

Voice from the Vault

By Gregory Sanford, State Archivist

World Series and Record Series: 1918 in the State Archives

I am writing this month's column as the Red Sox Nation awaits within a victory of winning the World Series, agonizing over the gulf between expectation and experience. News media are scurrying about in search of aged citizens who may have a living memory of the last Red Sox Series victory in 1918. Down in the vault, the Vermont of 1918 quietly persists.

In 1915 Vermont switched the date of its general election from September to November and the convening of government from October to January. Since the legislature only met every other year, the legislature had adjourned back in 1917 and did not meet in 1918. Horace Graham of Craftsbury, the long serving auditor of accounts, occupied the governor's chair. In his inaugural he had celebrated the new law that required state officers to maintain year round offices in Montpelier, a practice he had begun as auditor in 1902.

He also expressed satisfaction with Vermont's new (1915) workmen's compensation laws. Of the 7,781 workmen's comp cases that had come before the Industrial Accident Board between July 1915 and January 1917, all but two had been resolved. This, Graham noted, saved "thousands of dollars to both employer and employee, which otherwise would have been spent in litigation." He further opined that, "as the cost of insurance is based upon the extent to which the workman is exposed to danger, it will be seen that it is for the financial interest of the employer to safeguard his workmen as best he may."

With the United State's entry into World War I on April 6, 1917 Governor Graham marshaled Vermont's bureaucracy and resources to support the war effort. War measures ranged from laws protecting Vermont's public utilities and buildings from sabotage to adoption of the new federal daylight savings time.

Following President Woodrow Wilson's directive to root out any opposition to the war a Vermont branch of the American Protective League was established, in the words of the official state history of the war, "to secure information about the activities of certain civilians." One Vermonter caught up in suspicions of anti-American sentiment was the Rev. Frazier Metzger of Randolph, the 1912 Bull Moose Progressive gubernatorial candidate. The federal government considered Metzger a German spy. When handed the written accusations against Metzger, Governor Graham simply wrote on the paper, "This is a damned lie." Metzger was removed from the blacklist.

The war moved the World Series up to September, after a shortened season, since many ballplayers faced the military draft. Despite batting a collective .186 the Red Sox took the Series in six games. If the Series had not been moved up it might not have been played because the Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918 exploded in October. The pandemic had actually emerged earlier, primarily among military personnel who had been packed into training camps and transports. News of the outbreak was slow to emerge because of government censorship of anything threatening national morale.

The influenza first appeared in Kansas. Public reports of this highly fatal flu, however, first emerged from Spain. A non-combatant, Spain did not censor news and publicized the arrival of the flu upon its shores. Consequently the pandemic was known as the "Spanish" Influenza.

An estimated 100 million people died worldwide from the flu, most in the last few months of 1918. Vermont was not

immune and there were 44,000 reported cases of flu (out of a state population of just over 330,000); numerous cases went unreported. From September through December 1918 a reported 1,772 Vermonters died of the flu. On September 27th, the Vermont Board of Health, at the urging of Governor Graham, gave local health officers the authority to order "churches and schools and all places of public entertainment to be closed and [to] forbid and prevent the assembling of people in any place..."

Vermonters in the military suffered even more. Colonel Ernest W. Gibson, Sr., commander of the Fifty-seventh Vermont, reported on how the flu ravaged his men aboard the troopship *Leviathan*: "The ship was packed...[C]onditions were such that the influenza could breed and multiply with extraordinary swiftness...The conditions during the night cannot be visualized by anyone who had not actually seen them...[G]roans and cries of the terrified added to the confusion of the applicants clamoring for treatment and altogether a true inferno reigned supreme."

The war ended in November and the flu quickly abated during January-February 1919. Governor Graham, known as "Honest Horace" for his years as auditor, was widely celebrated for his role in organizing Vermont's war effort, protecting its citizens from the excesses of unfettered patriotism, and acting quickly in the face of the flu. And yet 1918 did not end well for the Governor. His previous efforts to modernize the auditor's office unearthed evidence that he had inappropriately used state funds while auditor. In early 1919 he was convicted of malfeasance, but immediately pardoned by Governor Percival Clement, who cited Graham's many contributions to the war effort.

And so, the last time the Red Sox won the Series the Vermont landscape was marred by war, pestilence, eroded civil liberties and political corruption. It would be the height of churlishness, as the Sox stand poised to win the Series, to suggest we take a moment to thank the NY Yankees who have for so long served as a bulwark against a repeat of 1918. And so, with good will to friends, let me say "Go Sox" and mouth that most unfamiliar of phrases, "wait 'til next year."