
Confusion, Controversy, and Quarantine: The Muncie Smallpox Epidemic of 1893

*William G. Eidson**

When a contagious disease appears in a populated area, governing officials, health agents, and concerned citizens need to move in harmony toward eradicating the unwelcomed pestilence. If all work in symphony and the leadership not only knows what to do but is courageous enough to do what needs to be done, then the contagion can usually be stopped before it becomes a serious epidemic. When, however, there is dissension—when one group ignores or repudiates another—trouble emerges.

Such was the situation in Muncie, Indiana, with the outbreak of smallpox during the fall of 1893. The medical community disagreed on the nature of the affliction, local citizens ignored sensible precautions and thus encouraged the spread of the malady, and city councilmen, who took quick and decisive steps on some issues, refused for several weeks to enact a controversial measure necessary to prevent the spread of this deadly disease.

The history of the Muncie epidemic began Thursday, August 17, 1893. It was such a beautiful day that a record-breaking crowd of ten thousand spectators attended the Delaware County Fair. They watched five exciting horse races, saw “Professor” Baldwin parachute from his balloon four thousand feet in the air, and provided ample opportunities for a number of pickpockets who infested the fairgrounds. Young Dr. Frank G. Jackson, however, was not among the happy fairgoers. Instead he was in his medical office, one to which he had moved only a week before, when notified of an illness that needed investigation in the southeast section of Muncie. At thirty-four years of age, Jackson was the city’s first health officer and as such was paid \$400 for the part-time position. Little did this Muncie native realize as he began his trek across

* William G. Eidson is associate dean, College of Sciences and Humanities, and professor of history, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. It was while working on a history of Muncie’s First Baptist Church that he became interested in the smallpox epidemic.

the railroad tracks on Thursday evening that what he found there would consume nearly all his waking hours for the next three months and would be described by him as the "most severe outbreak of small-pox this state has ever seen."¹

Jackson called on the Thomas Murray family living on Macedonia Avenue. There he found one person ill and five others who had been sick with what Dr. Robert A. Bunch had diagnosed as chicken pox. Although he had been practicing medicine for less than four years, Jackson was suspicious of that diagnosis because of the high fever and skin eruptions. Upon further inquiry Jackson learned that other people with similar symptoms were said to live in the vicinity. The next day, Jackson and Dr. Garrett Leech, who had been in charge of a smallpox epidemic in Muncie in 1876, carefully inspected other homes in the neighborhood and found five other families with the disease. Despite the fact that there had been no smallpox in Muncie for several years, Leech agreed with Jackson's smallpox diagnosis. Yet before unnecessarily alarming people, Jackson telegraphed the secretary of the Indiana State Board of Health, Dr. Charles N. Metcalf, who on the following day rushed to Muncie from Indianapolis and confirmed both doctors' suspicions. These patients had smallpox.²

On Saturday afternoon, August 19, Jackson met with the city council and announced that the city had a potential smallpox epidemic on its hands. Before these astonished men, the young physician traced the development in Muncie of this most feared malady. The disease was apparently brought to the city by a young lady from New Jersey who visited the family of Richard Dilks in April. From this young woman the daughter of Patrick Malloy contracted the disease but had such mild symptoms that she was even able to attend Blaine School with blisters on her face. Sitting next to her in class was the eight-year-old daughter of Thomas Murray. The Murray girl soon became ill and on May 10 was taken by her mother to Dr. Bunch, who found a dozen pox or blisters on her body, diagnosed her illness as chicken pox, gave her some medicine, and approved her plans to visit relatives in Covington, Kentucky, for the summer. Although misdiagnosed, it was the first incident of smallpox brought to the attention of a local physician.³

¹ Muncie *Daily Herald*, August 17, 18, November 2, 1893; Muncie *Daily News*, August 18, 1893; Muncie *Daily Times*, September 9, 1893; Frank D. Haimbaugh, ed., *History of Delaware County, Indiana* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1924), II, 481; Indiana, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Indiana State Board of Health* (Indianapolis, 1893), 178, 186, hereafter cited as State Report; Dr. Hugh Cowing Scrapbook, pp. 10, 20 (Special Collections, Bracken Library, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana).

² Cowing Scrapbook, 10, 11, 20; State Report, 140. For information concerning the 1876 outbreak, see Muncie *News*, June 18–July 26, 1876.

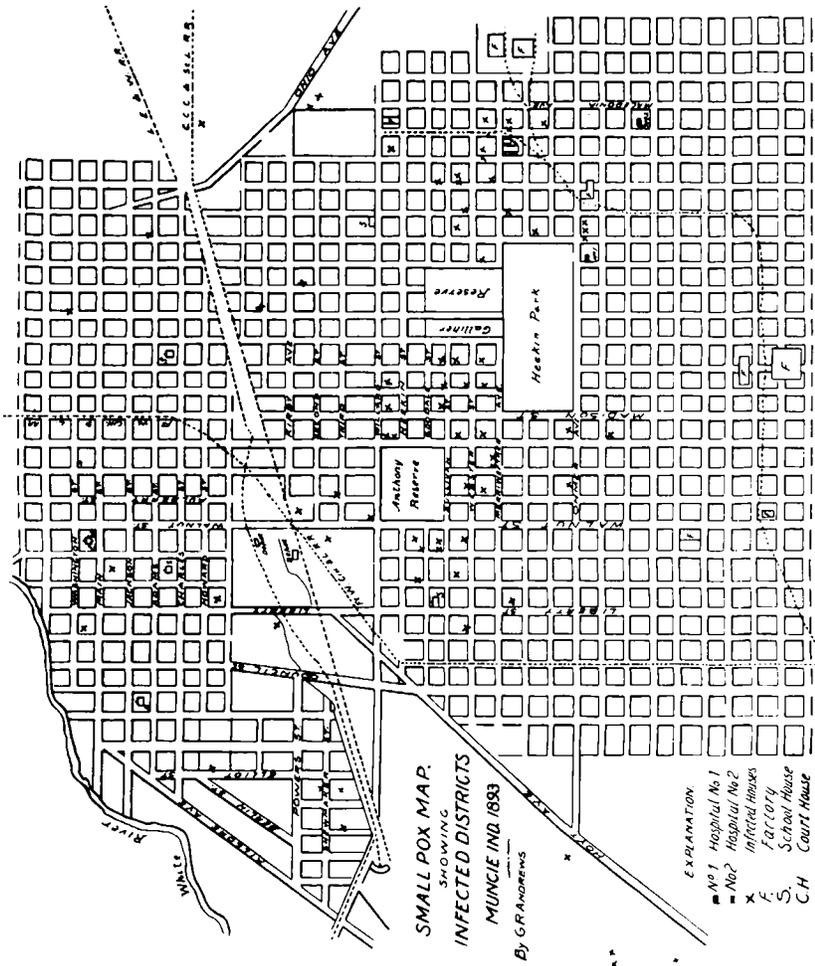
³ Muncie *Weekly Times*, September 14, 1893, in Cowing Scrapbook, 20; Muncie *Daily Times*, August 21, 25, 1893.



