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## **Water-Cure in the Bay State: Hydropathic Healing in Massachusetts, 1840-1890**

Susan E. Cayleff

Fanny B. Johnson, in her eighty-eighth year, delivered a message in 1907 at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the founding of the Dansville, New York, Water-Cure:

In the spring of 1857, being out of health and having read in the Water Cure Journal articles on health by Dr. Jackson, it was thought best by my family that I put myself under his care. This was at considerable sacrifice on my husband's part . . . but I often heard him say afterward that he never made another investment that paid him so well. I went to Dr. Jackson expecting to remain six weeks but I stayed six months and went home well . . . . I learned my lesson and have taken care of myself. I have not taken doses or tonics; I have taken care.<sup>1</sup>

She could well attest to the changes that the cure had brought about in her life; the restoration of health, the formation of friendships that lasted a lifetime, and the assumption of responsibility for her own health care. Other women wrote similar accounts, glowingly recalling their stays at water-cure

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1. Quoted in William D. Conklin, The Jackson Health Resort (Dansville, N.Y., 1971).

establishments and praising the hydropathic program of patient participation and eventual patient autonomy.

In addition to physiological remedies, the principles, therapeutics, and environment of these water-cure establishments offered their patients psychological relief. Women, whose role in the nineteenth century demanded an unvarying round of domestic responsibilities and the nurturing of husband and family, found respite at the water cures. The cures addressed complaints ranging from organic ailments to nervous disorders, from "broken-down constitutions" to emotional malaise. While men were equally attracted to the cures and oftentimes outnumbered women in attendance, it is women's relationship to the movement, and the Massachusetts establishments, that is the focus of this essay.

Hydropony, or cold water cure, sought to rid the body of "sickly matter" and replace it with healthy matter by using water as a conduit. Thus, water taken internally, and general and local applications of water (e.g., soaks, wraps, plunges, head, arm and eye baths, etc.) aimed to restore the body's balanced state. Simultaneously, radical reforms in personal living habits were advocated, including vegetarianism, the adoption of reform dress, exercise, abstention from all stimulants such as spices, coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcohol, and moderate exposure to emotional and sexual stimulation. Thus, while water was the sole healing agent, a hygienic way of life complemented its use.

Hydropony was one of the most celebrated alternative forms of medical care in an age generally characterized by more dramatic therapeutics. The allopathic ("regular") treatments of orthodox physicians included bloodletting and purging, and were aimed at calming the general or local fever that resulted from irritation or excitement, and caused, so the theory held, the diseased condition. The goal of these treatments was to aid nature in evacuating the body of its "ill humors" and restore a balance of elements by removing "putrid matter" from the system. These therapeutics were employed when treating "female complaints," as well as other ailments. Conventional medical tracts, asserting that women's disorders emanated from the womb, focused on the reproductive organs. These texts commonly portrayed women as impaired by menstrual difficulties and subjected to an unpredictable physiology that rendered them unable to perform intellectual work.

Hydropathic theory, in contrast, maintained that allopathy weakened the female constitution and rendered women incapable of bearing and rearing children. Thus, hydropaths rejected the so-called "heroic" therapeutics in managing women's maladies. They also challenged the allopathic view of women's physiology, redefining these processes as natural, not medical junctures, and thus deemphasized doctors and drugs. Therefore, hydropaths provided an important impetus for American women to question both the conventional therapeutics they were receiving and the consequently constricting definition of their physiology and intellect that justified their social status.

In a century in which numerous medical practitioners were competing for patients, hydropathy was called a cult or "quackery" by allopathic physicians, who thought its therapeutics irresponsible and who were themselves seeking popular support.<sup>2</sup> Despite charges of quackery, the water-cure movement enjoyed acceptance among the American populace and was, for a few decades in the mid-nineteenth century, a staunch competitor of allopathic physicians as well as other health reform sects.

Especially prolific between 1840 and 1900, hydropathic establishments, or water cures, flourished primarily in Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. There were, by one historian's count, 213 water-cure establishments nationwide.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the *Water-Cure Journal*, which served as the primary literary organ of the movement, was published from 1843 until 1913, and saw its subscription list reach one hundred thousand in the 1850s.<sup>4</sup>

Introduced into the United States in the early 1840s by American popularizers of a Czechoslovakian peasant's (Vincent Priessnitz) original European system, hydropathy followed in the path cleared by supporters of the earlier sects. These included

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2. See Paul Starr, The Social Transformation of American Medicine (New York, 1982), p. 99, for a discussion of the percentage of irregular practitioners in the nineteenth century.

3. See Harry B. Weiss and Howard R. Kemble, The Great American Water-Cure Craze: A History of Hydropathy in the United States (Trenton, N.J., 1967).

4. For information on the format, popularity, and circulation of the Water-Cure Journal see Water-Cure Journal, June 1851, p. 150; December 1852, pp. 129-130; and January 1860, p. 9.

Thomsonians, eclectics, homeopaths, the followers of Sylvester Graham and William Alcott, and the phrenologists. These movements played a precedent-setting role for hydropathy. Their common beliefs included a rejection of allopathic therapeutics and, in many instances, an unswerving faith in hygienic principles. Although the sects had varied theories of disease, they agreed on nature's ability to aid in the curing of disease. They also condemned the kinds and amounts of drugs used, stressed healthful living as a prerequisite for a strong physical constitution, and, in some instances, offered women a participatory role as practitioners.

