

Coast cities through the fall and made its way to Portland in October, it was only a matter of time before it spread to small Oregon communities.

Tribal members in Siletz and around the Americas understand the impact of epidemic disease, remembered in our bones and recorded in the too-short lives on too many headstones.

The elders alive at that time were survivors of waves of smallpox, malaria, tuberculosis, older strains of flu and other diseases that had been decimating Oregon Tribal communities since the 1700s or earlier. They had witnessed the worst-case scenario as few people ever had. So what, if anything, could a small reservation town do to blunt the force of such a calamity?

Quite a lot, it turns out.

We happen to know about the measures we took then because of Dr. Frank M. Carter. Slim and towering at six-foot-four, Carter first came to Siletz as agency physician just out of medical school in 1874. He served on and off in that role and around Lincoln County until his death in 1937.

In 1918 he was our doctor and, on the side, wrote the weekly column about goings-on in Siletz for the Lincoln County Leader. For much of the winter of 1918-1919, the space that usually recorded visitors, weddings, dances, and school plays gave way to recounting Siletz's efforts to keep the deadly new flu at bay.

The disease first arrived with someone passing through Siletz from Portland in mid-December; two families fell ill and were placed under quarantine. This held for a few weeks, until a Christmas dance at the Upper Farm schoolhouse. An unwitting sick person must have joined the festivities and cases began spreading around Siletz.

"The plan from the start," Carter explained, "was to isolate and quarantine the sick, and to prevent the assembling

of crowds." Schools stayed closed after the Christmas holidays, churches and the Siletz Grange cancelled meetings.

Patients had to be forced to stay in bed for 10-12 days, barred from going out "for any purpose whatever" to get past the risk of dangerous complications and to prevent further outbreaks. Cities all over the world had disastrous trouble enforcing public health rules but "knowing the danger of the disease," Siletz people "complied willingly with these requirements."

As Carter put it, the discipline and drive required to protect everyone meant that a "good intelligent nurse is indispensable." He found that good nurse in Agnes Newberry Thompson – an ancestor to many Tribal members.

Interviewed in the 1940s, she explained that she and Dr. Carter rapidly converted the disused school dormitory on Government Hill into a temporary hospital to treat and isolate sick patients. She stayed tirelessly on her feet, calming fevers and chills, keeping fires stoked and patients resting, and wrapping patients in "a big mustard plaster" to sooth their aching bodies. Rather than confining herself to her large new ward, she washed up and rode out on horseback to treat patients confined to their homes.

By late January when people began to recover and new infections dropped off, Agnes and Dr. Carter had seen about 150 cases in and around Siletz, Indians and whites included. The Leader reports three deaths from influenza in and around Siletz, but every patient who fell under Agnes and Dr. Carter's direct care survived.

Other Oregon communities give us cautionary tales from the same pandemic, where the disease overwhelmed caregivers or order broke down.

At Chemawa Indian School, the crowded dormitories and lack of leadership from school administration overwhelmed the care and skill of their



Courtesy photo from Lincoln County Historical Society

Dr. Frank M. Carter

experienced frontier doctor Mary Canaga Rowland and her nurse, Coquille Tribal ancestor Daisy Wasson Coddling. They saw 536 cases and 19 students died.

In Portland, the confusing orders of four separate health authorities led to three distinct spikes in the death rate between November and March.

As February settled in over Siletz, now through the worst with as little tragedy as anyone could hope for, people slowly and cautiously returned to their lives.

When schools reopened on Jan. 21, many parents kept their children home at first. Even then, they had to get by without the high school principal, who caught the flu visiting family in Seattle and had to recover there in isolation for several weeks.

On Feb. 2, the Siletz Grange met to prepare for the new planting season. On Feb. 8, a stormy Saturday night, a big crowd gathered at Metcalf Hall to

celebrate a delayed but welcome Feather Dance.

"The winter has been so mild and pleasant," Carter wrote on Feb. 21. "Sickness has been light except the flu, and that was very mild" compared to the heart-breaking seasons of sickness he had seen in his 35 years on the reservation.

Although no one then knew the term social distancing, the simple practical measures our community took 101 years ago seem strikingly contemporary. People even considered masks. But, Carter said, almost no one wore them except "Mrs. Alec Catfish, who says she wants to be in fashion with outside people."

If we could get through a deadly global pandemic with calm, organization and good humor – armed with only collective resolve, straw beds and mustard plaster – I know our leaders, our healers and our community can do the same today. Take good care.



Be safe. Stay home. Stay well.

Vacancy for Housing Standing Committee

Open Until Filled

Any Tribal member interested in consideration to serve on a Tribal Standing Committee is encouraged to fill out this form and return to the council office.

Please **mail or fax** your application to Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Attn: Executive Secretary to Tribal Council, P.O. Box 549, Siletz, OR 97380-0549; fax: 541-444-8325.

Name: _____ Roll No: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Telephone: Day () _____ Evening () _____

If you have any questions, please call Tami Miner, executive secretary to Tribal Council, at 800-922-1399, ext. 1203, or 541-444-8203.