SMALLPOX VICTIM
22 YEARS OLD

Reproduced from *Indiana, Twelfth Annual Report of the Indiana State Board of Health* (Indianapolis, 1893), 178.

Ten days later Bunch visited the Murray home to see another daughter, a four-year-old whose temperature was 100 degrees and who had eruptions over her face, neck, and limbs. Bunch visited the girl again the next day on May 20 and concluded that she, too, had chicken pox. On July 5, Bunch was summoned to the home of Mrs. Edward Fox, who lived next to the Murrays on Macedonia. The Fox girl had convulsions and a temperature of 102, but no eruptions until the next day, when her face, neck, and limbs broke out. Once again the Muncie physician said the ailment was chicken pox. He also diagnosed as chicken pox the illness of an older Fox daughter with similar symptoms. Five weeks later, on August 15, Bunch paid a visit to A. N. Shuttleworth's daughter who had a fever of 105 and numerous eruptions over her body. It was at this point that Bunch decided he should notify the health



authorities of a possible contagious disease in the city, although he still believed the disease was chicken pox.⁴

By the time Jackson was notified, there were fourteen people suffering from smallpox in six different families. The Murray family had five cases with the disease, and the Fox family next door also had five. Three other families with the illness lived in close proximity to these homes; only one family, that of A. J. Campbell, did not live close by. The Campbells lived in Avondale, several blocks away.⁵ What Jackson recommended after his investigation and diagnosis, and what the city council agreed to do that August afternoon and at a subsequent meeting two days later, was to quarantine each infected house, an act then known as domiciliary quarantine—to restrict a family to its home. Yellow cardboard signs reading “Smallpox” were posted on contaminated houses, and guards who had already had smallpox or had been vaccinated recently were stationed near the property to prevent people from entering the house and to keep secluded family members from leaving the premises.⁶

Except for the Campbells, all of the infected families lived in an area bounded by Willard Street on the north, Macedonia Avenue on the east, Ohmer (now Memorial Drive) on the south, and Walnut Street on the west. The area was eight blocks wide from north to south and sixteen blocks long from east to west. To warn individuals that smallpox might be in the area, red flags were erected at these boundaries, although the area itself was not cordoned off, only the infected houses.⁷

Eventually the city council took elaborate precautions in an attempt to prevent the spread of the disease. The city provided groceries and other necessities for the quarantined families but delivered them only to a safe distance from a contaminated house. From there the guards picked up the provisions and carried them to the proper yard; when the guards were at a safe distance, a member of the family came into the yard and took the goods into the house. Milk was poured into a special pitcher, but the deliverer never touched the pitcher. Afterward a member of the family came outside to get the milk. A guard at each house had a water bucket, likewise never touched by infected persons, from which he poured water into another bucket left outside the house. When a doctor entered a house where smallpox was present, he wore a rubber coat

⁴ Muncie *Daily Times*, August 21, 1893.

⁵ Cowing Scrapbook, 10-11.

⁶ Muncie *Daily Herald*, August 21, 1893; Muncie *Morning News*, August 25, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 11.

⁷ Muncie *Morning News*, August 25, 1893; Delaware County Plat Book 2, Map 56, 1887 Plat Map of Galliher Subdivision, Muncie (Special Collections, Bracken Library).

that came down to his feet, rubber boots that came up to his hips, and a rubber cap that fit closely over his head, leaving only his hands and a small portion of his face exposed. Upon entering the premises, he put on the rubber suit and upon leaving the house removed it and washed his hands and face in a solution of disinfectants. To show how serious officials were to prevent the disease from spreading, they ordered all dogs and cats without tags found running at large in the infected district to be killed.⁸

Even though the guards should have been unable to contract the disease, precautions were taken to keep them from spreading it. Because they spent so many hours in the diseased area, it was thought best that they remain in the district during their off hours. Thus a house was established in the area where they could stay and sleep when not on duty. This house also had provisions for incarcerating persons who disobeyed the quarantine laws, and at least two people were held there for such violations before the epidemic passed.⁹

At the same time that the city council ordered a cordoning off of all infected houses, it also agreed that as many people as possible should be vaccinated. Residents outside the contaminated area were urged to get vaccinations; people living inside the diseased district were required to be vaccinated. The council appointed five physicians to go throughout the infected area to give vaccinations to as many people as possible and to do so as quickly as possible. Although residents were charged fifty cents per vaccination, if an individual could not afford that amount, the city would pay for the injection at the reduced rate of twenty-five cents.¹⁰

Despite these precautions the first announcements of smallpox in the city created very little excitement or interest. People were slow to believe that the disease was really smallpox. Prominent in the group of disbelievers were a number of physicians, including Bunch, who maintained publicly that the disease was chicken pox, not smallpox, and that both city officials and Jackson had overreacted. Furthermore, one of the daily newspapers and some of the confined families doctored by Bunch shared skepticism about the presence of smallpox. These families resented the actions of the health officers, refused to be vaccinated, complained loudly about being isolated from other people, and defied the efforts at quarantine. The fact that from August 19 to August 25 there were no new cases of smallpox or chicken pox added credence to this argument.¹¹

⁸ *Muncie Daily Times*, August 24, 1893; *Muncie Weekly Times*, September 14, 1893, in *Cowing Scrapbook*, 20; *Cowing Scrapbook*, 33.

