

Way We Were

February 15, 2017

But for a box of apples...

Mahala Ruddell, Research coordinator

We know next to nothing about Armendio Novario outside of the few details in the *Park Record* article on his death in 1918. The paper noted that he was Italian, was “spoken highly of by those who knew him,” had been married about a year, and had been living in Park City with his wife since the summer of 1918. In the first week of December he fell ill, along with most of the rest of Park City, with a particularly virulent strain of influenza. This flu outbreak has since entered the history books as the “Spanish flu” pandemic, and Novario was just one of its millions of victims.

Stricken with a high fever, Novario started behaving oddly three days after first becoming ill. He suffered “spells,” as the *Record* politely put it, in which he “became delirious” and began acting violently. In fact, his neighbors claimed, one particular incident could have resulted in a murderous rampage, had Novario not “caught sight of [a] box of apples.” Upon seeing the apples, Novario had dropped the loaded gun he’d been carrying, sat down next to the crate, and eaten three before being “persuaded” back to bed. Fearing him a danger to himself and others, his attendants put him in a straightjacket.

However, on Sunday morning, December 8th, Novario asked for a cigarette and the attendant minding him made a fatal mistake in allowing it. After loosening the straightjacket so that Novario could move his arm to smoke, the attendant briefly left the room. When he returned, his charge was gone.

Novario was found not long after the attendant raised the hue and cry. His legs were spotted, “sticking out of the creek” behind his house on upper Main Street. “Life was extinct” upon discovery, the *Record* lamented. Searchers retraced the crazed man’s steps to discover that, after sneaking from bed, he’d left his room, “running along a platform in the rear of his home,” before jumping and “falling perhaps twenty feet, striking a fence, and then rolling into Silver Creek.”

Fever-induced forms of acute psychosis (as opposed to chronic) are not altogether uncommon with the very ill, especially in connection with influenza-like viruses. In an article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1919, Dr. Karl Menninger noted that nearly 100 cases of “mental disturbance associated with influenza” were admitted to a Boston hospital in the course of just three months between September 15 and December 15, 1918, a time of peak severity for the Spanish flu pandemic.

We’ll never know what imaginary demons were tormenting Armendio Novario’s fevered mind at the time of his wild escape and tragic death. He left behind his grieving widow who recovered from her own bout of the flu just days later.



Image ID: 1999.17.243/2002.26.48

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Fraser Buck

Caption: Armedio Novario and his wife lived on upper Main Street, pictured here in 1902. The creek Novario died in is just to the right of the picture.

Sources:

Menninger, Karl A. "Psychoses Associated with Influenza," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 72:4 (1919): 235-241

"Crazed Man Suicides," *Park Record*, Dec 13, 1918