While hydropathy followed in the path cleared by the earlier sects, it represented a high point in its comprehensive world view and in its emphasis on self-sufficiency, two features that distinguished it from the other sects. Hydropathy's popularity upon its introduction into America in the 1840s by proponents and practitioners of the cold water system -- as distinguished from mineral baths or hot applications of water -- is best understood within the self-help and health-reform traditions.<sup>5</sup>

The water cure as a popular health system was informed by a millennial ideal of human perfectability and consequent societal uplifting. It championed personal and social advancement through health and provided answers for all of life's uncertainties.<sup>6</sup> It offered a group context in which personal improvement could serve as a model for societal reformation. As a medical system, hydropathy utilized psychosocial factors critical to the healing process. It mobilized the patient's natural healing powers, aroused hope and expectancy of cure, and reinforced ties with the social group and the cultural world view. It also placed primary importance on the healer-patient encounter for providing hope, relief of symptoms, communication, and therapeutic touch while instilling faith and trust.<sup>7</sup> As stated in the early mastheads

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5. See Susan E. Cayleff, Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health (Philadelphia, 1987), chapter 1.

6. For a definition of a health system, see David J. Hufford, "Folk Healers," in Handbook of American Folklore, ed. by Richard M. Dorsson (Bloomington, Indiana, 1983), pp. 306-313.

7. For a description of the common therapeutic features that unorthodox healers tend to utilize, see David Sobel, Ways of Health (New York, 1979), pp. 223-230. See

of the *Journal*, one need only to "Wash and Be Healed."<sup>8</sup> Thus, one of hydropathy's unique contributions among the sects was that it offered a vision of a good life unencumbered by theoretical uncertainty, and it provided the entire context in which to live it.

Since hydropaths refused to classify women as physically and intellectually hampered by their physiology, the redefinition of women's social role became a primary concern. By soliciting a female readership, rethinking the treatment of female diseases, urging women's active participation in home health care, and actively supporting the inclusion of female physicians, the water-cure movement appealed to women as the primary caretakers of others, and fostered an extension of woman's sphere of influence from the domestic into the informally political realm. Further, it evinced a feminist ideology (termed "emancipationist" in the literature) that stressed woman's right to increased choices, opportunities, and rewards, and her resultant obligation to care for her own health and that of others.<sup>9</sup>

Adherents of hydropathy could participate in the system either through home self-care or under the tutelage of a water-cure physician at a site away from home. Life at an away-from-home cure reinforced all the positive elements of hydropathic living. The particular appeal of Massachusetts (and New York) for water-cure establishments stemmed in part from their rich tradition of evangelical religious reform, and various social reform activities that flourished there. As the enthusiasm for revivals waned, people's attention was turned toward phrenology,

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 also Wilbur H. Watson, Black Folk Medicine: The Therapeutic Significance of Faith and Trust (New Brunswick, N.J., 1985); Leon Eisenberg, "Disease and Illness: Distinctions between Professional and Popular Ideas of Sickness," a modified version of a manuscript that appeared in Research and Medical Practice: Their Interaction, Ciba Foundation Symposium no. 44 (Amsterdam, 1976), pp. 3-23; and Dolores Krieger, "Therapeutic Touch: The Imprimatur of Nursing," American Journal of Nursing, May 1975, pp. 784-787.

8. See Water-Cure Journal, vol. 1, number 1 (December 1, 1845).

9. Hilary Graham's, "Providers, Negotiators, and Mediators: Women as the Hidden Carers," in Women, Health and Healing: Toward a New Perspective, ed. by Ellen Levin and Virginia Olesen (New York, 1985), pp. 25-62, highlights the informal, unpaid work that women do to protect and promote the health of others.

mesmerism, land reform, living experiments, and faith sects -- in short, to other panaceas.<sup>10</sup>

Several establishments throughout Massachusetts demonstrate the typical characteristics of a cure. These were located in Athol, Easthampton, Springfield, Worcester, and two in Northampton. All these cures promoted their facilities in the pages of the *Water Cure Journal*; several distributed pamphlets and brochures which can now be found at local historical societies; others had their doings diligently charted by local newspapers; and patrons' memoirs address the question of life at a cure.<sup>11</sup> The sources reveal a significant female clientele which, given the impediments to women's mobility, is notable. Also, a positive gender-conscious sensibility pervaded the larger establishments.

Bay State cures had diverse histories and by no means demonstrated equal longevity or stability of proprietorship. The establishments survived from a few months to over a hundred years. But they did have several common features: the reform activity that emanated from them, their commitment to water-cure principles that gradually expanded to include other healing methods, conflicts between the movement's philosophy and the practitioners' methods, and their use by women as a retreat. Convinced that natural surroundings were the first step in determining a new outlook for patients, Bay State establishments stressed their country settings. Citing a change of scenery as part of the healing process, Massachusetts' cures were exacting in their selection of their environs, as the *Daily Hampshire Gazette's* (1845) depiction of the glorious setting of Round Hill House in Northampton reveals: ". . . the establishment is well known to be not only *unsurpassed* but *unequaled* in beauty by any in the

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10. See Whitney R. Cross, "Utopia Now," in The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982); and E. C. Atwater and L. A. Kohn, "Rochester and the Water Cure," Rochester History, vol. 32, no. 4 (1970): 1-24.