⁹ *Muncie Daily Times*, August 24, 1893; *Cowing Scrapbook*, 17, 39.

¹⁰ *Muncie Daily Herald*, August 22, 1893; *Muncie Morning News*, August 25, 1893; *Muncie Daily Times*, August 22, 1893.

¹¹ *Muncie Daily Times*, August 21, 1893; *Muncie Morning News*, August 23, 1893; *State Report*, 179; *Cowing Scrapbook*, 20.

It is not surprising, then, that there were many violations of the quarantine by people already living inside the infected district. There were numerous instances when family members exited the rear of a house to visit neighbors or when friends came to visit via the back door, all while a guard patrolled the front. Violations became so frequent that guards were eventually given authority to arrest people who disregarded the regulations. The effectiveness of the quarantine was also weakened when garbage collectors refused to collect trash and waste of families with smallpox. Although officials had ordered that all such waste be well covered with chloride of lime and then buried, the garbage remained outside the infected houses for days while the wind blew its contamination to nearby homes.¹²

Physicians and public officials quickly learned that fighting smallpox was not the only battle they would wage in Muncie that fall. Nearly as time consuming and infinitely more frustrating was the struggle to convince the public that a serious disease was present and that certain precautions must be followed to prevent it from spreading throughout the whole community. County health officer Hugh Cowing commented that at the beginning of the epidemic public and health officials had to fight not only the disease but also "the surroundings and the people."¹³

In an attempt to remove distrust and to settle, if possible, the controversy over the diagnosis, Mayor Arthur Brady and the Muncie City Council employed well-known Indianapolis physician, Dr. Henry Jamison, to examine the cases and give his opinion. Jamison arrived August 21, examined the afflicted, and in every case confirmed that the patients had smallpox. Meeting with the city council that evening, Jamison emphatically stated that if the disease were not eradicated before winter, it would become much worse. He then advised the absolute quarantine of all infected and exposed persons and urged city leaders to establish a hospital or pest house for those already afflicted.¹⁴

The next evening the city council, the newly created Committee on Public Safety, and interested physicians gathered. Despite Jamison's strong recommendation, those at the meeting agreed *not* to open a pest house. Although most of those present knew that a pest house was needed, they admitted that since many in the city believed there was no smallpox in the community, the removal of the afflicted to a hospital would be next to impossible. Until public opinion supported the physicians, there would be no hospital. This refusal notwithstanding, one must be careful in criticizing city

¹² Muncie *Daily Times*, August 24, October 4, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 24.

¹³ State Report, 358.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 92, 105; Muncie *Daily Times*, August 22, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 12.



DR. HUGH COWING



DR. R. A. BUNCH

Courtesy Bracken Library, Ball State University, Muncie.

leaders. Eight years before, in 1885, Montreal officials enforced vaccination regulations and compelled the removal of smallpox victims to isolation hospitals. Riots then erupted when citizens refused to go to the hospitals, and eventually troops were summoned to bring peace and order to the community. Muncie leaders certainly wanted to avoid any similar trouble.¹⁵

Although Jamison's verification helped to persuade some doubters that there was smallpox in the city, many still remained skeptical. In an effort to learn the truth and dissolve any misunderstanding, other physicians unofficially visited Muncie and examined the patients. Dr. L. E. Russell, chief surgeon in a Springfield, Ohio, hospital, did not help matters when he examined several cases two days after Jamison's visit. Russell declared all the patients had smallpox except the Murray family, which, he maintained, had chicken pox. Two days later Dr. N. B. Kerr, an eminent New York physician, stopped in Muncie on his way home from the West. At one time Kerr had been sent to the Northwest by the government to take charge of an infected smallpox district where he eventually treated over seven hundred cases. Kerr received per-

¹⁵ State Report, 107, 358; Donald R. Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants: Smallpox in History* (Chicago, 1983), 285.

mission to visit several Muncie patients and stated that all had smallpox, including the questionable cases in the Murray family. By the time he examined the patients, he said the marks were plainly visible and there could be no doubt about the disease.¹⁶

While physicians disagreed about what disease was present in Muncie, they did agree that diagnosis of smallpox was not always easily made. A mild case of smallpox and a severe case of chicken pox, for a day or so, may puzzle even an experienced physician. Cowing acknowledged that a number of cases in Muncie were atypical in their slight rise of temperature, in their delay of the eruptions, and in their presence of complications. An editorial in the October 7, 1893, issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* stated the problem succinctly: "It is simply impossible always in the early stages to differentiate these diseases [smallpox and chicken pox]."¹⁷

The pronouncements of prominent physicians from outside Muncie, however, helped to convince a number of citizens that smallpox was indeed in the city. Even more convincing was the outbreak of several new cases of the disease. During the last few days of August and the first week of September dozens of new cases were reported, at which time Emily Russell's sixteen-year-old daughter, Mary Emma, died. The fact that several of the new victims lived outside the infested district was particularly alarming. Obviously the disease was not being restricted to a small area as had been hoped.¹⁸

As a result, the State Board of Health declared a quarantine in the city on September 7. In order to prevent the epidemic from becoming worse, Muncie citizens were asked to observe the following precautions until further notice:

1. No public meeting of any sort should be held. No exercises should be held at any church, lodge, opera house, ball ground, or any place (including school when it was to open) of like character.
2. The people generally should remain at their homes as much as possible. Congregations of persons on the streets should be avoided. The police were directed to see that no crowds collected on the street. Loitering or loafing would subject parties to arrest.
3. Special care should be taken to keep at a good distance from the infected houses. No communication should be had with persons infected or in danger of infection.
4. Everybody should be vaccinated, whether vaccinated in the past few years or not.¹⁹

¹⁶ Muncie *Daily Times*, August 26, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 15.

¹⁷ Quoted in State Report, 140.

¹⁸ Cowing Scrapbook, 13, 16; Muncie *Morning News*, September 7, 1893; State Report, 152.

¹⁹ Muncie *Morning News*, September 7, 1893; Muncie *Daily Herald*, September 7, 1893. County commissioners soon agreed to enlarge restrictions to Delaware County. On September 9, two days after the Muncie edict, they announced that because of smallpox in Muncie, "We deem it best that all public meetings, church services and Sunday Schools throughout the county be discontinued for the present, and we hereby order that the public schools of Delaware County shall not begin until further notice from us." State Report, 110.



