The First 1918 Influenza Death in Dallas County

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In the fall and winter of 1918, 456 individuals died of influenza in Dallas county. During the epidemic, *Dallas Morning News* reported the names of the deceased, including those who died at Camp Dick, the army training camp at the state fairgrounds. The efforts of the city, schools, medical community, businesses and citizens of Dallas during the 1918 influenza epidemic foreshadowed events of the 2020 COVID-19 epidemic.¹

On October 4, 1918, *Dallas Morning News* reported that

“[i]t was made public for the first time yesterday at the Emergency Hospital that the first influenza victim was Pierpont Balderson, aged 15, address 2001 N. Harwood, who died at St. Paul’s Hospital Sept. 30. Young Balderson was stricken first with influenza, which later went into pneumonia.”²

Who was Pierpont Balderson? Who were his family members and what was their family history? Let’s look through the records for clues.

According to his Texas death certificate, Pierpont Balderson was born in April 1905 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the son of J. P. Balderson and Hattie Medlock. The informant on his death certificate was E. S. Parkinson who lived at 2001 N. Harwood.³

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Pierpont’s death certificate recorded no trade or occupation, nor did it indicate that he was a student. The 1918 Dallas city directory, however, listed him as a messenger for the Postal TelGraph Company, rooming at 1920 Masten. Perhaps he answered an advertisement like the one appearing in the *Dallas Morning News* on March 6, 1917 and in successive issues, seeking “Boys wanted between 15 and 18 years. Apply Postal Telegraph. Can earn from $40 to $50 per month.”

![BOYS wanted between 15 and 18 years of age. Apply POSTAL TELEGRAPH COMPANY. Can earn from $40 to $50 per month.](image)

If he were in school, as a 15-year old, he would have attended Bryan Street High School, one of four public high schools in Dallas at the time. Located in the downtown area, it was the nearest school to where he and his family lived. N. R. Crozier was the principal of the school from 1914 to 1919.

In 1918, the country was preparing for the war in Europe. “One feature of the registration at the High Schols (sic) is the heavy demand for certain subjects, such as military drill, manual trainings, domestic science, commercial subjects and several of the languages.” The newspaper went on to note an increase in French and a decrease in German, likely due to the war in Europe. Perhaps, Pierpont did not attend school, but worked to help support his family. In fall 1917, the

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Dallas schools began to offer free night school open to individuals of all ages. Young boys selling newspapers and working as postal messengers could take advantage of the night schools.  

Pierpont would have attended elementary school in Little Rock, Houston and Dallas as the family moved around between 1907 and 1918. Five “ward schools” (elementary schools) fed Bryan Street High School. A comparison of the addresses where Pierpont’s family lived, the addresses of the schools that fed Bryan Street High School, and Dallas, Texas Sanborn maps suggest that he would have attended Cumberland Hill School for his elementary years.

According to his death certificate, the newspaper funeral notice and cemetery interment records, Pierpont was interred in Oakland Cemetery, Dallas, Texas, on October 1, 1918 in section 40. Sacred Heart Cathedral, where the funeral took place, was located at the corner of Ross and Pearl Streets. Was he confirmed as a Catholic? Was his deceased father an Irish Catholic? His parents and his half-sister were married by Methodist ministers. Additional records are needed to answer these questions.

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**Pierpont’s Father:** Reviewing the 1900 census, we find Pierpont’s parents, J. P. and [Hattie] Ida Balderson, living in Fort Worth. J. P. was born in March 1866 in either England, New York or Ireland. He immigrated to the United States in 1870 and was naturalized.\(^{10}\) No immigration or naturalization record has been located. Research in various city directories in Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston, revealed J. P.’s full name as Joseph Patrick “Patsey” Balderson. He lived in Dallas from 1893 to 1898, in Houston in 1898, and then in Fort Worth from 1899 until his death in 1907.\(^{11}\) He was described as the one-time proprietor of a Calhoun street theater in Fort Worth. City directories, in Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston, showed that he was a musician, played the cornet and piano, and operated a variety or vaudeville theater in the Daggett addition.\(^{12}\)

In April 1901, a fire broke out in the building occupied by “Professor” Balderson at Twelfth and Calhoun, caused by “cigarette stump.” A second fire occurred in May. Later in the


year, *Fort Worth Record and Register* reported that a physician was called at midnight to the corner of Calhoun and Twelfth to attend to “a man named Patsey Balderson” who had been engaged in a “difficulty, and as a result there was no question but that he had been badly used.” He sold the property in 1902. Before his death in April 1907, his wife filed suit for divorce against him, but the case was one of several reportedly dismissed by a judge before July 1, 1907. Perhaps this was because J. P. died 23 April 1907 in Fort Worth. He was interred in Fort Worth’s Oakwood Cemetery on 24 April 1907.