11. Of the cures studied in depth, all advertised in the *Water-Cure Journal*, and that source can be utilized to provide information as to their location, facilities, staff, gender composition, and longevity. Also see Jane B. Donegan, Hydropathic Highway to Health: Women and Water-Cure in Antebellum America (Westport, Conn., 1986), p. xv.

country."<sup>12</sup> The newspaper described the meadows, terrace, shade, and cool breezes all at hand for the patrons' comfort.

The cures aimed to provide sex-segregated modern hydropathic conveniences and comforts as well. The buildings ranged in size from a modest one-family dwelling housing twenty, to mammoth structures serving as home for hundreds. The Springfield Water Cure, for example, under the proprietorship of Jasper Severance and Dr. E. Snell, was two hundred feet long by fifty feet wide, three stories high, with nearly fifty rooms. The building also had separate bathing facilities for women and men, and large dressing rooms connected by an abundant supply of pure "soft" water.<sup>13</sup> Nearby, the facilities of the Round Hill Water Cure (also called the Round Hill House) exemplified the success enjoyed by one of the larger, more prosperous establishments. Reporters of the *Northampton Herald* reported in 1847 that it "contained over one hundred rooms, [a] dining hall, [a] saloon, several reception rooms; [an] office, [a] kitchen, and bathing conveniences for the exclusive use of ladies."<sup>14</sup> Round Hill passed through several proprietors, all of whom added facilities. By 1855, several noteworthy changes had occurred, including a basement "devoted to bathing, dressing and packing rooms, including all varieties and baths, accommodated with ample heating apparatus for the winter months." Further, the cure now had one hundred and fifty sleeping rooms, "many with handsome bathrooms connected, and hot and cold water."<sup>15</sup> Out-door piazzas, walkways, and exercise and amusement facilities were also new additions. The reassurance that there were separate "ladies' bathing facilities," and practitioners specifically trained in women's diseases, fostered trust, consciously solicited women's patronage, and appealed to women's gender consciousness. Similarly, the Northampton Water Cure (to be distinguished from

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 12. "Hydropathic Establishment on Round Hill," Daily Hampshire Gazette, April 20, 1847, p. 1.

13. "Marking Another Milestone . . . Our Seven Hundredth Forgotten Facts about Springfield," Shopping News, n.d., located in the vertical file on Water-Cure at the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum Library, Springfield.

14. Northampton Herald, May 16, 1847.

15. Daily Hampshire Gazette, June 26, 1855, p. 2.



the Round Hill House) specifically advertised "the ladies' plunge."<sup>16</sup>

Cures appealed to specific clientele (e.g., women, sufferers of certain ailments, physicians, weary clergy, or exhausted teachers), yet they served a variety of patients, who made their choices by the setting, accoutrements offered, reputation of the physician in charge, therapies employed, and the proximity of the establishments to the patient's home. Clients less interested in medical care than the recreational facilities were also recruited. Round Hill, for example, "invites . . . the pleasure-seeking, and those who wish for a season of recreation from the cares of business, where pure air, pure water, lovely walks and rides, and captivating scenery may be enjoyed, without 'stint or measure.'" The director reassured the guests that they "need have no apprehension of being brought down to the scanty diet of the invalid."<sup>17</sup> Thus, Round Hill courted invalids, pleasure seekers, weakly children, and "those who have induced Chronic Affections of the Throat, by exposure, by public speaking, or by over-exertion in business or study."<sup>18</sup> Round Hill met with considerable success, as indicated by a list of references from seventy former patients from varied walks of life. The crowning compliment came from Jenny Lind, renowned soprano, who, after a three-month stay, called Round Hill "the paradise of America."<sup>19</sup>

In addition to attracting the well-off, the hydropathic movement's leadership and the individual cures emphasized the necessity of remaining economically accessible to large numbers of people. The *Water Cure Journal's* editors, noting that the cost of a subscription (\$1 per year) would save a family much in the way of doctor bills, offered to send the information free to those who could not afford it.<sup>20</sup> Joel Shew, one of the triumvirate to

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16. Daily Hampshire Gazette, June 8, 1847, p. 3.

17. *Ibid.*, May 30, 1848, p. 2.

18. Round Hill Water Cure and Motorpathic Institute, Northampton, Massachusetts, pamphlet, n.d., in Forbes Library, Northampton.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3-5.