**SMALLPOX VICTIM
13 YEARS OLD**

Reproduced from Indiana, *Twelfth Annual Report
of the Indiana State Board of Health* (Indianapolis,
1893), 181.

This quarantine meant that as long as there was danger of an epidemic in Muncie there would be no church services, programs, or school. In addition, however, the board of health's decree also warned people living outside the city that they entered Muncie at possible risk to their health. Naturally such a warning drastically reduced the number of nearby farmers and neighboring small-town residents who came to Muncie for business.

The quarantine also carried with it restrictions on the free travel of Muncie residents. Anyone who wished to leave the city by rail was required to obtain a certificate from a health official saying that he or she had been properly vaccinated and was free from infection. The ticket agent at the train station was forbidden to sell anyone a ticket without first seeing such a certificate. In addition, all baggage of people leaving the city by train had to be disinfected, which required so much time and attention that a special boxcar was set aside strictly for fumigation purposes; train officials urged passengers to get their luggage to the station several hours in advance of departure so there would be no delay. There was, of course, a charge for this special service. Each fumigated bag cost from fifteen to fifty cents depending on size.²⁰

Additional efforts to keep the disease from spreading included suspension of library privileges and burning of all books returned from the infected area. Furthermore, moving household goods from one part of the city to another was not permitted, except on written permit of the health officer. All public places were disinfected at city expense. Even the post office was told to fumigate every piece of mail sent out from the city; all mail leaving the city was placed in a large sheet-iron box four-feet square and six-feet high where it was fumigated for about an hour.²¹

On the same evening that the quarantine was issued, a citizens' meeting discussed the epidemic and what might be done by citizens to assist in the disease's elimination. The large attendance and the interest displayed indicated that the public finally realized that such a serious matter could no longer be treated with indifference. The point was raised that taking smallpox patients to a special hospital would be far better than the current method of domiciliary quarantine. The arguments of Jackson and others were so convincing that a motion was made by one of the citizens to develop at once a smallpox hospital and to investigate further what authority was needed to remove infected persons to a hospital. The

²⁰ *Muncie Daily Times*, September 12, 13, 1893; *Muncie Morning News*, September 10, 1893.

²¹ *Muncie Daily Times*, August 22, September 13, 1893; *Muncie Morning News*, September 7, 1893; *State Report*, 115, 180.

motion evoked considerable discussion and strong opposition but was eventually passed.²²

Previously the city council had declined to establish such a hospital because of insufficient public support. Now with a citizens' group resolution, the council responded quickly and within four days authorized the establishment of a smallpox hospital in the infected area. Health officials hastily obtained the use of a large, two-story building at the corner of Ohmer (Memorial Drive) and Heekin (Beacon Street), just south of Galliher Woods (present-day Heekin Park), at the extreme southeastern corner of the city. The building had been erected for a hotel (Wise Hotel) and had fifteen large rooms. The authorities decided that as soon as new cases of smallpox developed, the patients would be promptly removed to the hospital where they could be cared for properly. Such a facility would also reduce the possibility of spreading the disease; as soon as the diseased person was discovered, he or she would be removed to the hospital, and the residence would be thoroughly disinfected.²³ Besides giving the patients better care and reducing the possibility of spreading the disease, another advantage of the hospital was that it reduced the necessary number of guards. Before the council decided to transfer smallpox victims to a hospital, the city was employing as many as 150 to guard infected houses, which was an enormous expense.²⁴

Although guards were no longer needed, the city had to employ nurses at the hospital as well as doctors, disinfectors, and cooks. Father William Schmidt of St. Lawrence Catholic Church, for instance, contacted the Sisters of Charity in Fort Wayne and arranged for two nuns to be sent to Muncie where they could minister as nurses in the hospital. Both had considerable experience working with smallpox patients and would prove to be of tremendous assistance.²⁵

Because the city council had anticipated that some people might not willingly or easily go to the hospital, it passed an ordinance directing authorized personnel to remove all smallpox patients to the hospital and empowering such officials to "use all necessary means, including force and the breaking of doors if required, to compel the removal of all persons having smallpox." The

²² State Report, 113-14.

²³ Muncie *Daily Herald*, September 7, 1893; State Report, 111, 113, 114, 117; Cowing Scrapbook, 16.

²⁴ State Report, 358; Cowing Scrapbook, 16, 22; Muncie *Morning News*, September 16, 1893.

²⁵ Muncie *Morning News*, September 16, 1893; Muncie *Daily Times*, September 15, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 44. Both nuns later stated that there was no question in their minds that the patients in the hospital were in fact suffering from smallpox, and they expressed astonishment that anyone in the medical community had questioned the diagnosis.

publication of this ordinance brought a storm of protest from the community and a belief among lawyers that the ordinance was probably unconstitutional. As a result, no public official would issue a warrant for such forced entrance, and police refused to make forcible entrance without a warrant; in short, once smallpox was believed to be in a home, health authorities could not compel a family to submit to an inspection of their premises. As it turned out, health officials in Muncie seemed less concerned about a family's rights than about preventing the spread of smallpox. Jackson admitted later in cases where a family known to have smallpox refused admittance, physicians sometimes took the law into their own hands and forced their way into the home as if martial law were in effect.²⁶

Later Jackson commented about the problems associated with persuading patients to leave the comforts of their home for the hospital. "Of all the difficult and arduous labor time, none was so difficult or arduous as this," the health officer wrote, claiming that he had spent many hours, as many as eight in one situation, in rooms loaded with pestilence and stench trying to convince patients to go to the hospital. If health officers were unsuccessful, friends of patients were sent to influence the family. One friend, who went kindly to reason with a family, told members how they would get along much better at a hospital. The family responded by throwing rocks at the friend until he was finally forced away. Sometimes drivers went five or six times to pick up a patient only to be met with stubborn resistance, occasionally even with a shotgun's muzzle. In one instance, an irate father fired his gun and wounded a man who had come to take his diseased child to the hospital. In another situation a family with several infected members repeatedly refused to allow any of the family to be removed to the hospital. Eventually health authorities decided to starve out the family in order to force them to go to the hospital (although would-be friends slipped in provisions anyway). Despite these trials, Jackson maintained that all but one patient who was supposed to go to a hospital eventually went, although the delay in removing those in some homes caused others in the family to contract the disease and continuing the spread of the epidemic. In the one unsuccessful case, health officers were met at the door by a young man with a shotgun and told they would not be allowed to remove his father. Although the officials pleaded with the young man, they were unable to change his mind, and the middle-aged father was not removed from the home until he died a few days later.²⁷

