

Scarlet Fever in 1912

In reading the Monroe papers, I found references to scarlet fever as early as 1865 and as late as 1917 (the last year of papers that I've read so far). For some reason, the many references to scarlet fever in 1912 caught my attention and are the ones that will be shared here.

Scarlet fever is a bacterial illness that develops in some people who have strep throat. The bacterial infection that causes scarlet fever is contagious. Kids with scarlet fever can spread the bacteria to others through sneezing and coughing. Also known as scarlatina, scarlet fever features a bright red rash that covers most of the body. Scarlet fever is almost always accompanied by a sore throat and a high fever. Historically, scarlet fever resulted in death in 15 to 20% of those affected. However, scarlet fever is no longer associated with the deadly epidemics that made it so feared in the 1800s. Since the advent of antibiotic therapy, the mortality rate for scarlet fever has been less than 1%.

The first reference I found was to say that Banner School, a rural school in Jordan Township, reopened on February 19 after a vacation of two weeks because of scarlet fever.

It was announced on Monday, March 25 that East School would be closed on Tuesday so the building could be fumigated on Monday evening. One of the pupils was ill with scarlet fever and another case was under surveillance. The kindergarten room at the school was closed shortly after the assembling of school on Wednesday morning because of the fumes of formaldehyde left from the fumigation. No new cases had been reported at that time.

By Saturday it was announced that scarlet fever was an epidemic with 15 cases in the city. Both "moving picture shows" were ordered closed and a ban was placed on holding Sunday school in any churches the next day. The city board of health held a meeting in the office of City Health Officer W. B. Gnagi "for the purpose of taking such action as was deemed necessary to stamp out the scarlet fever epidemic that is fast spreading in the city."

Four new cases had been reported that day and those homes, all in the northeast part of Monroe, were quarantined. The movie theaters were to be fumigated on Sunday. The school had closed on Friday for the regular week-long spring vacation. If a great number of new cases were to develop, the schools would remain closed for another week or two. All of the school buildings were also to be fumigated early the following week.

There were 15 cases of scarlet fever in the city by April 2. The home of R. M. Austin, on what is now 21st Avenue, was then the most recent to be quarantined. Their son was said to have had the disease in a mild form, but the home had not been quarantined as the case had not been diagnosed as scarlet fever at first. It had been discovered on Friday that the boy's skin was peeling off, which was said to be a positive indication of scarlet fever.

Naomi Mathers was taken ill that Saturday morning. Other homes quarantined that day were Richard Stewart, Jacob Baumgartner, and E. M. Thorp, all in the First Ward. The children who were ill in these homes were Winogene Stewart, Nellie Baumgartner, and Grace Thorp. The home of Bert Mathers on north 16th Avenue was then placed on quarantine late in the afternoon.

The board of health strictly forbade holding Sunday school in any of the churches in the city that Sunday. The gathering of children in public places or homes was also discouraged until the epidemic was over. However, church services were not interfered with.

The board of education decided on the afternoon of April 2 to keep the public schools closed for another week to guard against the spread of scarlet fever. Schools had to add an extra week in June to make up for this time lost. The public library had also been closed because of the epidemic. It was expected that it may not reopen for a couple more weeks. Gnagi reported that there were still 15 cases, but no new cases had been reported. The board of health discouraged children under the age of 16 from frequenting public places. None were allowed at the movie theaters, in bowling alleys, or in billiard halls.

The quarantine at the home of Bert Sickinger on East Summit was raised on April 13 since their daughter, Josephine, had recovered from an attack of scarlet fever. The quarantine on the home of Ed Walters was raised late that afternoon since Mr. Walters had "about recovered from a severe illness of scarlet fever."

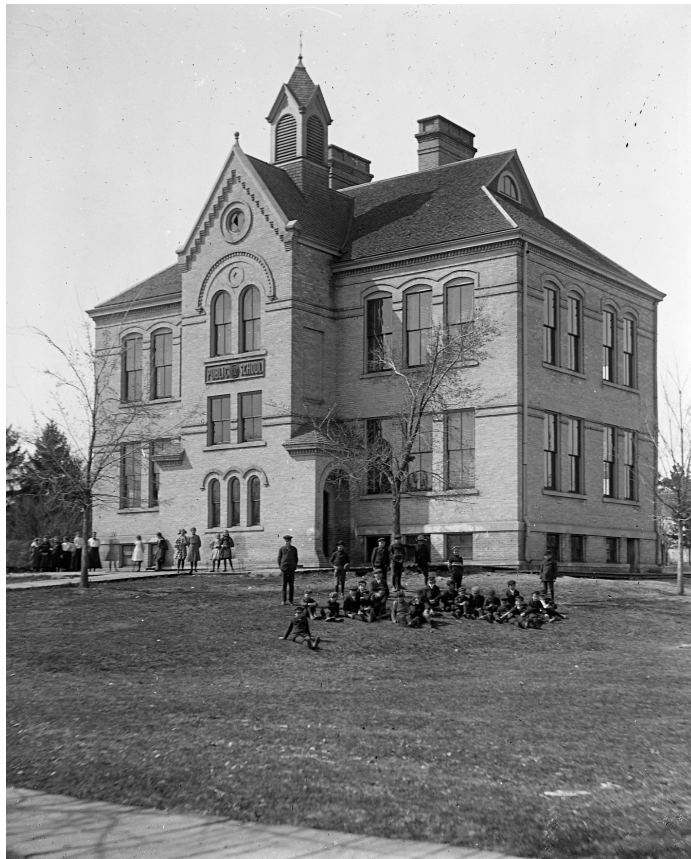
It was also announced on April 13 that the Sunday schools in the city would reopen after having been closed for two weeks. The ban placed on children attending moving picture theaters was also lifted.

The school reconvened on Monday after having two weeks off. At that time, no new cases had appeared and the quarantine had been raised in several of the homes in which children had been ill with the disease.

By April 20, the quarantine at the home of Richard Stewart, on 21st Avenue, was raised since his daughter, Winogene, had recovered from the illness. The quarantine on the home of Bert Mathers was raised on Saturday. These were the last of 11 quarantines resulting from the epidemic to be raised.

However, the home of Emil Pandow was quarantined by Gnagi on Saturday evening, April 20 because Nellie Pandow had the disease. She had been slightly indisposed the previous week and remained away from school on Thursday with a sore throat, but attended on Friday. She had been downtown on Saturday.

Occasional cases of the disease were written about in the papers in subsequent years, but I noticed nothing more reported in 1912.



Scarlet fever was quite common in Monroe's First Ward in 1912. East School had to be closed and fumigated in late March to help prevent the spread of this disease, which could cause a child's skin to be peeled off. East Park now occupies the large block between 22nd and 24th Avenues and 9th and 10th Streets where East School had stood for almost 100 years.