20. See Water-Cure Journal, vol. 27, no. 3 (March 1858): 38; Hygienic Teacher and Water-Cure Journal, vol. 34, no. 3 (October 1862): 79.

popularize hydropathy in the United States, reminded readers in an 1854 article, "To Cheapen Water Cure," that the system was accessible to all through home use. Further, to reduce costs at the cures, he suggested that patients help one another with the processes that required attendants, thus removing the fees of bath attendants.<sup>21</sup> Other writers argued that charitable benevolence could make hydropathy accessible to poor patients, as could treating the needy at a nominal fee or promoting free physician's advice.<sup>22</sup> One 1858 article, "Salaries of Professional Men," declared that physicians should be salaried, not paid on a fee-for-service basis. This, the author claimed, would encourage *both* the doctor and the patient to emphasize keeping the patient well.<sup>23</sup>

In a real sense, these writings and others in their genre reveal a class enmity and struggle being waged through a debate on medical systems and beliefs. The hydropathic striving for economic accessibility reflected a demand for personal freedom and self-determination in all areas of life.<sup>24</sup> This active commitment to economic accessibility is evident when water-cure costs are compared with the average wages of workers, the cost of living, and the costs of allopathic medical care.<sup>25</sup> The Easthampton Water Cure charged, in the 1850s, six dollars per week, with an examination fee of two dollars; patients could board a private nurse for an additional two dollars per week.<sup>26</sup> Close by, the Springfield Water Cure charged five to ten dollars per week, and reminded prospective patients to bring their own

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21. Joel Shew, M.D. "To Cheapen Water-Cure," Water-Cure Journal, vol. 18, no. 4 (October 1854): 75-76.
22. See Water-Cure Journal, vol. 2, no. 12 (November 15, 1846): 178; and "Topics . . . Dollars and Cents," Water-Cure Journal, vol. 33, no. 2 (February 1862): 33. Shew told patients to write water-cure physicians for diagnosis and treatment: see Water-Cure Journal vol. 9, no. 4 (April 1850): 104-105.
23. Water-Cure Journal, vol. 26, no. 3 (September 1858): 48.
24. Cayleff, Wash and Be Healed, pp. 85-86.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-90.
26. Water-Cure Journal, advertisement, n.d.; and Weiss and Kemble, The Great American Water-Cure Craze, p. 133.

linens.<sup>27</sup> The Northampton Water Cure, under the auspices of Dr. David Ruggles in 1847, charged \$5.50 per week.<sup>28</sup>

For skilled workers, medical care within the establishments' price range was feasible. For women who were self-supporting, the economic and social limitations of their lives (large number of hours worked per week, and lack of mobility and autonomy) made them unlikely, although not impossible, patients at these establishments. The ability of a given family or individual to afford a stay at a water cure depended on a variety of factors, including regional economic opportunities and cost of living, earned wage, fluctuations in pay, and costs of consumed commodities. The loosely defined "clergyman's price" (a sliding scale that at times slid to free), may have been extended to an occasional farm laborer, unskilled worker, or self-supporting woman. The inability to leave responsibilities (specifically work) behind, however, limited the cures largely to the middle and upper classes or, possibly, to recipients of charity, and to seasonal workers such as farmers or teachers.

Significantly, a stay at a cure was economically feasible for people who were able to afford other kinds of health care. At live-in cures, fees were kept low by employing a centralized medical staff, modest dietary regimens, sliding fees, a price reduction for long stays, patients bringing their own linens and acting as one another's attendants. Thus, numerous patients could receive constant supervision at reasonable rates.

In a setting that fostered daily proximity between physician and patients, and sought a bonding in that relationship, physicians at the cures did not function only as medical advisers. They were overseers of all medical attendants, consultants to the kitchen staff, and the role models demonstrating habit alterations for patients. Establishments found it to their advantage to employ female physicians to remove any doubts female patients might have had about the intimacies of the physician-patient relationship. The larger establishments made an attempt to employ *at least* one woman physician; at the water-cure colleges the gender ratio of students was roughly one-to-one, and the larger (often family-owned) cures recruited and trained women

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27. "Marking Another Milestone."

28. Daily Hampshire Gazette, June 8, 1847, p. 3.

physicians. A few cures had exclusively female staffs and clientele. The establishments most likely *not* to have a woman physician in attendance were the smaller ones, often operated out of a single-family dwelling unit. These cures focused more on an outpatient, fee-for-service population treated by a single proprietor. The prevalence of female physicians at the cures increased after the middle of the nineteenth century. This stemmed from hydropathy's increased gender-consciousness. The cures and their leadership were influenced by the woman's rights movement, whose participants argued for the legitimacy of women physicians.

The backgrounds of water-cure physicians varied considerably. The Elmira and Dansville water cures, both in upstate New York, enjoyed consistent leadership fueled by generational family commitments. While these two establishments flourished for decades, they were more the exception than the rule. The five cures in central and western Massachusetts -- Athol, Easthampton, Westboro, and two at Northampton -- demonstrated less continuity in leadership. These establishments experienced physician mobility, frequent periods of decreased use, and earlier closings. The Athol Water Cure, for example, was run by Dr. George Hoyt. Born in Deerfield in 1801, Hoyt attended Deerfield Academy, the Pittsfield Medical School, practiced in a Boston hospital for two years specializing in surgery, and started a practice in Hubbardston, before arriving in Athol in 1832. Hoyt succeeded Dr. Jacob Holmes "and was one of the first to introduce the use of water medicinally in baths."<sup>29</sup>

The Southard House, where Hoyt established his cure, was also a station on the Underground Railroad. He helped liberate a young slave and enrolled him in the Athol public schools. The unpopularity of integration forced Hoyt to carry stones as weapons while riding in his carriage.<sup>30</sup> Hoyt was also

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 29. Lilley B. Caswell, Athol, Massachusetts, Past and Present (Athol, 1899), p. 197; and William Lord, History of Athol (Somerville, 1953), esp. pp. 570-573.