Although some resistance remained, public opinion toward the hospital eventually changed. Health officials and the Committee

²⁶ State Report, 117, 181, 185.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113, 114, 179, 359, 360.

on Public Safety made numerous appeals in newspapers and at public meetings to convince the public that smallpox patients should be taken to the hospital. Significant in changing the public's opinion was the action of Frances L. Budd, wife of a prominent dentist in the city. She came to the health officer, reported that her twelve-year-old son had smallpox, and specifically requested that he be taken to the hospital. Her action was followed by other citizens, and afterward it was much easier to secure the consent of patients and relatives. In order to induce patients to go, permission had previously been given for members of the family to go with the patient and see that proper care and attention were given, but as people gained confidence in the treatment their loved ones would receive in the hospital, fewer and fewer family members felt it necessary to accompany the patient to the hospital.²⁸

As the epidemic continued to spread, however, officials soon realized that one hospital could not hold all the smallpox patients. As a result, the city council was persuaded to construct a second hospital. The Muncie Land Company donated some land four blocks southeast of the first hospital and just south of the crossing of Ohmer (Memorial Drive) and Macedonia Avenue. Working rapidly, contractor D. C. Mitchell completed a structure 118 feet long and 18 feet wide before the end of September. Divided into a women's wing, men's wing, dining room, kitchen, and office, the new hospital had a capacity of approximately forty patients. The first hospital could house twenty-four and was at capacity by the time the second building was completed. Soon after, city officials abolished domiciliary quarantine, and by October 8 all infected patients were removed to one of the hospitals.²⁹

The decision to place all patients in hospitals was certainly wise; domiciliary quarantine simply had proven ineffective. The disease was in a thickly settled area in which the majority of the people were either indifferent to the seriousness of the disease or were strongly opposed to vaccination. To defy the authorities, some quarantined people took bundles of rags from infested homes and threw them into backyards of other homes, thus spreading the disease. In many cases residents refused to be vaccinated or lied to health officials about the presence of smallpox in their homes. Months later, Cowing expressed the feeling of most health officials when he concluded that "house quarantine was an utter failure."³⁰

While people in Muncie did not panic over the quarantine and the operation of two smallpox hospitals, they were considerably confused and fearful of other aspects of the disease. For one thing

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 182, 359.

²⁹ Muncie *Daily Times*, September 20, 1893; State Report, 118, 181; Cowing Scrapbook, 33-34.

³⁰ State Report, 105, 358-60; Muncie *Daily Times*, September 5, 1893.



SMALLPOX HOSPITAL NO. 1, MUNCIE, INDIANA



SMALLPOX HOSPITAL NO. 2, MUNCIE, INDIANA

Reproduced from Indiana, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Indiana State Board of Health* (Indianapolis, 1893), 112, 166.

they were unsure of how the disease was spread. They had been told that the disease could be acquired only by direct contact with persons who had smallpox or by contact with articles touched by those who were sick, hence the importance of avoiding crowds or the infected section of the city. State board of health secretary Metcalf was quoted in a Muncie newspaper saying that a person could safely go into an infected house as long as one did not touch the body, clothing, or bedding of the diseased person. On the other hand Muncie residents could read that the disease could be transferred by air and not strictly by touch. An unidentified local physician emphasized the point in a letter to a newspaper in which he claimed that one could get the disease by merely breathing the air near a smallpox patient. He further claimed that the air could retain the germs for years if conditions were right. Residents naturally wondered that if the only way one could contract the disease was by direct contact, then why all the precautions in Muncie? If a person had never visited the infested district and had not been in the presence of anyone who had, why must one's luggage be disinfected? Why fumigate the mail of such a person? Despite whatever information one believed about the spread of the disease, those outside the infected area were always strongly opposed to people who had spent considerable time in the diseased district coming "uptown." No matter how thoroughly those living in the southeastern part of town were disinfected, many of the citizens expressed strong alarm at a trip out of the infested area.³¹

Not only were people confused about how the disease was spread, they were also perplexed by the existence of differing schools of physicians. In Indiana the four schools having the largest number of practitioners were homeopathic, eclectic, physiomedical, and allopathic (regulars). Muncie had all four of these schools represented among its physicians. All of these people were considered physicians, and each school had its own medical colleges, although curriculum and academic standards varied widely. Concern among the citizens of Indiana that some physicians were not properly trained led the state general assembly in 1885 to make it unlawful for any person to practice medicine in the state without obtaining a license. But the license was granted simply upon presentation of a diploma from a "reputable" medical school or upon proof of the candidates' having practiced medicine in the state for a certain period of time: ten years for those with no special education, three years for those with one full course of medical lectures.³²

³¹ Muncie *Morning News*, August 25, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 11, 26; Muncie *Weekly Times*, September 14, 1893, in Cowing Scrapbook, 20; Muncie *Daily Herald*, August 31, 1893.

³² Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis, 1968), 472-73.

