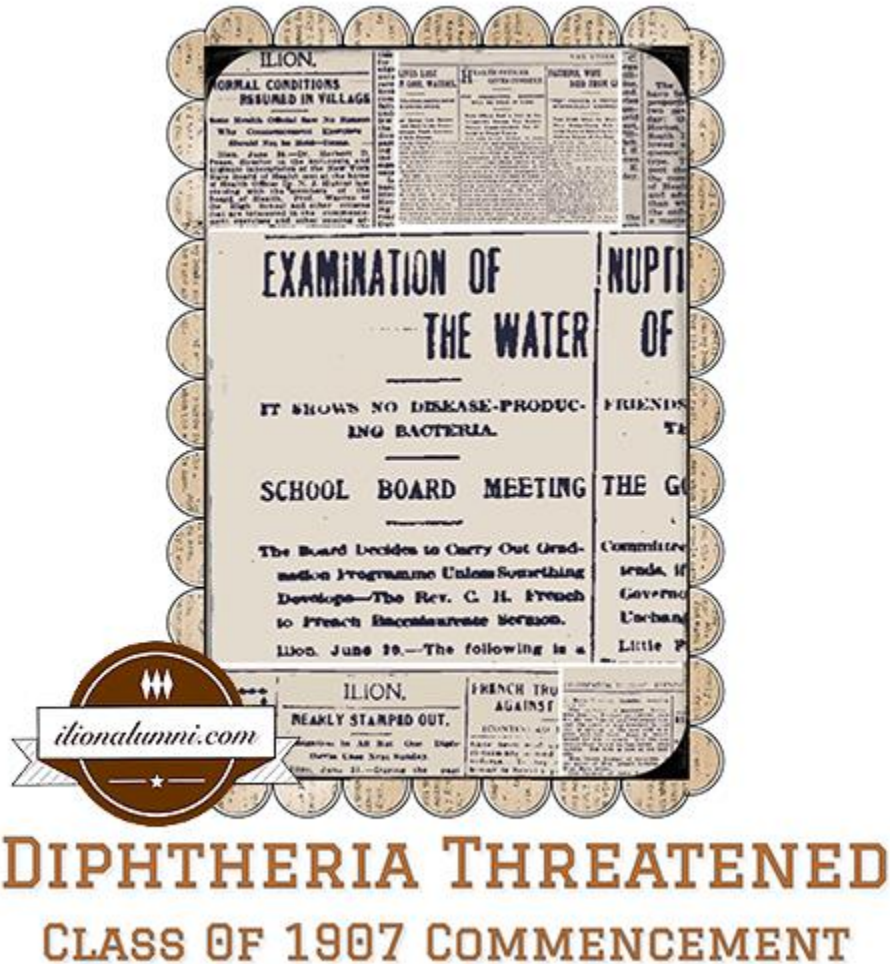


Ilion Class of 1907 Commencement

Diphtheria Scare

May 2020

By Aileen Carney Sweeney



DIPHTHERIA THREATENED CLASS OF 1907 COMMENCEMENT

Diphtheria - Spreads to Village

In mid-June of 1907, the village of Ilion was facing a serious diphtheria scare. The disease, named the "the plague among children" by Noah Webster, was feared and often fatal. There had been just a few cases in Ilion but of those

infected the results were fatal. It was not the first time that diphtheria brought sorrow to the community.

The dreaded disease also hit the village in 1888. Will W. Benton, Jr., only seventeen years old, died suddenly on March 8, 1888 of malignant diphtheria just months from his high school graduation. Will Benton had earned the honor of being named the Salutatorian of the class of 1888. He had been sick with the measles. He recovered enough to go to school, on the Thursday, before he died. He caught a "cold" and was sick again, but this time he was ill with deadly diphtheria. His father was prominent Iliion businessman W. W. Benton. The Benton family lived in a mansion on the West side of Armory Hill, near the steps. Will was their only child. [Source www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com) - [Troy Daily News March 9, 1888](http://www.fultonhistory.com)



W.W. Benton - Iliion Businessman

Prominent Iliion businessman, W. W. Benton was the father of Will Benton. The Benton family lived in a mansion on the West side of Armory Hill, near the steps. Will was their only child.

Ilion.—Will Benton, aged seventeen years, and the only child of W. W. Benton, died suddenly yesterday of malignant diphtheria. He had been sick with the measles, but had recovered sufficiently to go to school Thursday, when he caught cold and was taken sick again. He was to graduate in June, and stood second in the class.—One of the oldest

Ilion Class of 1888 - Future Salutatorian Dies from Measles before graduation

Troy Daily News - March 9, 1888

Ilion's prominent businessman, W.W. Benton lost his only child to measles.



Home of W. W. Benton father of Will Benton

Armory Hill - Ilion NY

["Souvenir of Ilion" - 1904](#)

Copies of the book were provided by Carolyn Deming Bayer IHS Class of 1947, Jane Russel Nile

IHS Class of 1950 and transcribed by Paul T. McLaughlin IHS Class of 1941 for publication on the [Ilion History section](http://www.herkimer.nygenweb.net) of www.herkimer.nygenweb.net.

