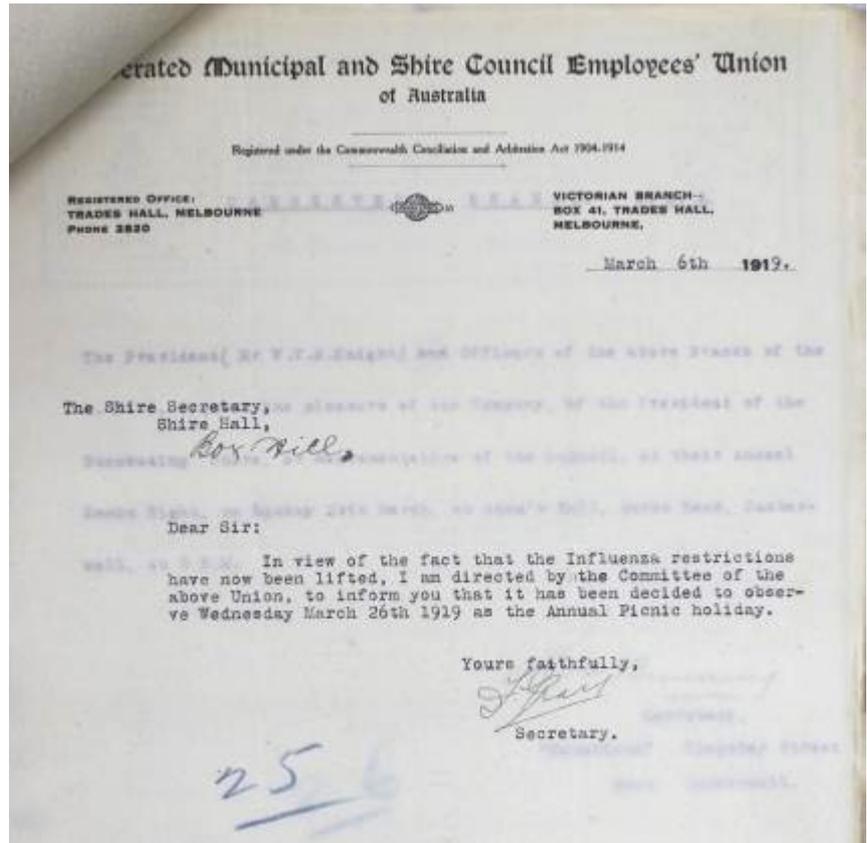
24

The newly built Mont Albert Primary School was selected as a suitable site for a local hospital to house influenza patients, and Education Department approval was granted.

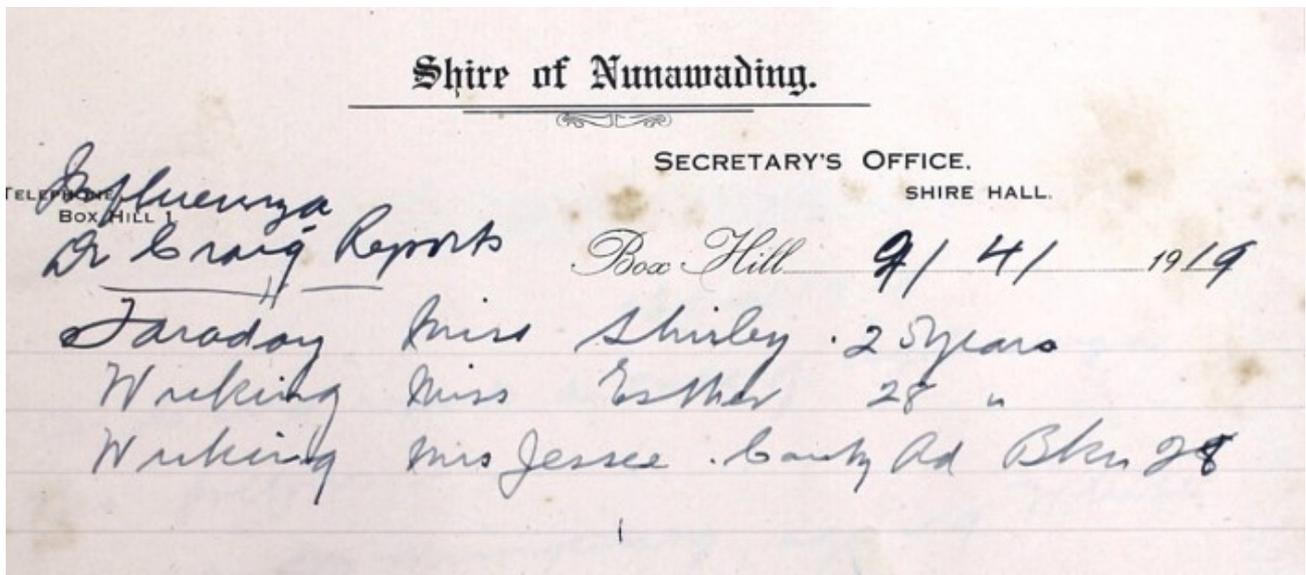
In late November 1918 the Shire Secretary reported to the Council that 2,000 copies of the Health Department material had been distributed through the schools. In December the Health Officer, Dr Alfred Vaughan, advised Council to apply for the 'special influenza vaccine' that the government was making available to all Councils.