From the beginning and throughout the epidemic a number of Muncie physicians, particularly those affiliated with the Indiana Anti-Vaccination Society, insisted that there was no smallpox in the city. Muncie physicians such as Andrew R. Mock, Lewis Payton, John C. Ross, Auburn C. Jones, and Bunch all belonged to the society. None of these men was a regular (allopathic) physician, and all maintained that vaccination was not only worthless but potentially dangerous. The way to reduce smallpox, members claimed, was not by vaccination but by better urban sanitation. Obviously these doctors refused to give their patients vaccinations during the epidemic. However, sometimes they would issue their patients a certificate of health verifying that they had been vaccinated when in reality they had not. As a result, city officials eventually rejected all certificates of vaccination issued by these physicians.³³

When the local school board decided that no child would be allowed to enter school without a proper vaccination, Mock refused to have his children vaccinated and insisted that they be admitted to their schools. The Anti-Vaccination Society then asked for a court order restraining the school authorities from such action, maintaining that medical compulsion, like religious compulsion, was un-American. Although the case was not decided until the next year, a Terre Haute judge eventually ruled that the board of health had the authority to require all pupils to be vaccinated if there had been exposure to smallpox, and that the presence of the disease in Muncie was sufficient exposure to warrant issuing the order by the board.³⁴

The debate over vaccination also caused some confusion for Muncie residents. Nevertheless, the physicians in charge all agreed that vaccination was a proper and needed precaution, and hence were able to convince city officials that the populace should be inoculated. As a result approximately 10,000 residents out of a total population of 22,000 were vaccinated.³⁵

The schism among Muncie physicians was much more serious than merely the issue of vaccination. Drs. Bunch, Jackson, and Cowing had all attended medical school in Cincinnati, and the latter was a graduate of Miami Medical College. Jackson attended Ohio Medical School, although he eventually graduated from Lou-

³³ *Emerson's Muncie Directory, 1893* (Richmond, Ind., 1893), 647; *Muncie Daily Herald*, September 23, November 13, 22, 1893; *Muncie Morning News*, August 23, 1893; *Muncie Daily Times*, August 22, October 6, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 27, 33, 46, 49; Allan Chase, *Magic Shots: A Human and Scientific Account of the Long and Continuing Struggle to Eradicate Infectious Diseases by Vaccination* (New York, 1982), 72.

³⁴ *Muncie Daily Herald*, September 26, November 13, 1893; Chase, *Magic Shots*, 72; Cowing Scrapbook, 49.

³⁵ Dick Greene, "Our Neighborhood," *Muncie Star*, August 11, 1980.

isville Medical School, both of which were regular medical schools producing physicians in the mainstream of the profession. Bunch, however, graduated from Eclectic Medical Institute in Cincinnati.³⁶

Along with homeopaths, eclecticists made up the two principal medical sects in America during the late nineteenth century. Doctors in the eclectic school did not use the powerful mineral remedies of the day but relied instead on the use of plants and herbs for their remedies, though as their name implies they professed to take the best from various schools. They carried on a vigorous campaign against what they claimed was the excessive drugging and bleeding done by the regular profession. Although graduates of eclectic schools (there were nine in the United States in 1890) were authentic M.D.s, they were often called botanical doctors because of their reliance on plants. Others called them quacks, but many Americans liked the fact that these doctors used "natural" remedies and thus seemed close to nature.³⁷

Bunch was not only a graduate of one of these eclectic schools, he was also active in both the state and national eclectic societies. In fact, at one time he had been president of the state group in Indiana. He was also one of ten eclectic physicians in Delaware County in 1893: five in Muncie, four in Albany, and one in Gaston. In comparison, there were forty-seven regular doctors, eight homeopaths, and eight physio-medicals living in Delaware County.³⁸

Regular physicians such as Jackson, Cowing, and Leech had little regard for eclecticists. For one thing, none of the eclecticists practicing in the city aided the medical efforts to eradicate smallpox. Some of the homeopaths and physio-medicals did help, especially Dr. John Quick, a physio-medical practitioner. Then, too, eclecticists regarded themselves as medical reformers dedicated to correcting problems created by others in the medical profession. That attitude certainly did not endear them to the regular physicians. Finally, the social class of eclecticists was usually low, certainly lower than that of regular physicians or homeopaths. One reason for this low social status, although surely not the only reason, was that their patients came almost exclusively from the working classes. The most popular of the eclecticists in Muncie was Bunch, whose practice was quite extensive and who was known as the poor man's friend. But Bunch's large practice and nickname did not impress Cowing. After Bunch finally admitted that one of the ill patients might be

³⁶ General William Harrison Kemper, ed., *A Twentieth Century History of Delaware County, Indiana* (2 vols., Chicago, 1908), II, 632, 635, 699.

³⁷ Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York, 1982), 96, 99; Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Golden Age of Quackery* (New York, 1959), 168.

³⁸ Kemper, *History of Delaware County*, II, 635; State Report, 391.

suffering from smallpox, Cowing stated that this admission by Bunch "shines like a dazzling star in the deep gloom of his professional pathway. Heaven grant that it may light the way to better things to come." Muncie newspaper editors were acutely aware of the rivalry among Muncie physicians and urged the doctors to lay aside such petty quarrelling and to unite to fight the epidemic.³⁹ But the dissension did not stop.

There also were the "infallible" remedies for smallpox that appeared in the newspapers. One never-failing treatment that was said to have cured thousands called for one ounce of cream of tartar dissolved in a pint of boiling water. This concoction was to be drunk at various intervals during the day, after which the patient would be completely well in three days. But the claims of this cure were mild in comparison to a more widely touted one, which purportedly had been used for thirty years and had cured all but one case of smallpox. The treatment called for one grain of sulphate of zinc plus one grain of foxglove (*digitalis*) mixed together with half a teaspoon of water, to which four ounces of water were added. One was to take one teaspoon every hour. According to one practitioner, this medicine would cure the disease in only twelve hours. Although such remedies appeared frequently in the local papers, there is no indication that any sizable number of people relied on them for a cure.⁴⁰

Because neighboring Hoosiers were frightened that the disease might spread, they established quarantines against Muncie residents. In virtually every community in Delaware and Randolph counties, as well as in such cities as Anderson, Elwood, New Castle, Hartford City, Marion, Frankfort, and as far away as Indianapolis and Fort Wayne, authorities employed special policemen to guard roads and train stations and to prohibit persons from Muncie from entering or remaining within their borders unless the Muncie visitors had health certificates stating that they had been successfully vaccinated and were free from the smallpox infection. These restrictions were instituted despite assurances from Metcalf that they were neither necessary nor advisable.⁴¹

Fear of smallpox was so great in some areas that officials went beyond the routine quarantine. On September 13 the Board of Health of Randolph County declared that all people who entered from Muncie would be quarantined for ten days, no matter if they

³⁹ Muncie *Daily Times*, August 22, 1893; Starr, *Transformation of American Medicine*, 96; *A Portrait and Biographical Record of Delaware and Randolph Counties, Indiana* (2 vols., Chicago, 1894), I, 216; Cowing Scrapbook, 12.