What is Diphtheria?

What is diphtheria and why was it so dreaded? Diphtheria is transmitted from person to person normally through respiratory droplets. Does that sound familiar? "

"Diphtheria once was a major cause of illness and death among children. The United States recorded 206,000 cases of diphtheria in 1921, resulting in 15,520 deaths. Diphtheria death rates range from about 20% for those under age five and over age 40, to 5-10% for those aged 5-40 years."

The infection is caused by bacteria not a virus. The infected person is contagious for two to three weeks. "The most notable feature of diphtheria infection, however, is the formation of a thick gray substance called a pseudomembrane over the nasal tissues, tonsils, larynx, and/or pharynx." The bacteria secretes a toxin that caused the pseudomembrane and it can also travel to other vital organs and cause permanent damage, and often death.

June 11 - June 13

The Village Board of Trustees held a special meeting, on Monday June 10, to address the crisis. The Board voted "... to appoint two special policemen to establish a strict quarantine and to watch the houses of those who may have diphtheria. The authorities are determined to stamp out the disease. This action of the board was taken in accordance with the provisions of the general village law relating to contagious and infectious disease. ..." Two new cases were reported Tuesday, the little daughter of Frank Horton, and Earl Ackler, who lives at South Ilion.

Thursday June 20 - Board of Education Special Meeting

The School Board of Education held a special meeting, on the Thursday morning before graduation, to decide if the graduation ceremony should go forward. The consensus was to go ahead, as planned, unless something developed in the meantime to prevent it. The junior class was scheduled to hold their reception on Friday evening at Harter's Hall. The baccalaureate ceremony was scheduled to be held at the Presbyterian Church on Sunday evening. The graduation ceremony was scheduled for Tuesday evening, June 25, at the Opera House.

The Iliion High School alumni also held a meeting and decided to postpone the Wednesday June 26 Alumni evening reception. The event would probably be held in the fall.

Bacteriological examinations of three different samples of the village water were done by Dr. William S. Nelson of Utica:

Friday June 21 - Nearly Stamped Out

During the week, there had only been one new case of diphtheria reported. The new case would be the only one under quarantine as of the coming Sunday, if no new ones developed. The Village Health Officer, Hunter, stated that with the proper precautions the disease would be stamped out within a few days. There had been 16 cases as of that date. Fumigation was ordered for the affected households.

Friday afternoon June 21 - State Board of Health Notification

Then on Friday afternoon, "something developed" and the State Board of Health notified the local Board of Health that *all public inside gatherings should not be held for a period of 30 days*. That immediately affected all the scheduled Class of 1907 events, including the Commencement ceremony.

Monday June 24 - Professor Springstead Goes to Albany

Professor C. A. Springstead coached all of the student commencement speakers each year. He was eager to have the ceremony go forth as planned. He went to Albany and presented a petition, signed by the members of the school board, the board of health and the graduating class, asking that the authorities permit the graduating exercises to be held. The people that were vested in several coming events, as well as the businesses, concluded that the range of infections did not warrant any such stringent restrictions. They began to take steps to have the ban removed and three petitions were sent to the State Board of Health signed by the businessmen and village officials and other interested parties.

Monday evening June 24 - State official Paid a Visit to the Village

Dr. Herbert D. Pease, director to the anti-toxin and hygienic laboratories of the New York state Board of Health, came to the village on Monday evening. He met at the home of Health Officer Dr. N. J. Hunter. He met with the members of the Board of Health, Professor Warren, of the High School, and other citizens that were interested in the commencement exercises and other coming affairs. After conducting his investigation that evening, Dr. Pease gave permission to the local Board of Health to permit the holding of the high school graduating commencement exercises. The ceremony was to be held in the Opera house and was scheduled for the next night. He also said there was nothing to prevent the holding of church services, concerts, etc. now.

Dr. Pease advised that the Sunday schools and the library remain closed and that there be no picnics or other functions at which children would congregate. He also advised that persons in whom families there had been contagion remained away from the

commencement exercises. "The members of the graduating class, their parents and in fact everybody in the village are greatly pleased to learn that the village will resume its normal state of affairs."

Tuesday evening June 25 - 1907 Class Commencement held as planned

"The clouds all had silver linings; the storms passes, the fears subsided and a large body of people gathered in the Iliion Opera House to rejoice in the honors of another graduating class from the Iliion High School."

THE GRADUATING CLASS

Valedictorian, Miles Yates, .954. Salutatorian, Miss Carrie Turnbull , .885.

Nellie Cheney, Clarence Chismore, Oliver Coleman, Howell Crim, Harry Eckler, Jacob Edick, Percy Edwards, Clarence Marhaver, Irving Marhaver, Elizabeth McDay, Anna Malloy, Elizabeth Nigabower, Pauline Pearson, Claude Petrie, Vera Roberts, Hattie O'Neil. Frank Tracy, Grace Williamson and Miles Morgan.