30. See "A Historical Landmark: The Southard House," Athol Transcript, August 10, 1920, p. 1; Caswell, Athol, Massachusetts, pp. 196-199; J. Clarence Hill, "Dr. Joseph Lord, First of Long Succession of Athol Medicos," Athol Daily News, October 20, 1949, p. 10; and Athol Almanac, June 1886.

one of the earliest match manufacturers in the country.<sup>31</sup> When he left Athol in 1851 to move to Boston, he sold his establishment to Dr. J. H. Hero.<sup>32</sup> Years earlier, Hero had been Hoyt's patient at the cure. Hero attended a New York medical college and practiced in Milford, before buying the Athol Cure; he apparently owned another establishment in Westboro, the New Malvern Water-Cure (circa 1855).<sup>33</sup>

In 1867, Hero established the Willow Park Seminary. In 1876 he moved to Worcester, where for three years he conducted a Turkish bath establishment. Here he manufactured a cough syrup that he had used successfully in private practice. The Hero Cough Syrup Company was formed, other remedies were added, and Hero's agents covered much of New England. His commitment to water cure lived on in his work, and in his two sons, Butler Wilmarth Hero and George Hoyt Hero, who were named after his two medical mentors.<sup>34</sup> Hero sold the Athol Water Cure to Dr. Field.<sup>35</sup> Shortly thereafter, the cure faded out, and the building became a dwelling house.

The Athol Water Cure survived roughly twenty-two years despite physician mobility and transiency. Hero is typical of a certain kind of water-cure physician, whose energy and charisma rendered his ventures successful. Many patients apparently flourished under the care of such healers. The physician-as-placebo factor, which has been observed in twentieth-century studies, explains the near-reverence in which some water-cure physicians were held. Charismatic personalities played a vital role in the success of the cures and the movement as a whole; establishments might well fold when the charismatic physician departed.

This pattern of physician mobility in hydropathic establishments was played out twice more in western

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31. Athol Almanac, June 1886.

32. Caswell, Athol, Massachusetts, pp. 198-199.

33. Obituary of J. H. Hero, in Worcester West Chronicle, January 13, 1898, p. 4.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

35. Dr. James Oliver, "The Old Doctors of Athol and the Water Cure," Athol Transcript, January 3, 1896.

Massachusetts. Dr. E. Snell relocated from the Springfield Water-Cure to Easthampton, where he purchased and renovated Snow's Hotel for a water-cure. Snell's new project in Easthampton operated during 1853 and lasted approximately a year. He was the sole physician and in many cases employed electrical cures. The brief tenure of his establishment is difficult to explain, as it left little written evidence.<sup>36</sup> In the nearby town of Northampton, the Round Hill Water Cure was unique for its survival in the face of constant turmoil. From its purchase in 1846 until its sale in 1870, the establishment passed through the hands of seven owners and six physicians.<sup>37</sup> During these years, renovations, physicians of different persuasions, and the expansion of the establishment to accommodate 250 persons were among the noteworthy changes. Despite the turnover, Round Hill was one of the most popular cures in the country.

The treatments used at individual cures resulted from the backgrounds of the individual practitioners. With standardized criteria often lacking and cure managements in flux, conflicts between water-cure philosophy and an individual physician's practices were inevitable. Ruggles, for example, in his Northampton Water Cure, earned an ambivalent rebuke from Joel Shew, then the editor of the *Journal*, for using electrical treatments at his establishment.<sup>38</sup> Varied therapeutics were integrated again when Dr. Snell at the Easthampton Water Cure adopted "Coad's Patent Graduated Battery," which he found "very useful in many cases of Paralysis, Rheumatism, &c."<sup>39</sup> Formerly, Snell had teamed with Dr. H. H. Sherwood of New York, a magnetic practitioner who dispensed medicines. These medicines,

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 36. For information on Dr. Snell and his partner, Jasper Severance, of the Springfield Water-Cure, see "Marking Another Milestone"; and "Springfield Water Cure," in Springfield City Directory, 1851-1852, pp. 108-109.

37. Daily Hampshire Gazette, October 13, 1846, November 16, 1847, May 30, 1848, June 26, 1855, and August 27, 1861; and Weiss and Kemble, Great American Water-Cure Craze, p. 129.

38. See Water-Cure Journal, vol. 3, no. 8 (April 15, 1847): 127; see also Ruggles' obituary, written by Dr. Seth Rogers of the Worcester Water Cure, which appeared in Water-Cure Journal, vol. 9, no. 2 (February 1850): 54.

