

# Stories from Franklin County's Past: Spanish Influenza and Dr. John Martin

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As we acknowledge the six-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in mid-March of 2020, many of us remember the school/business closures, the mask mandates, the shortages, and the fear. On the Hampton Chronicle's Facebook page, a comment was left regarding a young doctor from Latimer who was practicing during the Spanish Influenza epidemic 1918-1920. His name was Dr. John Franklin (J.F.) Martin.

John was born June 26, 1887, in Iowa Falls and was the son of Arthur and Margaret Martin. He had two siblings: Nora and Pearl. He graduated from Iowa Falls High School in 1907, and completed a course in medicine at the University of Illinois School of Medicine in Chicago.

In 1910, he married Bonnie Bell Blakely who was also from Iowa Falls. While they were residing in Chicago, their son, Richard A. Martin, was born July 4, 1911. Unfortunately, Bonnie died a few months later on September 20; she is buried in the Union Cemetery in Iowa Falls.

When Dr. Martin completed his medical degree in 1912, he opened his medical practice in Latimer. He spent his entire career serving the people of Latimer and Franklin County.

In November of 1916, Dr. Martin married Elsie



Obituary photograph of Dr. J. F. Martin, circa 1955.



Dr. John Martin, circa 1926-1929.

June Sawtelle in Latimer. She had grown up in Latimer, attend Memorial University in Mason City, and was a teacher in Franklin County schools. Their daughter, Helen Jeanette, was born in November of 1917.

Little did Dr. Martin or anyone else know how significantly their lives were going to change with two words: Spanish Influenza.

Doctors documented the "first" case of the influenza pandemic on March 4, 1918, in Albert Gitchell, a U.S. Army cook at Fort Riley, Kansas. Nicknamed the "Spanish Flu," cases of "severe influenza" were observed in Kansas as early as January 1918. Within a week, hundreds of soldiers who worked, trained, and bunked alongside Gitchell were sick. Within a matter

of weeks, more than 1,000 soldiers were ill and the virus was reported at the majority of Army training camps throughout the United States.

During the first wave of the influenza pandemic, the sick and elderly were most at risk. In the United States, approximately 75,000 influenza-related deaths were reported during the first half of 1918.

By the time the second influenza wave began in August 1918, the virus had mutated to become much more deadly—rapidly killing the young, middle-aged, and old with many previously healthy people succumbing to respiratory failure within hours of becoming ill. Between September and December 1918, nearly 300,000 Americans died of influenza. In October 1918 alone—the deadliest month of the pandemic in the United States—an estimated 195,000 people died. The severity of the second wave forced public health officials to enforce quarantines of infected people and ordered residents to wear masks in public to slow the spread of the disease.

A third wave of the pandemic hit Australia and parts of Europe particularly hard during the first half of 1919, but despite outbreaks in American metropolitan areas, the mortality rate from the virus fell dramatically. The pandemic subsided in late 1920. Deaths from influenza in 1921 were comparable to pre-pandemic levels.

Franklin County was not exempt from the Span-

ish influenza outbreak. The first mention of Spanish influenza was in the September 26, 1918, issue of the Hampton Chronicle where it was reported that Walter Shroyer of Hampton was ill from the disease at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Chicago.

The October 10, 1918 Hampton Chronicle reported that the selective draft call for the county was postponed for two weeks by the War Department due to the influenza epidemic.

Hampton began a quarantine on October 11, 1918 when the mayor (G. T. McCrillis) by direction of the city council sitting as a Board of Health and by orders of city health physician, Dr. F.E. E St. Clair, ordered all public places and public gatherings, the local schools, theatres, billiard halls, etc. closed until Monday morning, Oct. 21. At that time there were approximately 150 cases in Hampton and 125 in the surrounding county.

Due to the Spanish influenza's second wave, another quarantine was implemented December 19, 1918. Many of the same stipulations occurred during the second quarantine. Homes with infected family members were encouraged to post placards warning others against visiting. Most holiday celebrations were canceled including the Municipal Christmas celebration which had included a parade, an appearance of Santa Claus, and the distribution of free presents.

The second quarantine was lifted on January 6, 1919. During the second

wave of the Spanish influenza, nearly every family in Hampton and the surrounding community had one or more family members sick. The average number of cases reported each day was over 50; by the end of the quarantine the number had dropped to five per day. Several of the influenza patients contracted pneumonia. A number of deaths occurred, most of them being in the rural neighborhoods. Over the course of the epidemic, the Iowa Board of Health reported 6,116 deaths from influenza and 3,085 from pneumonia.

The Hampton Chronicle acknowledged the impact on doctors in the area in their January 6, 1919 issue. At the time of the Spanish Influenza, doctors often made house calls rather than having the patients come to their office. These doctors were on the road early in the morning and visited patients until late into the night. They missed sleep, and they missed meals. They wore out automobiles and they exhausted horses, but they stayed faithfully on the job working 20 of 24 hours. After treating very sick patients, they then returned to their own, often young families.

Deaths continued to reported in Franklin County into April of 1919.

