

The Growth of Public Health in Winston Salem, NC, 1910-1930

The city of Winston, North Carolina, grew rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so much so that urban infrastructure could not keep pace. In 1870, the total population was 443; in 1880, 2,854; in 1890, 8,018; in 1900, 10,008 and in 1910, 17,167.¹ Much of this increase came from Winston becoming a center of the tobacco industry; by 1897 Winston was the third largest tobacco-manufacturing town in the nation, and by 1910, it was the sixth largest city in the state. In 1913, it merged with the town of Salem; this merger and continued in-migration for tobacco jobs led the city to become the largest in the state by 1920 with a population of 48,395. This near tripling of the population in one decade exacerbated health conditions in the city. Reformers and activists formed the Forsyth County Public Health Department (FCPHD) in 1913 to protect the general health of city residents, to increase sanitation and access to clean water, and to stop the spread of communicable diseases. Soon after its founding, the FCPHD faced its first major health crisis in 1916 when a scarlet fever epidemic broke out among adults. Two years later, the Influenza pandemic hit the city with force. This paper looks at the cooperation among federal, state, and local officials to contain these back-to-back epidemics, and the impact they had on the growth of the FCPHD.

¹ Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910: Statistics for North Carolina* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 569.