39. "Easthampton Water Cure," in Water Cure Journal, no vol., no date, p. 143; and Weiss and Kemble, Great American Water-Cure Craze, p. 133.

one of their advertisements stated, could be given without the water cure if the patient so desired.<sup>40</sup>

Competition among the various cures required some variation from hydropathic practices. Round Hill's practitioners, aware that water-cure therapies might be a deterrent to some, had even made provisions for "those invalids who object to the water treatment."<sup>41</sup> Several years later, under the new proprietor's auspices (Dr. Halsted), the name of the establishment was changed to Round Hill Water-Cure and Motorpathic Institute, which reflected Halsted's belief in the movement cure, which promised relief to patients with spinal disease and paralysis. At this time, Halsted purchased "one of Professor M. Vergnes' Electro Chemical Baths, for extracting from the human system all metallic substances, whether taken as medicine or otherwise absorbed."<sup>42</sup> Clearly, individual physicians had a significant impact on the therapeutics offered at their establishments. They embraced diverse or contradictory therapies, yet the cures were nevertheless hydropathic as defined by individual practitioners, the movement's leadership, and patrons.

Perhaps the most important elements shared by the cures were the ambience, philosophy, and regimen that made them a temporary shelter from life's constant battles. Patients found a nurturant and genuinely caring community that reflected and perpetuated a world view congruent with their own. Because practitioners were concerned with corollary reforms, the water-cure movement was not only a woman's retreat, but a reformer's haven as well.

The alliances between hydropathy and other nineteenth-century reforms were extensive. These movements shared a belief in the desirability of reforming personal living habits as a means of uplifting humanity. Hydropathic leaders oftentimes came to water-cure by way of other reform activities. Among these were physical education, vegetarianism, temperance, abstention from tobacco, avoidance of patent medicines with their high alcohol content, racial advancement, dress reform, and "hygienic farming"

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40. "Springfield Water Cure," pp. 108-109.

41. "Round Hill Water Cure Retreat," p. 2.

42. Round Hill Water-Cure and Motorpathic Institute, pp. 2-3.

that stressed raising healthy produce, not meats.<sup>43</sup> Thus the water-cure movement became a vital link in the national reform network and adopted many of the beliefs of other reform movements.

They also advocated a widened sphere of influence for women. Importantly, hydrotherapy's ties with the women's movement were loose and ill-defined. Because it viewed *health* as the means to social betterment, overtly political tactics were eschewed. Hydropaths advocated a specific woman's issue in dress reform and applauded the efforts of the women's rights activists of their day; yet while their support was undeniable, their own efforts went towards health reform. Like Hoyt's involvement in the underground railroad in Athol, other establishments adopted "pet" reforms in line with their proprietor's beliefs. Interest in physical education, for example, expanded to embrace "Kinesipathy, or the Movement Cure," in which specific motions were developed to aid the smooth operation of the body's systems, and relieve spinal disorders.<sup>44</sup> Round Hill Water Cure in Northampton has already been noted as a premiere institution in this regard.

Further, by encouraging dress reform, the movement took another step toward redefining traditional female roles. The adoption of reform dress complemented the reconceptualization of woman's physiology, intellectual abilities, and social roles, and promoted "emancipationist" ideology.

As numerous nineteenth-century participants attested, water-cure establishments offered a physiological and psychological sanctuary. For women, the prospect of escaping domestic or familial routines and enjoying a respite during which

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43. For example, Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, introduced in 1875, contained nineteen percent alcohol (forty proof), much more than table wine or sherry, as discussed by Sarah Stage in Female Complaints: Lydia Pinkham and the Business of Women's Medicine (New York, 1979), p. 32; and Sarah Stage, "The Woman Behind the Trademark," in Leavitt, ed., Women and Health in America (Madison, Wisconsin, 1984), pp. 255-269. Also see Cayleff, Wash and Be Healed, pp. 109-139.

44. See Charles F. Taylor, M.D., "Kinesipathy, or the Movement Cure," Water-Cure Journal, vol. 23, no. 3 (March 1857): 53; George H. Taylor, M.D., "The Movement Cure," Water-Cure Journal, vol. 27, no. 5 (May 1859): 65-66; and Charles F. Taylor, M.D., "The Cure of Spinal Disorders by 'Movements,'" Water-Cure Journal, vol. 23, no. 5 (May 1857): 51.



their needs were paramount was attractive and exciting, and it could be justified by the medical nature of the sojourn, since illness was considered a natural consequence of femaleness. Women social reformers, frequently physically and emotionally in need of respite from public life and often unmarried (hence unencumbered by children), were attracted to the cures by the peer nature of their fellow patients, the ready acceptance of reform ideologies, the prospect of relief from physical malaise, and the availability of women physicians.<sup>45</sup>

The list of noteworthy women who frequented the cures reveals the strong web of female companionship and social reform activism that was nurtured and flourished there; lifelong relationships between women often began with a stay at a cure. Indicative of nineteenth-century American women who formed and maintained romantic friendships and commitments with other women through these establishments, was Catharine Beecher, renowned teacher, writer on moral and religious topics, and advocate of women's education. A sufferer from "nervous excitability," which usually centered in the paralysis of one limb, "she found no visible relief until she visited a water cure establishment."<sup>46</sup> In her *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness* (1855), Beecher praised the "inestimable benefits" of the water cure and recommended it to her readers.<sup>47</sup> During the