Following the influenza epidemic, Dr. Martin continued his illustrious medical practice in Latimer. He served his community over the years by being: the mayor for 12 years; a member of the town council; the county coroner; on the Latimer Independent Schools Board of Education, and on the staff of the Lutheran Hospital in Hampton. He was an ardent sportsman and was active in game conservation programs. He was a loyal supporter of the Beed's Lake project when it started and was one of the first to build a family home at the lake. He was a member of the Franklin County Medical Society and the Iowa State Medical Society. He was a member of the Masonic Order in Iowa Falls.

Dr. Martin continued to practice medicine until his death in 1955 due to a heart attack. He died at the Lutheran Hospital in Hampton and is buried in the

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Corrections will be printed on page two in the next issue published. The correction will denote the issue, article and incorrect information along with the correction.

Digital corrections will also be made, and an editor's note will be added to the bottom of the article in question noting what was inaccurate and noting when the article was amended. If the article was posted on Facebook, Twitter, or any other online medium controlled by the Hampton Chronicle, a post will be made linking to the corrected article, noting the correction.



Circa 1919, a public service advertisement issued during the Spanish flu pandemic.

## Latimer News

On a wintery day CAL Over 60's met in the Latimer Community Center on St.Patrick's Day Tuesday, March 17th. Lois welcomed everyone and Pastor Peter Wagner of St Paul's Lutheran Church gave devotions and table prayer. Sheryl Borchering and LaShell Borchering served the tables. Jolene had prepared tater tot casserole, creamy oreo fluff, bread and chocolate cake with green mint ice cream.

Lois gave readings on St.Patrick's history, meaning of the shamrock and she read an Irish Blessing.

The next dinner will be on Tuesday, April 7th. Everyone is welcome to attend and invite guests.



To everyone who thought of me, with a card or a phone call on my very special 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, a big thank you. It really meant a lot to me!

-La Vanne McCormick

## CASTING CALL

Iowa River Players will hold auditions for The Diary of Anne Frank on April 7 & 8 at 6:30 p.m. at 901 W. Broadway in Rowan. Roles are available for five men/boys and five women/girls. Performances are scheduled for June 20, 21, 27, and 28. Unable to attend? Contact Luanne Krabbe at 319-231-7828 to arrange a time.

## PRO RACING THIS WEEK

Racing News, Stats & Trivia

### This Week's Cup Series Race: Cook Out 400

Location: Ridgeway, Va.  
Date: March 29th, 3:30 p.m.  
Last Year's Pole: Christopher Bell  
Last Year's Winner: Denny Hamlin

### Martinsville Speedway

Track Details  
Distance: 0.526 Miles  
Shape: Paperclip  
Banking / Turns: 12

The NASCAR Cup Series returns to the "Paperclip" on March 29th, 2026, for the Cook Out 400. Martinsville Speedway is the shortest track on the circuit at 0.526 miles, featuring tight turns with 12-degree banking and long, flat straightaways that demand heavy braking. For 2026, teams must navigate a new "tiered" pit road speed system designed to reduce congestion on the narrow pit lane. Additionally, following recent tests, Goodyear has introduced an even softer tire compound to encourage more fall-off and passing. Defending race winner Denny Hamlin returns as the clear favorite, seeking his sixth grandfather clock trophy. He'll face a surging Tyler Reddick, who enters with four wins already this season. Watch the 400-lap battle live on FS1 at 3:30 PM ET.

### Last Weekend's Race: Tyler Reddick Won at Darlington

Tyler Reddick won the Goodyear 400 at Darlington Raceway on March 22, 2026, marking his fourth victory in the season's first six races. Despite starting from the pole, Reddick's No. 45 Toyota for 23XI Racing faced significant mechanical adversity, including a malfunctioning alternator and a failed driver cooling suit. After falling outside the top ten, Reddick rallied to lead the final 28 laps, ultimately finishing 5.847 seconds ahead of Brad Keselowski. "I think it's very fitting that when we finally get our first win here at Darlington that 'The Lady in Black' would test us like that," Reddick said after the win.

**Tyler Reddick**  
Born: Jan. 11, 1996  
Crew Chief: Billy Scott  
Car: Toyota

Year	Wins	Top 10s	Avg. Finish
2026	4	5	4.167
2025	0	14	14.47

### 2026 Standings

Cup Series Top Ten				O'Reilly Auto Parts Series Top Ten			
Drivers	Points	Top 10s		Drivers	Points	Top 10s	
1) Tyler Reddick	325	5		1) Justin Allgaier	306	5	
2) Ryan Blaney	230	4		2) Jesse Love	254	5	
3) Bubba Wallace	205	4		3) Carson Kvatil	222	3	
4) Denny Hamlin	203	3		4) Sheldon Creed	218	4	
5) Chase Elliott	194	3		5) Austin Hill	210	3	
6) William Byron	191	3		6) Sammy Smith	192	5	
7) Chris Buescher	188	3		7) Corey Day	188	5	
8) Christopher Bell	182	3		8) Brandon Jones	170	2	
9) Brad Keselowski	182	3		9) Parker Retzlaff	169	2	
10) Kyle Larson	176	3		10) Rajah Caruth	151	3	

### Racing Trivia

What nickname is given to the 1.5-mile tracks that dominate the schedule?

a) Paperclips      c) Monster Miles  
b) Cookie-cutters      d) Ticky Triangles

ANSWERS: a) Paperclips, b) Cookie-cutters, c) Monster Miles, d) Ticky Triangles

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