⁴⁰ Muncie *Morning News*, August 24, September 23, 1893; Muncie *Daily Herald*, August 24, 1893.

⁴¹ Muncie *Morning News*, September 10, 14, 15, 16, 1893; Muncie *Daily Times*, September 13, 15, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 21; State Report, 145.

had a whole "carload" of certificates with them. Such a declaration included the towns of Winchester, Union City, Farmland, and Parker City. Soon officials of the state board of health forced the Randolph County board to remove some of the objectionable features of the statement, but Muncie residents were never certain if they would or would not be detained in Randolph County. Despite the action of the state board of health, Albany and Eaton also threatened to quarantine any Muncie residents who tried to visit their communities.⁴²

One of the reasons for drastic measures was distrust of health certificates issued in Muncie. An article in the *Albany Journal* stated that

there has been so much well known carelessness in the management of the disease by Muncie officials that the authorities of Albany have not very much confidence in their ability or knowledge. Health certificates have been given out simply upon the demand of anyone who wanted them. Tickets have been sold at the depot without recommendation of "Czar" Metcalf.⁴³

The presence of a person from Muncie or of someone who had recently visited was sometimes enough to cause considerable fear and hysteria in some communities. Near Middletown the school board for the Painter School issued an order prohibiting the children of John Beckner from attending school. The reason for this strong action was that Beckner's sister-in-law had been working in the home of a Muncie man who contracted smallpox. The lady soon left Muncie and returned to her home near Talbor, where a few days later she was visited by the Beckner family. When parents of children at the Painter School learned of this, they demanded that the school board prohibit the Beckner children from attending school; the school board complied.⁴⁴

Fear gripped Daleville when an elderly gentleman named McAlister, while slightly intoxicated, confessed that there was a boy from Muncie visiting his home who was "all broke out." Although McAlister's home was a mile and a half east of town, the Daleville community begged for a doctor to examine the boy. Dr. G. W. H. Kemper from Muncie volunteered to investigate the case. When he arrived at the Daleville train station he observed that the town was wildly excited and frightened. It took Kemper a while to locate the lad, for the youngster was fishing. When Kemper finally found the boy, the doctor had to admit that the young fellow was certainly broken out but not from smallpox. The boy had gotten into some poison ivy or poison oak.⁴⁵

⁴² Muncie *Daily Times*, September 15, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 19, 21.

⁴³ Cowing Scrapbook, 26.

⁴⁴ Muncie *Daily Herald*, September 23, 1893.

⁴⁵ Cowing Scrapbook, 30; State Report, 144-45.

In late September Anderson believed it had a case of smallpox. According to the Anderson *Herald*, about two weeks before, an Anderson man named Collier had handled some household goods belonging to a family that was moving from Muncie. Although the Muncie family did not live near any of the infected houses in Muncie, the Anderson paper obviously believed this furniture was the cause of the illness. When it was learned that the furniture had been shipped out of Muncie just before the ruling went into effect requiring all such articles to be fumigated, Anderson people were convinced that Muncie had given their city a case of the dreaded disease. As it turned out, Collier did not have smallpox; but relations between the two cities were strained by the incident. Muncie newspapers claimed that Anderson mothers put their unruly children to sleep by threatening to send them to Muncie.⁴⁶

Salesmen found it difficult to travel in the area. At Albany, two such men who had recently been to Muncie were arrested and placed under close guard because they did not have certificates of health. Just the rumor that a person had been in Muncie was enough to get some traveling salesmen run out of town, as happened in Winchester. Prominence likewise mattered little. George Keiler, well-known Muncie architect, tried to travel through Albany. He was put into quarantine and had to notify Muncie officials of his dilemma. Not until Cowing, who was well known in Albany, sent a telegram stating that Keiler was all right was the architect released.⁴⁷

Although only thirty-three years old and in practice for little more than three years, Cowing took his position as county health officer seriously. In an attempt to reduce the fear county residents had of smallpox spreading to their communities, he frequently spoke to groups throughout the county clarifying the situation in Muncie, explaining the nature of the disease, and trying to prevent panic. One of his biggest tasks was simply to refute rumors. According to Cowing, each day brought some sensational story to be refuted. For instance, it was reported that dozens were dying daily in Muncie, that the city clerk had issued only one burial permit, and that bodies were either cremated at the garbage furnace or were sold.⁴⁸

By the time the quarantine was issued on September 7, 1893, there were fifty-two cases of smallpox and one death. The next ten days saw an additional fifty persons break out with the disease. Then after the seventeenth of September a lull hit the area. New outbreaks of smallpox appeared, but they were limited almost

⁴⁶ Cowing Scrapbook, 29-31; Muncie *Morning News*, September 15, 1893.

⁴⁷ Cowing Scrapbook, 21-22.

⁴⁸ Kemper, *History of Delaware County*, II, 699; State Report, 122.

wholly to families already infected. Hopes that the disease was being controlled were shattered in early October, however, when a new wave hit the city. There were two, three, or four new cases everyday as the disease crept from house to house in the infected district. In some places every house in a row of five or six, one by one, became infected. By October 5, there had been 133 instances of the disease reported. Mercifully, the situation then improved. Perhaps it was simply that the disease had run its course, but more likely it was immediate hospitalization that helped prevent its spread. From October 6 to 23 there were only eight new smallpox patients. That number was reduced to six the last week in the month, and only one additional person broke out with smallpox from November 1 to 9. Two other outbreaks in November and December brought the total of smallpox cases in the Muncie epidemic to 150.⁴⁹

In 1876, the previous time smallpox had appeared in Muncie, fifty people contracted the disease, and five died from it. This time there were twenty-two deaths. The death angel seemed to play no favorites in Muncie. Thirteen males and nine females died. Fifteen of the victims were adults, ranging in age from their early twenties to their seventies. In addition, three infant children, one girl of nine, and three teenagers died. Of the twenty-two who failed to recover, seventeen had never been vaccinated. Two of the victims had old vaccinations and three were vaccinated after the epidemic began. To avoid spreading the disease, no public funerals were allowed for any of these victims, and all were buried during the middle of the first night after their death, which avoided any public gatherings and made possible the disposal of the infected bodies as soon as possible.⁵⁰

Because fighting the epidemic cost the city thousands of dollars each week and brought it to within two thousand dollars of its statutory limit of indebtedness, several citizens suggested that the city attempt to persuade the state to reimburse some of the expenses. The state legislature, in anticipation of an invasion of cholera, had made an appropriation of \$50,000 for the "purpose of preventing the introduction and spread of cholera and other infectious diseases within the state." Since much of Muncie's cost was in trying to keep the disease from spreading, the health officials believed they had a legitimate right to request funding.⁵¹

Surprisingly, governor Claude Matthews received several letters from Muncie citizens urging him not to use the epidemic fund

⁴⁹ *Muncie Morning News*, September 7, October 1, 27, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 23, 30, 33, 41-43, 46.