In March 1919 the State government lifted restrictions, believing that the pandemic had run its course. This was a premature move, as cases subsequently increased.

In April 1919 the Health Department requested Councils to provide particulars of the number of influenza inoculations [vaccinations] that had taken place in their municipality. The Health Officer reported that he had inoculated 689 people.



Another Circular required Councils to send daily lists to the Public Health Department, giving details of the name, age, sex and address of every person diagnosed with influenza. A system was already in place for local doctors to advise Council when an infectious disease was diagnosed, and Councils were to use a similar arrangement to compile the lists for the Health Department. Some lists sent in by doctors were barely decipherable:



In May 1919 the Department finally issued a special form that doctors should use when reporting an influenza case:

**PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT.**  
**Report of a Case of Influenza.**

to the Municipal Clerk, Municipality of Murray

I hereby report the following case of Influenza, and supply the required particulars

Name Frank Bamford

Address Carrymore Bk. The

Age 23 Sex M

Is patient satisfactorily isolated? Yes Should patient be removed to hospital? No

If aid is required state nature of same

Observations (if any) 79

Date 3/17/19 A.R. Richards  
Medical Practitioner.

In the same month, the Department suggested that Councils should set up citizens committees to prepare for any worsening of the outbreak.

Central Influenza Organisation,  
Public Health Department,  
Melbourne, 20th May, 1919.

Circular to Clerks of all  
Municipalities.

Dear Sir,

In order that the Department may have full information of the measures taken in each municipality in preventing and relieving the present epidemic, the Acting Minister of Public Health will be glad if you will forward to me as early as possible particulars of any organisations of citizens created in your municipality, with the names and addresses of the Secretaries of such Committee or Sub-committees, and the duties assigned to each body.

It is unnecessary for me to urge that, in the event of the epidemic assuming much larger proportions, which is not improbable on the evidence of other countries, the most complete organisation of citizens in each municipality will be necessary, and, if these committees are to be efficient, they must be created in advance. This Department will be glad to give advice and assistance in the creation of such citizen activities if approached through the municipalities.

Yours faithfully,  
A.R. Richards  
Secretary.

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The Municipal Clerk.

An Influenza Committee was set up, consisting of Councillors Garrett, Young, Blood and Husband, who held one meeting.

S H I R E                      O F                      N U N A W A D I N G

S H I R E H A L L

B O X H I L L, 27th May 1919

I N F L U E N Z A C O M M I T T E E ' S R E P O R T

Mr President, & Gentlemen/-

Your Committee has to report having met on the 20th instant, when there were present, Cr Garrett in the Chair, Crs Young, Blood, and Husband.

After careful consideration of the matters submitted, your Committee decided to recommend,-

1. That arrangements be made with a Doctor to give a Lecture on Influenza as suggested by the Public Health Dept.
2. That the services of a nurse be obtained, and retained for cases ~~xxx~~ arising of influenza in the Shire, requiring her ~~xxxxx~~ attention.
3. That the Local Medical practitioners be written to, and asked to report any cases that come under their notice where food, or other necessaries are required.
4. That the Public Health Dept be informed the Council does not anticipate any difficulty in obtaining the use of motor cars, for the transport of local cases of influenza, requiring removal.
5. That the various Red Cross Societies in the Shire, be written to, and asked, if the members would be prepared to assist in the matter of nursing, ~~be~~ in cases of influenza, should the necessity arise.

Signed on behalf of the Committee

W. Garrett Chairman

In July 1919 William Webster, Head Teacher at Mitcham State School reported that there were 'only 54 pupils at school out of 180' while the Head Teacher at Vermont State School reported similar poor figures, '77 out of 151 on the roll'.

The images, and source of the information above, is Council correspondence, held at the Public Record Office, and researched by Society secretary Helen Harris OAM in 2019. The correspondence also contains the original forms and lists completed by doctors, and digital images have been made of all of them. An alphabetical list has been compiled of details of 372 people and is available online under the *Search our Collections* tag. From the list it can be seen that 23 boys and two staff from the Salvation Army Home came down with the disease, and that a returned soldier, Private Sloan, infected five members of his family when he visited the family home in Mersey Street, Box Hill. The worst affected family seems to have been that of Fankhauser, whose seven members were diagnosed with influenza.

At the end of the year, the Health Officer, Dr Alfred Vaughan, completed his usual annual report. He made the following comments regarding the local influenza outbreak:

'In common with the rest of the State, the epidemic of Influenza occurred in a severe form throughout the year and 14 deaths were recorded in the Shire from this cause.'

Documentation exists for five of those deaths:

Alexander BELL, 50 years, 204 Elgar Road Box Hill

Cecilia Kate M. FORRESTER, 40 years, 15 Russell Street Surrey Hills

Margaret KENYON, 28 years, c/- Mrs Treverson, Haines Street Mitcham

Mrs MERRETT [Jnr], no age given, Springvale Road Nunawading

Frederick STARLING, 29 years, 68 Carrington Road Box Hill