1907 Class Newspaper Articles

Visit the [Class of 1907 Newspaper Articles](#) for other newspaper stories about the graduation, including the subjects chosen by the selected seniors for commencement speeches.

Diphtheria Vaccine



"7 year old Ronald Ford receives his diphtheria inoculation at Argyle Street School Clinic on 7 May 1941. A nurse holds up Ronald's sleeve, whilst a doctor administers the injection." - source commons.wikimedia.org

"Since the introduction of effective immunization, starting in the 1920s, diphtheria rates have dropped dramatically in the United States and other countries that vaccinate widely. Between 2004 and 2008, no cases of diphtheria were recorded in the United States. However, the disease continues to play a role globally...The current U.S. childhood immunization schedule for diphtheria includes five diphtheria toxoid immunizations before age six years, plus one booster dose for adolescents. (A toxoid is a toxin modified to invoke an antibody response, but not capable of causing disease.) All diphtheria immunizations for children are given in a single injection combined with tetanus toxoid and pertussis vaccine (known as DTP or DTaP). Adults receive diphtheria toxoid in combination with a tetanus toxoid booster,

which is recommended every ten years. The adult product can protect against tetanus and diphtheria (a vaccine known as Td) or all three diseases (a vaccine known as Tdap)." - source [History of Diphtheria](#) www.historyofvaccines.org -

Dr. Pease and Diphtheria

Herbert D. Pease, M.D. was the first director of the The New York State Wadsworth Center. The center was established in 1901 to standardize and manufacture antitoxin, the prevailing treatment for communicable diseases such as diphtheria and anthrax. Dr. Herbert D. Pease was the same doctor who permitted the Iliad 1907 commencement to go forward. Dr. Pease, served from 1900 until 1909 when he resigned his position to become director of the bacteriological work of the Lederle laboratories in NYC. "He has conducted many of the investigations of epidemics of typhoid fever and other infectious diseases and has been a leader in the educational work along public health lines, especially in the development of exhibits, and particularly in the State tuberculosis campaign." - source [Public Health Legislation News and Notes 1909](#) www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov - US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health



- source www.wadsworth.org

Dr. Herbert D. Pease died on February 14, 1950. Unfortunately, his name was tarnished by his association with the advertising used by "B & M External Remedy", a company that was indicted by the FDA for medical quackery.

Dr. Pease and Medical Quackery



- source www.hipstamp.com

- source of quotes books.google.com - The Medical Messiahs: A Social History of Health Quackery in 20th Century ...By James Harvey Young

The FDA went after Frank E. Rollins, in 1922, when he "... was still flooding the country with his mixture of turpentine, ammonia, and raw eggs. "

"B. & M. labeling flaunted the boldest of claims. The list of maladies it could cure ran on and on: pneumonia, laryngitis, bronchitis, pleurisy, la grippe, asthma, hay fever, catarrh, rheumatism, lumbago, neritis, peritonitis, neurasthenia, locomotor ataxi, varicose veins, blood poisoning, auto-intoxication, sprains, scalds, burns cancer and tuberculoiss- above all, tuberculosis."

"On the eve of the trial, Rollins and Johnson backed out. The government was welcome to destroy the bottles seized."

"B. & M. was soon on the market again with labeling approved by Dr. Pease. He himself, indeed, had penned most of the text that went to the printer, and the new pamphlet showed the fruits of his research in picture, table and text. "Tabulations of Results," the heading on one exhibit read. ...In December 1928 and January 1929 (FDA) agents

seized shipments of B. & M. from Maine to California, charging adulteration and misbranding."

"Three years went by before the issues were tried before a jury in 1932. Melvin Johnson, the attorney for Rollins and B. & M., "...went to New York to the Pease Laboratories, a private research center much patronized by manufacturers as a source Of medical studies to be cited in advertising. Johnson put B. & M. into Dr. Herbert D. Pease's hands for tests." Rollins had paid Dr. Pease \$15,000 for his research on the product."

"Dr. Pease, head of the large New York laboratories, sat through the presentation of the government's case. Later he said he had not been hired to testify, but during the trial, Johnson desired to put him on the stand. Pease was not to be found. Even a court subpoena could not stir him up. "I have no excuse to offer you," Johnson told the jury, ". . . for his not being here, except that he walked out on us." "

"After more than ten years of time and at a cost of more than \$75,000, the Food and Drug Administration had cleaned up the labeling of a horse liniment sold as a tuberculosis cure [38]. Immediately Walter Campbell sent out an order to seize misbranded B. & M. wherever it could be found. A criminal suit was launched against the corporation, to which, in time, its officers pleaded guilty. At \$100 for each of twenty counts, the fine amounted to \$2,000.[39]" -

source quackwatch.org - The Medical Messiahs: Chapter 5