⁵⁰ State Report, 150-53; Cowing Scrapbook, 10-13, 17, 21-23, 26, 27, 30-33, 39, 40, 46, 48.

⁵¹ *Muncie Morning News*, September 16, 1893; State Report, 93.

to help Muncie. Some of the letter writers suggested that Muncie officials were making "a big thing" out of the epidemic. They claimed that if money were appropriated those in charge would prolong the disease in order to make as much as possible out of it. The governor also received letters from some Muncie physicians still maintaining that the city merely had chicken pox, and not smallpox. Those letters, Matthews believed, were caused by rivalry among schools of medicine in the city. Even Dr. S. S. Boots, president of the Indiana State Board of Health, recommended that the fund not be used to aid Muncie, although his reasons were quite different. He stated in his recommendation to the governor that smallpox in Muncie was now under control and that there was no threat of its spreading over the state. Furthermore, he said that Muncie showed an ability to maintain its internal quarantine without need of state money.⁵²

But the majority of the members of the state board of health differed with their president and recommended that the fund be used to help the quarantined city. The governor eventually agreed with the majority of the board and announced on October 5 that the epidemic fund would be used to help defray some of the expenses in Muncie. For the first week of October Muncie received \$1,000 from the fund and \$800 each of the following three weeks for a total of \$3,400. Total cost of the epidemic to the city was \$22,807, leaving a balance of \$19,407, or nearly \$1.00 for every man, woman, and child in the city. Most of the city's expenses were for vaccinations, medicine, food, and payments to physicians, nurses, and guards.⁵³

As the number of new cases decreased, Muncie citizens became eager for the quarantine's repeal. By the end of October churches had not held religious services for seven weeks. Schools had not yet opened for the 1893-1894 school year, delayed by more than a month. The autumn opening of the Opera House had been postponed more than once. Residents who traveled outside the city were weary of the problems in getting all luggage fumigated and holding onto health certificates. Naturally business in the city was dangerously low, and businessmen were eager to see the hinterland trade once again enter the city.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the state board of health had said that the quarantine would remain in effect until there had been no new cases for fourteen days. Jackson, along with Father Schmidt and two members of the city council, went to Indianapolis on November 3

⁵² Cowing Scrapbook, 27, 32, 38.

⁵³ Muncie *Morning News*, October 6, 13, November 2, 4, 1893; Cowing Scrapbook, 24, 33, 40, 41, 47; State Report, 120, 124-25, 148.

⁵⁴ Muncie *Daily Herald*, October 31, 1893; Frederick Putnam Diaries, August 28, 30, 1893 (Special Collections, Bracken Library).

in an attempt to convince state officials that it was safe to lift the quarantine. After much persuasion, the board agreed. Metcalf came to Muncie and announced on Saturday afternoon, November 4, that the quarantine was lifted. Public gatherings such as church services would thus be allowed. Schools could open on Monday, and travel outside the city no longer required certificates of health or fumigation of luggage. There was some celebration that evening as about five thousand people congregated in the streets blowing horns and ringing bells. Yet most did not celebrate. The epidemic had been terrible and the deaths saddening; people were happy to have the bad times behind them but felt no sense of celebration, just relief.⁵⁵

Months after the epidemic ended, several doctors wrote what they believed had been learned from the Muncie experience. They overwhelmingly agreed that vaccination, isolation, and disinfection were the three important factors in stamping out the disease. They learned that in some cases immunity was not acquired after one vaccination; certain people required a second or even a third shot. They also noted that vaccination, even though it did not always give absolute immunity, did lessen the liability of attack, the severity of the disease, and the possibility of death. Furthermore, all the physicians stressed that domiciliary quarantine was ineffective in preventing the spread of the disease. As a rule, they believed that a hospital with a faithful medical staff offered better conditions for recovery than did a patient's home. They also pointed out that by early removal of patients from their home to a hospital, the danger of infecting others was greatly diminished. Once a patient was removed to a hospital, the doctors agreed that a thorough disinfection of the house was extremely important to prevent the disease's spread.⁵⁶

The smallpox epidemic produced extraordinarily difficult times for Muncie. Health officials were particularly hard pressed. They worked long hours everyday and yet met with opposition all along the way. Quarantine precautions were frequently ignored. Many persons refused to be vaccinated. Several physicians denied the existence of the disease, and public criticism of the way the epidemic was handled was not infrequent. Economically the city was hard hit; the depression of 1893 had adversely affected Muncie during the summer, causing one bank to close its doors. Before businesses could recover, the epidemic virtually cut off all trade with people living outside the city.

Obviously domiciliary quarantine did not work, and there is little doubt that the disease would have been eradicated sooner if

⁵⁵ *Muncie Daily Times*, November 4, 1893; *Muncie Morning News*, November 4, 5, 1893.

⁵⁶ State Report, 146, 162, 165, 182, 360.

a smallpox hospital had been opened immediately and if the patients had been quickly removed to that hospital. The delay in opening the hospital was unfortunate but understandable.

Yet in the end, the system worked. Despite resistance from some, thousands of residents were vaccinated. After the initial delay, city officials were concerned enough to make tough community-wide regulations and to enforce them despite some popular opposition. School officials also held fast that only vaccinated children could come to school. Hospitals restored most victims to health and reduced the spread of the disease. As bad as the epidemic was, it would have been much worse had city officials showed an unwillingness to establish quarantines, had they been unsupportive of vaccination, or had they refused to open smallpox hospitals.