NZIS Symposium 8 Feb 2018

NEW ZEALAND FAMILIES IN THE 1918 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Professor Geoffrey W. Rice  FRHistS
University of Canterbury
Christchurch, NZ
A slim academic text, 1988

Ten years of part-time research & interviews

First study of 1918 pandemic in the world based on analysis of individual death certificates

But no photos
BLACK NOVEMBER
The 1918 influenza pandemic in New Zealand

Geoffrey W. Rice

Second enlarged edition 2005

3 new chapters 327pp

lots of photos, tables and graphs

lots of interviews

now available as an e-book from Canterbury University Press
MANY NEW ZEALAND FAMILIES WERE AFFECTED
by the 1918 influenza pandemic. In the space of about six
weeks, over 6000 Pakeha died and an estimated 200 Maori.
This equals nearly half of the civilian population of New Zealand.
Soldiers killed in the First World War. Yet those were
civilians, dying in the first month of peace.
This was New Zealand’s worst-ever public health disaster.
The whole country seemed to shift into overdrive for several weeks
in November 1918. Because the victims had returned Black
when they died, many believed it was the plague.
Could it happen again? The risk of another major influenza
pandemic is even greater now, thanks to international jet travel.
Global surveillance should improve, warning
and we now have antiviral drugs and antibiotics to deal with the secondary pneumonia that was
the real killer in 1918. But do we have the systems in place to deal with another massive health crisis?

This book looks how we coped back in 1918 – the response of public health officials, how the sick
were nursed, how thousands of convalescents were fed and the lessons learned that may still be
relevant today. It was inspiring and humbling story that all New Zealanders need to know about.

DR. GEOFFREY RICE was Professor of History at the University of Canterbury until his retirement in 2012. This
book is a condensed and updated version of his 2008 work Black Remember. The 1918 influenza pandemic in New Zealand,
which won acclaim in the History category of the Montana NZ Book Awards. In 2006 New Zealand
that there are new sections on memorials and recent influenza research.

Updated & condensed version: BLACK FLU 1918 (2017) 96pp
European NZ deaths in 1918 pandemic: 6,671
Death rate from population 1.1 million: 6 per 1000

Māori registered deaths: 1,679
Reported but not registered: 481 Total 2,160

Estimated Māori mortality: 2,500
Death rate from population of 51,000: 49 per 1000

Grand total NZ deaths: 8,831 but probably c. 9,000
Christchurch: medicine depot & bike-shed inhalation chamber
Orphanism in the 1918 influenza pandemic in NZ:

Pakeha parents with offspring who died:
Males 1,528  Females 969  TOTAL: 2,497
Children under 20 deprived of one parent:
0-4 yrs 2,070
5-9 1,988
10-14 1,384
15-19 973
6,415  Children losing both parents: 135
TOTAL: 6,550
Registered Māori deaths: 1,679
Reported but not registered: 481 TOTAL: 2,160

Māori male orphans: 1,083 Female: 1,008 TOTAL: 2,091

Māori orphans usually cared for by members of whanau

Huge impact on some families:

Orauta, near Kawakawa: 14 deaths from just 3 families

Gum-digger at Te Hapua: buried his wife, his brother, his son and 2 daughters.
Figure 10.1 Age-specific death rates (European)
Remarriage: study of Christchurch victims

A quarter of those made widows or widowers by the 1918 flu had remarried by 1923

Higher proportion of those without children remarried by 1923: 57%

But a majority of those who lost a partner never remarried: 3/4

Similar impact to that of war: young women who had lost a boyfriend or a fiancé stayed faithful to their first love and never married: ‘maiden aunts’ and spinster school teachers were numerous in 1920s and 30s.
Tom & Annie Holt, Dunedin

he worked on the railways

both died on same day, 26 Nov. from pandemic flu/pneumonia

Railway staff raised money for the orphans
They left five girls: (from left) Isabella, Edna, Phyllis, Ruby; in front Helen (‘Nellie’)

Tom’s sisters took the two eldest; Grandmother Holt took the three youngest for 4 years; then Tom’s other 3 sisters took them in until they married.
The Wetherall family, Heathcote, Christchurch, in 1914: Back row, from left: Hector, John, Bill, Annie, James, Rosina, George, Jane. Front row: Olive, Robert, Jessie, Ada, Robina, Frank. John & George were killed in France; Robina, Hector & Jane died in 1918 flu.
Rosina became Mrs Burberry (she had kept this photo)

Her father Robert was shattered by his losses, and died aged 65; the farm in Heathcote was sold

The younger girls were taken in by their older married sisters

The males scattered to find work and lost touch with their sisters

Only 2 Wetheralls now left in Christchurch phone book
Mrs Elizabeth Corbett (née Carnachan) died aged 29; baby Sidney survived.

Her brother Angus died in Featherston Camp aged 24

Elinor & Sidney about 1921
Alfred & Ivy Connor
married Feb 1917
baby Ivy-May born 21 July 1918
Ivy died in the 1918 flu pandemic
Grandmother Fulford looked after Ivy-May until Gran died; child now 9

Alfred was an army cook until April 1919, then at Wellington Hospital and Midland Hotel: child boarded with friends, but he saw her every day.

He never remarried: died aged 81, remembered as a wise, gentle, caring father who hand-sewed her dresses
Meads family, Midhurst, c. 1900. From left: Andrew, Harold, Olive, Ronald and Jane.
Both parents had the flu badly: Andrew was delirious, but survived

Mother Jane was pregnant, and died.

Andrew’s sister came out from Stratford to help nurse the family, and never caught the flu

The teenagers had mild flu; struggled to keep milking the cows

Younger children unaffected, but:

‘It affected us all, for life was so different without Mum’.
Meads family in late 1920s: Back row Alex, Fred, Eliza, Ron, Olive, Ethel, Harold. Front row Eva, Andrew, Greta
Ivy Driffell: young nurse at Rawene Hospital, Northland, in 1918

A good rider, so she was sent to help in the remote coastal villages

‘No doctors, no nurses, no chemists, no antibiotics in those parts’: she had ‘a bottle of brandy and lots of aspirins’

Many had died before any help arrived; bodies wrapped in sheets and buried quickly; no coffins, no tangi

‘It was impossible to nurse them properly’; too many to cope with; the well ones looked after the sick, but didn’t know what to do

Orphans were taken into the whanau (extended family) and cared for by aunts and uncles
Unknown Māori child’s burial, c. 1910
Impact on population growth very slight: less than 1% mortality
Steep increase in Pakeha population 1921-6, then levels off in Depression
Māori population had grown again by 1926 Census, and kept on growing