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45. Sunday Telegram, July 21, 1946, p. 63, as quoted in Brigham, Elmira Directory for 1863-1864. The majority of the establishments specifically advertised their facilities for helping the sufferers of women's diseases. See "Communication from Mrs. R. B. Gleason of the Elmira Water Cure: Symptoms of Pelvic Displacement, and Their Treatment" in Catharine Beecher, Letters to the People on Health and Happiness (New York, 1855), pp. 7-15; Mrs. R. B. Gleason, M.D., Hints to Patients, 29 page pamphlet, Chemung County Historical Society, 1889; Mrs. R. B. Gleason, M.D., Talks to My Patients; a Valuable Home Book for Women: Hints on Getting Well and Keeping Well, advertised in Herald of Health, July 1873, p. 44; Zippie Brooks Wales, M.D., "Nursing," Herald of Health, vol. 22, no. 1 (July 1873): 17-19; Round Hill Water-Cure and Motorpathic Institute, Northampton, Mass., pamphlet in Forbes Library, Northampton.

46. Margaret Farrand Thorp, Female Persuasion: Six Strong-Minded Women (New Haven, 1949).

47. Beecher, Letters to the People on Health and Happiness, pp. 7-15; and "Communication from Mrs. R. B. Gleason of the Elmira Water Cure: Symptoms of Pelvic Displacement, and Their Treatment," as quoted in Nancy Cott, Root of Bitterness (New York, 1972), pp. 271-276.

summer of 1847, a period of personal crisis for Catharine, Beecher joined her sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, at the Brattleboro (Vermont) Water Cure, where the latter had been since May of 1846. Later Beecher preferred the Round Hill Water Cure in Northampton, which emphasized motorpathy and specialized in the rejuvenation of paralyzed limbs. Beecher, one of her biographers has noted, was an enthusiastic supporter of water cures because they were "centers of female culture [that] made it possible for women to escape the confines of their sick rooms and commune with sympathetic peers."<sup>48</sup> Beecher continued to frequent various cures from 1843 throughout the 1850s for at least two months out of every year, even after she no longer used the cure's treatments.<sup>49</sup>

Other nineteenth-century women, many of them infirm from physical maladies that corresponded with demanding or conflicting social and personal roles, reveled in the simple medicine and female companionship at the cures. Among them was Alice James, sister of Henry and William James, who was "given to prostrations." James had her first nervous breakdown at the age of nineteen, and her condition was diagnosed as a variety of nervous and organic ailments. James' debility escalated rapidly, and her medical treatments included a three-month stay in 1883 at the Adams Nervine Asylum in Jamaica Plain; that asylum utilized some tangentially-related hydropathic therapies.<sup>50</sup> James' experiment with water processes temporarily relieved her problems. Yet, the nature and extent of her maladies rendered water cure an unlikely solution, since its adoption would have necessitated abandonment of the "patient" role, which she seemed unable to relinquish.

Others tried to use the water cure fleetingly, unsuccessfully, as James did, as a therapy that they hoped would cure them while they remained passive patients. Most, however,

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 48. See Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity (New York, 1976), p. 206.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 184; and Charles Stowe, The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe Compiled from Her Letters and Journals (Boston, 1889), pp. 112-119. Also see H. B. Weiss and H. R. Kemble, "The Forgotten Water-Cures of Brattleboro, Vermont," Vermont History, vol. 37 (Summer 1969): 165-176.

50. Jean Strouse, Alice James: A Biography (Boston, 1980), pp. ix-x, 225.

were aware of the active role required of them under hydropathic treatment. One such patient, Susan B. Anthony, the renowned women's rights activist, planned her travels to coincide with a stop at a cure in 1885. After months on the road making speeches, she resided at the Worcester Hydropathic Institute, which was run by her cousin, Dr. Seth Rogers.<sup>51</sup> The vigorous and spartan treatment that awaited her, while not relaxing, was invigorating and challenging: "First thing in the morning dripping sheet; pack at 10 o'clock for 45 minutes, come out of that, take a shower followed by a sitz bath, with a pail of water at 75 degrees poured over the shoulders, after which a dry sheet, then brisk exercises."<sup>52</sup> This program was repeated four times daily. One gets the distinct impression that this busy, physically demanding, schedule suited Anthony, and others like her, quite well.

Jeannette Marks, noted author, professor at Mount Holyoke College, and "Boston marriage" (life-long) companion of Mary Woolley (president of Mount Holyoke), also spent time at a cure, in 1909 and 1910. She, too, sought recuperation from the demands of public and professional life. After her visit to the Battle Creek (Michigan) Sanitarium, throughout her life Marks followed a vegetarian and nonstimulating diet modeled after the Battle Creek regimen.<sup>53</sup>

The movement's "emancipationist" ideology meant that life at a cure provided a supportive and nurturing environment that fostered liaisons between women in residence. Women remembered their visits to and affiliations with the cures in the most positive terms, and, in certain instances, their experiences were turning points in their lives, creating an inspiring sense of hope and strength. Some even chose to live permanently at the establishments.

