CHAPTER THREE
Part III: Influenza

A few days after the S.A.T.C. recruits had been sworn in, Keith and the rest of the campus had another crisis to deal with - the Spanish Flu. In 1918-1919, this pandemic raged across the world, killing more than the Great War. It was particularly deadly for those between the ages of 20 and 40 and therefore a serious threat to the school.

Many Indiana residents had come down with the flu in the fall of 1918 and some died of the illness or other complications resulting from it. Still, Keith was surprised on October 4, 1918, when the County Board of Health put the school under a strict quarantine. As Keith described it in a letter found in his correspondence:

“Last Saturday, on account of the influenza, they clapped down quarantine on us in addition to closing the schools, moving picture theaters, and clubs and also all saloons of the town. That makes it rather difficult for us to arrange our affairs and still keep our schools going. The so-called day students were given the choice of moving in or staying out. Most of them moved in and so we are full to the gun wales again temporarily. ... The most difficult matter to adjust is in the case of a death or serious illness of a relative of a student. It seems almost incredible, but we have had five bona fide deaths of immediate relatives since last Saturday and our students have had to go home.”

Marion Spencer, who had charge of a hall of young women, recorded the emotional strain caused by the quarantine, fear of the disease and the death of family members. At the beginning of the quarantine she wrote:
“I am feeling fine, but I think you ought to see the excitement in this school. A strict quarantine has been put on it and on the town for Spanish influenza. Town girls can’t go to their homes or if they do they can’t come back. The S.A.T.C. men are all about as guards, so that no one enters or leaves the campus. If you want anything to eat you can go to the hedge and have Sharkey’s bring it to the hedge. The very thought of it makes me hungry. One of the girls’ brother’s funeral was to be to-day and naturally she was not permitted to leave. She felt so badly too. Chapel, the school dances, and all gatherings are called off.

“(October 7, 1918)

On October 13th, her tone became more serious:

“Over yesterday the disease seems to have gotten a start 11 girls getting it yesterday. None on my hall have it but the infirmary is full of boys and the one corridor above chapel has been turned into a girls’ ward. I am keeping my girls in their hall as much as possible. Perhaps they will be safe. ... Fright seems to be the hardest thing to fight among the girls. Then too their parents write such frightening letters to them telling of the bad conditions in their
homes. Some of these little mining towns are having a terrible time. “ (October 13, 1918)

Though some communities saw many deaths from the flu, ISNS escaped with few infections and only one death. Keith believed that the disease had been controlled by taking the cases quickly away from those not infected and keeping them away from general student body. Keith reported:

“We have had altogether since Oct. 4th, about thirty cases of all kinds in our infirmary... We lost one girl, a Miss Emily Bryson, of Uniontown. From the first her case was different. The parents were summoned and in a little while she was removed to the city hospital where seven days later she died of pleura-pneumonia.” (December 23, 1918)

Students noted their gratitude for the expert nursing care they received in the crisis in the 1919 yearbook. They dedicated that issue to Miss Mary E. Kelso, the head nurse who had worked on campus for a decade prior to the onset of the epidemic. They declared: “Our beloved friend and nurse, Miss Kelso... The class of nineteen hundred nineteen in particular will ever remember Miss Kelso for her skillful management of the influenza situation, and the sacrifice of her desire to become a Red Cross Nurse. Throughout the period of the epidemic, she nursed not only the students of the school but also those enrolled in the Student Army Training Corps.”

The Model School was closed and remained so for the entire month of October. Student teachers still went to the school every day and worked with the critic teachers on subject matter and methods, but model school students didn’t return until November 5.