**Pierpont’s Mother:** Hattie Ida Medlock and her twin Effie Ada were born 18 February 1877 in Arkansas to John Forsyth Medlock (1840-1920) and Rhoda Malinda Glenn (1846-1879).

The twins, age 3, appear on the 1880 census with their uncle, Benjamin S. Medlock, a physician, and his wife Julia, in Owen, Saline county, Arkansas. After their mother had died, their father remarried and they were raised by their aunt and uncle. Hattie Medlock and Joseph

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15 1900 U. S. census, Tarrant County, Texas, population schedule., Ward 3, Fort Worth, ED 96, p. 2 (penned), dwelling 26, family 29, Hattie Balderson, gives her birth as February 1880, age 18, while the 1880 Saline County, Arkansas gives her age as 3 (i.e. 1877) and the 1910 Saline county Arkansas census lists her age as 32 (i.e. 1878). Texas State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. Austin, Texas, USA. “Texas Death Certificates, 1903–1982.” subscription database, Ancestry.com (https://www.ancestry.com : accessed 28 September 2020, for Hattie Parkinson, 33727 (1919)s

Balderson, listed as “Joe Bolson” on the marriage license, were married on 11 December 1899 in Fort Worth, Texas by Methodist minister, Edwin D. Mouzon. Their marriage license and certificate is on the Tarrant County Archives website. It is unknown how or where they met, but Hattie’s twin sister came to Texas to attend Baylor College at Belton and graduated from the St. Paul Nursing Training School in Dallas. When Hattie lived in Fort Worth in 1898, she advertised for help finding Effie’s location.

Hattie had three children: Pierpont, a daughter who was born in 1905 and died between 1908 and 1910, and a daughter, Lois, born in 1908. After J. P.’s death, Hattie returned to her native Arkansas where she met and married Eugene S. Parkinson. Their daughter, Lois Rhoda Parkinson, was born in Little Rock on 10 February 1908.

A Dallas city directory recorded


18 According to her great niece, she and her twin sister attended nursing school. The sister graduated, but she didn’t. Janet Cook to Barbara Ware, emails, 11 October to 13 October 2020, photographs, obituary, and information regarding Medlock family.


Hattie and Eugene’s move to Dallas around 1914, where they were listed at 1211 S Harwood.

She operated a boarding house. In 1917 Hattie and family lived at 1290 Masten and she “furnished rooms,” an occupation in which she engaged to help support her family in Fort Worth, Little Rock and Dallas.21 When she died on 21 January 1919, another victim of pneumonia and influenza, the family lived at 2609 Rosewood. She was buried in Section 37 of Oakland Cemetery.22 After her burial, her son, Pierpont, was moved from his original burial location to the same section as his mother.23

**Pierpont’s Stepfather and Half-sister.** Pierpont’s stepfather, Eugene S. Parkinson, was born in Mississippi on 5 August 1876 and died in Dallas 11 November 1924. In between he lived in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Houston, Texas.24 Eugene had moved from Mississippi to Arkansas

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after serving in the Spanish American War, first as a private and then a corporal.\textsuperscript{25} He worked as a lineman for Southwestern Telephone and Telegraph in Little Rock, Houston, and Dallas. After settling in Dallas, he worked as a driver for Palace Dry Cleaning and Hat Works, Wells Fargo, Magnolia Petroleum, and American Railway Express.\textsuperscript{26}

Hattie and Eugene moved their family to Dallas between 1911 and 1915. Pierpont died in 1918 and Hattie in 1919. After Hattie’s death, Eugene married Frances Elizabeth Brown Clay, who had previously been married to James Thomas Clay.\textsuperscript{27} When Eugene S. Parkinson died in 1924, he was buried alongside Hattie in Oakland Cemetery.

Eugene and Hattie’s daughter, Lois Rhoda Parkinson, was born in Little Rock, Arkansas on 10 February 1908. Reverend Umphrey Lee of the Methodist Church married Lois to Thomas Clyde Gilchrist in Dallas on 13 November 1927. They had two sons. Both Lois Parkinson Gilchrist and Thomas Clyde Gilchrist are buried at Oakland Cemetery, Section 5.\textsuperscript{28}

Although Pierpont Balderson had a short life, his name lives on when individuals write about the 1918 influenza pandemic in Dallas, but his family and their history were not mentioned.


\textsuperscript{27} Index to Dallas County, Texas Marriages, 1846 to 1963, Roll 13, E. S. Parkinson and Elizabeth Clay, 11 Jun 1919, Book 26, Page 55 from microfilm in the J. Erik Jonsson Central Library, Dallas, Texas.

