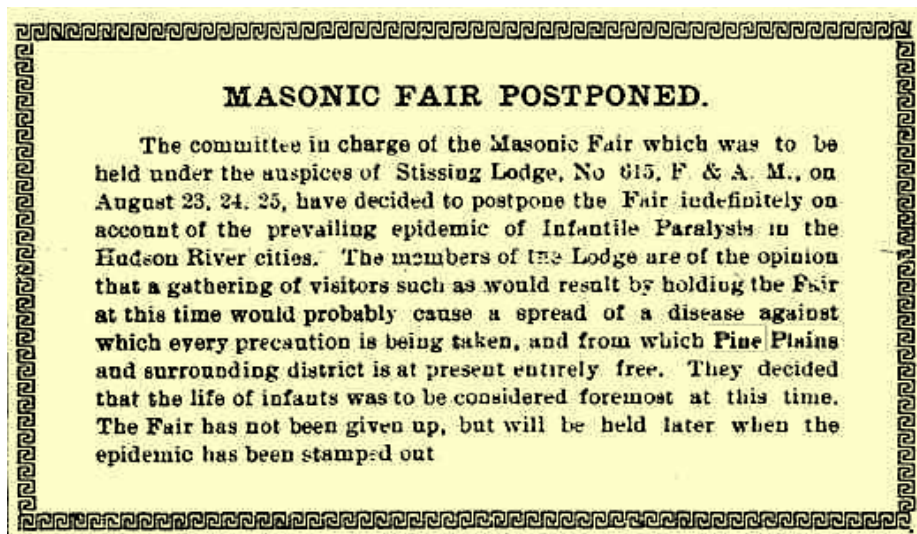


The Polio Scare of 1916

In 1916, the United States experienced its first large-scale polio epidemic, with 27,000 cases resulting in 6,000 deaths in 26 states. In New York City alone, there were 9,000 cases, leading to 2,400 deaths and 1,000 children paralyzed. Polio (Infantile paralysis) occurred primarily in the late summer/early autumn, and the fact that it attacked mostly children made it a particularly feared disease. Nobody knew what caused it, and at the time, there was no vaccine or cure.

The most effective way the Board of Health found of dealing with the spread of the disease was through quarantines and vigilance. Communities set up strict guidelines for handling children. Any public place where young people gathered together in large numbers was at risk, such as Memorial Hall. Children under 16 were forbidden to attend movies for a period of time, while other events were postponed.



In 1918, Memorial Hall was completely shut down for a period of time due to the flu epidemic, which was far more deadly than polio.