

# Foreword

In 1978 Dr. Ramunas Kondratas, then assistant curator at the National Museum of American History, Division of Medical Science at the Smithsonian Institution, made a rather unique documentary film on homeopathy. Featuring Gustav “Gus” Tafel, who took the audience on a 30-minute tour of the largest manufacturer of homeopathic medicines in the United States, Boericke & Tafel, “Reunions: Memories of an American Experience” presented a distinguished looking gentleman in his late sixties, the grandson of co-founder Adolph J. Tafel, who waxed nostalgic over his time at the “B & T” firm. Located in Philadelphia at 1011 Arch Street, the building, apparatus, and manufacturing processes had changed little since moving to that location in 1880.\* The Skinner potencies† used by B & T until 1991, for example, had been recommended by the eminent homeopath James Tyler Kent in 1903, and even Gus Tafel admitted that many of the bottles of assorted attenuated and diluted tinctures made by that process had been lining the storage shelves for years.

But what exactly *is* homeopathy? The film’s narrator explained that homeopathy was “a vitalistic and holistic medical doctrine formulated by a German physician, Samuel Hahnemann” in the early nineteenth century. After reviewing the company’s history, Tafel toured the facility, introduced the audience to the firm’s president (a “second cousin by marriage”), discussed the business through the years, and concluded with almost fatalistic resignation, “it [homeopathy] lasted until about 1900 and then it slowly started to deteriorate and then the allopathic schools took over.” Happy with his B & T career, Tafel gave a wry

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\*In 1987 Boericke & Tafel was purchased by VSM in Holland. B & T moved in 1992 to Santa Rosa, California.

†Named after Scottish homeopath Thomas Skinner, the “Skinner Continuous Fluxion Apparatus” used by B & T was designed to produce highly dynamized products.

smile and reflected, "I won't say all the people were cured with the medicine they took, but it certainly didn't hurt 'em any and they never went after us on any kind of suit." The documentary ends by the narrator summing up with, "Homeopathy . . . is a link to another time. The future of this form of medicine is uncertain but it has a definite place in history."

True enough, and now at last we have a history told by America's most preeminent historian of alternative medicine, John S. Haller, Jr. Yet this film was mentioned for a definite reason. Anyone viewing this documentary would conclude that homeopathy in the United States was an ossified, nearly moribund alternative health system based upon a few notions concocted by an anachronistic German eccentric now carried on by a handful of kindly old men more from habit than conviction. The principles of like-cures-like and minuscule dose with its distinguishing potentized remedies appear quaint and well intentioned but hardly the things of which modern medicines are made. The book in hand, a sequel to *The History of Homeopathy: The Academic Years, 1820-1935* (2005), will quickly dispel this impressionistic view. Rather than presenting the picture of a slowly dying monolithic form of alternative medicine, John Haller demonstrates that homeopathy has fostered a multiplicity of beliefs and therapeutic modalities. Instead of the dry and dusty nooks and crannies of a struggling, superannuated homeopathic manufacturer, the present volume shows homeopathy to be a highly animated and constantly changing alternative to medical and even religious orthodoxy. Rather than the nearly expired profession bemoaned by Gus Tafel, we see here, as stated in the book's subtitle, homeopathy transitioning *From Rational Medicine to Holistic Health Care*. It is a lively narrative of conflict and controversy, carried up to the present day by a colorful cast of ever evolving and always interesting characters.

As Haller tells it, "In fact, classical homeopathy was anything but steady-state. As will eventually be shown, having wedded themselves to high potency therapeutics, classical homeopaths moved inexorably from an empirically grounded science to a religiously based belief system sporting a myriad of competing interpretations." Indeed the definition given in the documentary, namely, that homeopathy is a "vitalistic and holistic medical doctrine," is broadly true but in the search for more spiritual cures the devil has always been in the details. The book in hand demonstrates that there have been almost as

many views of homeopathy as there have been homeopaths. These diverse perspectives form a kaleidoscope of theories and regimens—everything from Swedenborgianism-turned-Kentianism to Reichenbach’s “Odic force” theory have produced an array of therapies from Electronic Attenuator X-O-Rays, Schüssler’s cell-salts, and Bach flowerism to high potencies, low potencies, somewhere-in-between potencies, and other so-called energy medicines—all (or at least most) formulated under the homeopathic shibboleth of *similia similibus curantur* or (as some have insisted) *similia similibus curentur*.

As complicated as all this sounds, Haller gives insight, strength, and clarity to this story by allowing the protagonists to speak for themselves. In less competent hands such a cacophony of voices would become a hodgepodge of atonality, losing the narrative and the reader in an anarchy of sound bites. But through Haller’s seasoned expertise and objective analysis homeopathy’s search for itself, though persistently elusive, still emerges with verve and precision. Thoroughly researched and drawn from the primary sources themselves, *The History of American Homeopathy: From Rational Medicine to Holistic Health Care* forms the second volume of what will undoubtedly become the standard history of this heterodox system of health care in the United States.

Despite the story’s complexity, Haller’s theme is straightforward: with the decline of the academic years following the Flexner Report in 1910, a growing laity emerged as the heir apparent to the system founded by Samuel Hahnemann nearly two centuries ago. Yet even sailing under this new populist banner has remained problematic. Haller admits, “. . . whether American homeopathy can ever share in conventional medicine’s broad-based integration remains to be seen. Having moved so far into the world of the non-professional healer and having thereby distanced itself from most licensure requirements tied to training, testing, and certification, whether homeopathy can be anything more than a faith-based system dependent upon anecdotes, beliefs, theories, preconceived notions, testimonials and opinions of support is questionable. Ultimately, this may be what its proponents have wanted all along.”

In the final analysis the history of homeopathy has been anything but homogeneous and this has plagued its historiography. Too often the history of homeopathy has been chronicled by extremists—crusaders out to vilify it as unmitigated quackery or partisan apologists and

thinly veiled hagiographers eager to justify nearly everything and/or anything in its name. This is no such volume. Haller lets homeopathy explain itself, and in so doing a fascinating history emerges. The following chapters tell a story that is multifaceted, diverse, and sometimes contentious but *never* boring.

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