Family Genealogical Summary:

1. Hattie Ada Medlock was born 18 February 1877, one of a set of twins, to John Forsyth Medlock and Rhoda Malina Glenn, in Arkansas and died 21 January 1919 in Dallas, Texas. She married (1) Joseph Patrick Balderson on 11 December 1899 in Fort Worth, Texas. He was born March 1866 in Ireland or England, parents unknown, and died 24 April 1907 in Fort Worth, Texas. She married (2) Eugene Sharkey Parkinson in 1907, exact date and location unknown. He was born 5 August 1874 in Mississippi, and died 5 November 1924 in Dallas, Texas. He married Frances Elizabeth Brown Clay on 11 June 1919 in Dallas county, Texas.

Hattie Medlock and Joseph Balderson has the following children:
2 i. Pierpont Balderson, born April 1903 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; died 30 September 1918 in Dallas, Texas. Pierpont was the first person to die of the 1918 influenza epidemic in Dallas county, Texas.
3 ii. Daughter Balderson, born 2 Oct 1905 in Fort Worth, Texas; died between 1908 and 1910 in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Hattie Medlock and Eugene Sharkey Parkinson had the following child:
4. i. Lois Rhoda Parkinson, born 10 February 1908 in Little Rock Arkansas; died 4 October 2000 in Lewisville, Texas. She married Thomas Clyde Gilchrist on 13 November 1927 in Dallas, Texas. He was born 10 June 1900 in London, England and died 6 December 1966 in Dallas, Texas. They had two sons who are still living.

Source Summary: It takes many sources to bring together a family story including census, city directories, newspaper articles, county marriage records, online data and records aggregators (e.g. Ancestry, FamilySearch, Findagrave), family members, vital records (death and birth certificates), cemetery interment cards, obituaries, and internet articles.

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<td>Census</td>
<td>1880, 1910 U.S. Census: Little Rock, Pulaski county, Arkansas</td>
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<td>1900 U.S. Census: Fort Worth, Tarrant county, Texas</td>
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<td>1900 U.S. Census: Belton, Bell county, Texas</td>
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<td>1920, 1930, 1940 U.S. Census: Dallas county, Texas</td>
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<td>1880 U.S. Census: Mississippi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vital Records</td>
<td>Texas Death Certificates: Dallas county, Texas: 1918, 1919, 1924, 1966</td>
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<td>Marriage certificates: Tarrant county, Texas; Dallas county, Texas</td>
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<td>Birth certificate: Little Rock, Arkansas 1908</td>
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<td>City directories</td>
<td>Dallas, Dallas, Texas: 1893-4, 1894-5, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1915, 1916,</td>
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<td>1917, 1918,</td>
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<td>Fort Worth, Tarrant, Texas: 1901-02, 1902, 1904, 1905-06</td>
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<td>Houston, Harris, Texas: 1897-98, 1913</td>
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<td>Little Rock, Pulaski, Arkansas: 1907, 1908, 1910, 1911, 1919, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1929,</td>
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Cemetery Records
- Oakland Cemetery, Dallas, Texas Interment cards
- Oakwood Cemetery (Fort Worth) online name list [Balderan, J P]
- Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery (FamilySearch)

Findagrave
- Cemeteries in Dallas, Fort Worth and Little Rock

Maps
- Sanborn maps: Dallas, Texas 1899, 1921

Newspapers
- Dallas Morning News
- Fort Worth Star Telegram
- Fort Worth Record and Register
- Arkansas Gazette, Arkansas Democrat

Military Records
- General index to Pension Files 1861-1934
- USGenWeb Mississippi Archives Index of Spanish American War Rosters
- World War I Selective Service Draft Registration Cards

Immigration and Naturalization
- Various online databases that did not yield results. Not able to check other records with libraries and courthouses closed.

Tax Rolls
- These do not seem to be available, at least not online, for the time period of interest.

Obituaries/Death Notices
- *Arkansas Democrat, Arkansas Gazette* (1919), (1927)
- *Fort Worth Star Telegram*

Various historical information articles
- Texas State Historical Society publications
- JSTOR
- Fort Worth Star Telegram
- Dallas Morning News
- Various articles found by searching Google.

**Comments:** In order to share the story of this family, Findagrave.com entries have been created or updated, and the related family trees on FamilySearch.com have been corrected, merged and enhanced. If you would like to know more about the 1918 Influenza in Dallas, you can find an interesting article in the “Influenza Encyclopedia” produced by the University of Michigan Center for History of Medicine and Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library.

Due to the current pandemic closure of libraries, archives and governmental offices, research for this article was conducted almost exclusively online. Thanks to the genealogy departments of the J. Erik Jonsson Central Library and the Fort Worth Central Library for looking up county marriage license information available only at their sites.

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