

Country Squires of New London, NH
Minutes for the Meeting on Thursday, January 9, 2020 at Eastman

***Call to Order:** President Joseph Watts called the meeting to order at noon welcoming members, guests, and our guest speaker, Squire Paul Etkind.

***Invocation:** Past President Tom Vannata gave the invocation. In his words, he gave thanks for all we have and for our good fortune.

***Luncheon:** We enjoyed our lunch of salad, chicken parmesan with pasta, and chocolate cake.

***Guests and New Members:** President Joe Watts opened the meeting at 1 PM by asking members to introduce their guests.

- Jon Bellis introduced Pete Savickas, who moved to the Upper Valley from Rhode Island last year. He has many hobbies and interests.
- Joe Watts introduced Andy Schmidt, a retired State Representative who lived in Eastman for 14 years. He has lived in New London for the past three years.
- Bruce Barton introduced Garrett Keene, who has lived in the area for the past five years. He retired after a career with Dell Technologies. Is a veteran who served from 1971-76. He currently volunteers with the Ski Patrol.

***Speaker and Presentation:** Art Rosen initially spoke about why Bill Weld was not our speaker at this meeting. Some of Weld's people booked his appearance at the Squires meeting, but it appears that another group of his people booked Mr. Weld for a talk in Iowa on the same day. Mr. Weld's staff sent a written apology to the Squires for this communications breakdown in their own office. Instead, Paul Etkind agreed to move his talk about influenza, which was scheduled for the February 2020 meeting, to January.

Morris Edwards introduced today's speaker. Dr. Paul Etkind is a retired public health epidemiologist who focused on infectious diseases. He worked for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the City of Nashua, and two non-profit public health membership organizations in Washington, DC. He graduated from Clark University in Worcester, MA and earned his Masters and doctoral degrees in epidemiology from Yale University.

Paul discussed influenza, ("Mother Nature's worst weapon of mass disease, or WMD") which is an issue that can be so concerning that it keeps public health officials up at night. He outlined the talk with a discussion of its biology, it's natural history, it's

record in human history, and its infamy from the greatest pandemic ever recorded, that of the pandemic of 1918, often referred to as “Spanish flu.”

Influenza is an orthomyxovirus that is usually carried by birds and a few mammals, most notably horses and swine. It is unusual because it is an RNA, not a DNA, virus. The virus exhibits a tremendous capability to recombine with other strains to rapidly create new strains of influenza virus. RNA reproduces very quickly, so new strains are also easier to create with mutations and errors during replications.

The natural reservoir of influenza virus are migratory birds. There are eight global “fly ways” for migratory birds, making it possible for birds to have contact with other birds from elsewhere in the world and exchange influenza viruses, thus creating new strains. These migratory birds can have contact with domestic mammals, who can also become infected with the bird strains. Mixing with mammals can create new strains that can create disease within humans (“virulence”) and also be easily transmitted from person to person (“pathogenicity”). Often, the changes between circulating strains are minor. This is called “antigenic drift” and many people will have partial immunity from the new strain because of previous infection with similar strains or previous immunization against similar strains. If a brand-new, never-before encountered strain of virus is created, it is called “antigenic shift.” Few, if any, people will have any immune protection against such a strain of virus. If a new strain of virus is easily transmitted from person to person and produces severe disease, many people are likely to become sick and die.

Evidence of influenza outbreaks exist in the historical record going back to 412 BCE. The first pandemic was reliably recorded in 1694, and the first “modern” pandemic was recorded in 1889-92. This was referred to as a “modern” pandemic because it was the first that could be followed in near-real time because of reporting carried over telegraph. Newsprint was cheap and literacy was increasing so more people could follow accounts of the diseases from other lands.

The pandemic of 1918 produced disease that had no precedence and has not been seen since. It killed unprecedented numbers of people. It killed swiftly, often in a matter of hours. It shook the core of social cohesion, and societies were on the verge of collapse before it waned. By the numbers, the 1918 pandemic looked like this in the US:

- Number infected: ~25 million
- Number of deaths: ~675,000; More died than in all of the US’ 20th century wars combined

- % of flu deaths age 8 or less: 20
- Decrease in life expectancy: 12 years
- % of US military deaths in WW 1 caused by the flu: 50
- Near collapse of social order

In the World:

- ~50 million dead - almost all locations touched by this outbreak
- ? End of WW I

We tend to focus on the drama of pandemics. We need to keep in mind that, even in a year of antigenic drift (often called “seasonal flu”), we usually see between 30,000 - 35,000 excess deaths. Even when seeing this kind of impact, we rarely achieve an immunization rate of more than 50% in the US.

The next pandemic is not a matter of “if,” it is a matter of “when.” Paul went on to outline what we need to do and what we are trying to do to either prevent the next one or to manage it more successfully.

***Post-talk Presentation:** Following Dr. Etkind’s talk, President Joe Watts presented him with the often imitated, always envied, and most prestigious Squires Mug.

***New Business:**

Our next meeting will be held on Thursday, February 13 at Eastman. The speaker will be Tom Hull, a career diplomat with the State Department. He was, among other posts, the Ambassador to Sierra Leone. Tom will speak to the work of diplomats worldwide.

*** A Motion to Adjourn was called for and seconded thus ending the meeting.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul Etkind, Secretary
9 January 2020