

**FELICIA ALBERTA
MITCHELL
DAUGHERTY
1879-1934**



**OKLAHOMA CITY
SPANISH
FLU
PANDEMIC**

The 1918 flu pandemic brought Oklahoma City to its knees. The selfless efforts of Felicia Daugherty rallied an entire city in a victorious fight against the virus, resulted in untold saved lives.

Felicia Alberta Mitchell was born in Louisiana in November 1879. Her family moved to Denton, Texas, soon after her birth. She married Charles Daugherty in November 1901 and moved to Oklahoma, where Charles served as state labor commissioner while she worked for the Women's Suffrage Association.

In the Fall of 1918, the highly infectious Spanish influenza arrived in Oklahoma City – population 103,000. A fever of 100+ degrees lasting several days and a heavy cough was common. By Tuesday, October 1st, over 5,000 people had the flu. Most people died when, while on the mend, they went back to work and relapsed. Victims often fell sick at work in the morning and died by nightfall.

On October 9th, every school, theater, and church were closed. Public gatherings were banned. The flu was so widespread that one-third of the city's streetcar operators were sick, making it impossible to get to work. Communications were crippled when nearly all of the Pioneer Telephone operators were sick.

The flu hit poor areas worst, especially Packingtown (Stockyards) where many black and immigrant citizens lived. Almost every home had more than one family member sick. Meanwhile, the city's health department director went AWOL, to visit his mom in Kansas City, and things became worse at the hospital when doctors and nurses got sick. "People shouldn't be left to die, simply because they are poor," the Oklahoman said. Management of the city's health department was handed to the Red Cross.

They highlighted three separate issues. First, the worst cases were admitted to the hospital. Those refusing to go were forcibly delivered by the police. Second, milder cases and those recovering needed better food, and clean clothes and homes. Third, to prevent other diseases, the city had to be scrubbed down.

Red Cross Education Director Alberta Daugherty became the leader in the fight against the deadly virus. She believed there were thousands more ill in the city going untreated because of transportation and communication problems. Daugherty quickly recruited women to go door-to-door to care for sick people. The Carnegie Library became the place to call for help, drop-off donations, and mobilize volunteers. Daugherty arranged for temporary hospital wards set up at First Presbyterian Church, the Country Club, and the Community Center.

The city paid for grocery purchases to be delivered. The Provident Association washed laundry for the whole city, free of charge, and opened a childcare center to care for sick parents' healthy children. The Public Works Department recruited able-bodied men to clean up the city. On Saturday, November 9th, the ban on public gatherings was lifted. The next morning churches opened for the first time in over a month.

When Guy McClure, construction engineer in charge of building the city's waterworks dam, died, friends suggested the big lake which was a part of the project be named after him. When mayor Ed Overholser, who contracted the flu in October, resigned due to lasting flu complications on Christmas Eve, the project was instead named Lake Overholser.

About 28% of U. S. population – 675,00 people – died. The city had 100,000 cases and 7,500 deaths, with a financial loss of \$1.5 million from lost lives and wages. Felicia Daugherty's leadership has been lost over time but she played an important role in addressing the pandemic. She died in February 1934 at age 54 in Oklahoma City.