The water-cure movement lingered into the early 1900s, but its ideological popularity and national influence had begun to wane by the late 1860s. Theoretically, the harmonious universal

51. See "Worcester Hydropathic Institute," Water-Cure Journal, vol. 19, no. 6 (June 1855): 137.

52. Susan B. Anthony, as quoted in "Your Worcester Street," in Worcester Telegram (1948).

53. Anna Mary Wells, Miss Marks and Miss Woolley (Boston, 1978), p. 107.

vision that invigorated hydropathy became increasingly untenable in the unharmonious, materialistic world after the Civil War. The self-denial and self-control that were such pivotal aspects of the "good citizen," as embodied in hydropathic thought, gradually gave way to a far more self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking, consumer-oriented vision of the good life. For men, the precise elements that made one an exemplary hydropathic follower impeded one's value on the open market: restraint, moderation, and caution were not the assets upon which fortunes were made in late nineteenth-century urban America.

For female followers of hydropathy, the homosocial bonding (same-sex camaraderie and intimacy) fostered at the cures and the informal politics that radiated from them became problematic, since from 1870 to 1920, women's separate female sphere became increasingly devalued for the supposed threat it posed to relations between the sexes. Heterosocial bonding became the new ideal. Thus, both the changing nature of American life and values, and a marked change in the social relations between the sexes, contributed to the demise of the hydropathic movement. These factors were accompanied by changing ideas about leisure time, as the concept of "vacation" arose.<sup>54</sup> New fashionable watering places, offering luxurious cuisine and entertainment, provided competition to the cold-water cures. Other changes within American society hastened the hydropathic decline. The increasing availability of in-home plumbing rendered the cures' water supplies less unique; the responsiveness of Americans in the 1860s to the admonitions of health reformers decreased; and improvements in sanitation reduced the extent of disease.<sup>55</sup>

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54. Frederick J. Stielow, "Resorts and Vacationers on the Island of the Awakening; Grand Isle, Louisiana and the 'New' Leisure, 1866-1893," draft provided by the author in 1982 prior to publication. A modified version of this paper appeared as "Grand Isle, Louisiana, The New Leisure, 1866-1893," in *Louisiana History*, vol. 23, (1982): 239-257. Stielow notes that the growth of a resort industry coincided with increased conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure.

55. See Jacqueline S. Wilkie, "Submerged Sensuality: Technology and Perceptions of Bathing," *Journal of Social History* vol. 19 (1986): 649-664; Harold Donaldson Eberlein, "When Society First Took a Bath," in *Sickness and Health in America*, ed. by Judith Walzer Leavitt and Ronald L. Numbers (Madison, Wisconsin, 1978) pp. 331-341; and Richard W. Schwarz, *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.* (Nashville, Tenn., 1970), p. 24.

Internal factors also contributed to the decline of hydropony. The elements of the medical encounter that had made hydropony such a powerful therapeutic force -- touch, communication, faith, and trust -- began to change form as machines came into use. The communal context of the water-cure establishment, once such an asset in stimulating patient enthusiasm, possibly lost some of its appeal as a more private physician-patient relationship gained ascendancy. Hydropony's emphasis on patient autonomy also undermined the physician's role. The hygienic physician was a teacher, not an irreplaceable sage; by educating their clientele to care for themselves, hydroponists gradually contributed to their own loss of importance. And as hydroponic establishments and practitioners embraced other innovations, a conflicting conglomerate of therapeutics gradually diluted the original emphasis on the curative powers of cold water. Finally, the hydroponic leadership engaged in a great deal of internal conflict, resulting in the expulsion of two of its American popularizers. Also, the leadership's collective inability to embrace innovations originating in scientific medicine, as well as exclusionary criteria enforced by the latter, undermined hydropony's credibility.<sup>56</sup> Radically altered notions of expertise, individualism, and consumerism, all contributed to the demise of hydropony.

Hydropony has survived as hydrotherapy, and modern hygiene has benefitted from the hydroponists' (and other sectarians') emphasis on frequent bathing, disdain of drug therapy, and belief in disease prevention through self-regulated, reasonable living habits, diet, and exercise. In that era, and in our own, people expressed dissatisfaction with standard medical practice and pursued a high, seemingly idealistic level of well-being and fulfillment.<sup>57</sup> In both eras, the near-obsessive concern with physical fitness and health corresponds with a highly competitive industrial life in which one's fitness is yet another asset that

56. Cayleff, Wash and Be Healed, pp. 166-173.

57. See Harold Y. Vanderpool, "The Holistic Hodgepodge: A Critical Analysis of Holistic Medicine and Health in America Today," Journal of Family Practice, vol. 19 (1984): 773-781; L. Kopelman and J. Moskop, "The Holistic Health Movement: A Survey and Critique," Journal of Medicine and Philosophy, vol. 8 (1981): 209-235; and Eric J. Cassel, "The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine," New England Journal of Medicine, vol. 306 (March 18, 1982): 639-645.

improves job performance and individual advancement. The pursuit of limitless personal fulfillment through health may compensate for a belief that other, far larger, aspects of one's life are *not* controllable or ordered. Health and bodily perfectionism might be the ultimate metaphors for self-determination and choice amid cultural uncertainty and upheaval. Now, as then, health may be one of the few arenas in which a utopian, perfectionist ideal can be sought and, for a time, realized.