

Natural Health Principles and Principals: Jackson and Macfadden in Dansville

Andrew W. Saul. Ph.D.¹

*Joy, temperance and repose
Slam the door on the doctor's nose.*
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Daylight was fading fast as I wriggled through a weed-covered chink in the metal fence surrounding the old Jackson Sanatorium. No, I was not an AWOL inmate sneaking back before curfew. It was 1979, and I had been a natural health lecturer for only a couple of years. When I was promised a tour of what remained of this grand old five-floor naturopathic hospital in Dansville, New York, I jumped at it. I had little idea of what to expect. Fortunately Henry, natural hygienist, unofficial caretaker and my guide this late autumn afternoon, was an enthusiastic (if not to say rabid) scholar of the works of James Caleb Jackson, M.D. (1811-1895). He undertook my re-education immediately. For like most people, I knew nothing of Doctor Jackson, though he was actually one of the most influential natural health practitioners of the 19th century. Jackson was a personal friend of both Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony, and he was Clara Barton's personal physician. It was not by mere coincidence that the first chapter of the American Red Cross was founded in Dansville.¹ Jackson's nutritional health contributions have been largely obscured by his much better known contemporary, John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.

As we fumbled our way towards a side door into the darkened hospital basement, my guide filled me in. He first explained to me that Jackson, not Kellogg, was the true originator of the first dry breakfast cereal. Basically twice-toasted, crumbled-

up whole wheat graham crackers, Jackson's "Granula" was neither flaked nor as successfully mass marketed.

We were inside the big building now. I looked around and there was just enough light to see that I was standing in what was once a hydrotherapy treatment room. There were assorted tubs, hot water tanks, sitz baths, and massage tables, some with neatly folded fomentation towels still hanging silently beside them.

I asked if those towels had been hanging there since Dr. Jackson's day.

"No," Henry said, with a faint smile. "The facility was later operated by Bernarr Macfadden and after his death in 1955, was kept open as a health resort and spa until 1971.

Ah, yes: Bernard Adolphus Macfadden, born in 1868, orphaned by age 11, and a millionaire by age 35. He was the immensely successful publisher of long-running popular magazines including *True Detective*, *Photoplay* and *Physical Culture*. At one time, Macfadden outsold Hearst on the newsstand; *True Story* is published to this day. Macfadden was also the founder of the notorious "New York Evening Graphic," and was a personal friend to George Bernard Shaw. The archetypal "health nut," Macfadden personally led a mass health walk every year all the way from New York City to Dansville. Dansville is upstate near Rochester, so that is quite a hike. The 325-mile health-food-powered marathon was dubbed the Cracked Wheat Derby. Macfadden, a public relations genius if there ever was one, decided to try parachute jumping while in his 80s. He landed without injury, possibly due in part to the fact that he was used to routinely sleeping on the bare floor.² The "Father of Physical Culture" was 87 when he died. He

1. 8 Van Buren Street, Holley, New York 14470 USA
drsaul@doctoryourself.com

is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx.^{3,4}

The image of those old towels, still waiting to be used, remains clearly in my mind to this day. We climbed upstairs into a cavernous, tiled lobby that looked the part of a once-elegant, formal ballroom. I found Macfadden literature and educational packets in a drawer, neatly mimeographed and slightly musty. We moved to the main hallway, at the center of which was a massive cast iron stairway. "It is fireproof," Henry said, "because the first Jackson Sanatorium burned to the ground. This building was built in 1883, and built to last."

And so it had. Up the grand stairway we went, without so much as a creak to be heard. When we reached the fifth floor, we proceeded down a long, faded turquoise-painted hallway. To either side, you could see that each patient's room had a louvered door, to improve fresh air flow. I stepped into a room, and the first thing I noticed was that it was taller than it was wide, with an enormous window and exceptionally high ceiling. Such high ceilings were to be found on all floors of the hospital, said Henry, because fresh air and sunshine were as much a part of "taking the cure" as were mineral waters and fresh, raw garden foods.

One more flight of stairs upward and we were on the roof. I am no friend of great heights, and being way up top on this unrepaired building gave me the willies. But Henry distracted me with consummate skill. He led me over to what looked like one of several playground merry-go-rounds, you know, like the ones Bill Cosby described from his childhood. But these were different. Each of the round platforms looked as if someone had placed a small wood framed, glass-paned greenhouse on it.

"Patients sat in one of these to sun themselves," Henry explained. "And every hour or so an attendant would rotate the thing so that the patient continually had the sunlight fully on him."

Much of the rest of the roof resembled

a cross between a dance floor and a high-school gymnasium.

"There were daily exercises up here, and people stood where these marks are. And yes, there were dances, too. Over there is a bridge and pathway leading up the hill to a mineral spring, which opened up after a slight earthquake here in 1798. That spring is the reason Dr. Jackson built here in the first place."

There was no way I was going to cross what was left of that incredibly rickety-looking bridge, and fortunately Henry didn't ask me to. It was getting dark now, and time to go. Henry produced an inadequate flashlight and by its weak yellow beam we managed to make our way back down through a now nearly dark staircase, and out the way we came in.

As we left, I looked straight up the side of the massive brick building, now just barely visible in the twilight. I thought how great it would be today to have a true choice in hospitals like people had a hundred years ago. If there is a full-service, public nutrition-based hospital somewhere in America, it is news to me. Even a natural-diet nursing home would be a genuine medical milestone.

The Facts of Faddism

Those who would speak only of the eccentricities of the health "faddists" marginalize their many lasting medical contributions. Too much of what the public hears today effectively distracts it from the real success nature-cure advocates have achieved. When we dwell less on the practitioners' personalities, and focus more on their actual treatments, we see an ahead-of-the-times emphasis on physical activity and eating right. It is strikingly difficult to find any modern scientific basis for condemning the essential "health faddist" lifestyle. Regular exercise and eating high-fiber, nutrient-rich foods is urged by today's most respected health authorities. Long ago, Macfadden's "Physical Culture Creed" specifically called for "Reasonable regular use

of the muscular system” and a “wholesome diet of vital foods.” Such advice is beyond reproach.

Poor health may result from consuming too much of the wrong thing as well as eating too little of the right thing. It was the health-food “faddists” who were first to promote abstinence from tobacco, alcohol, junk food, and overeating. From long before Jackson to long after Macfadden, what the “faddists” then insisted on is now universally regarded as part and parcel of good health.

Water Cure

Even Dr. Jackson’s emphasis on the curative powers of water has considerable merit. Jackson had been a very sick young man, and attributed his dramatic reversal to hydrophathy.⁵ He was far from alone: in his century, the practice of water-cure was widespread. While the dietary doctrine that accompanies hydrophathy almost certainly had a major role in the doctor’s personal recovery and that of his patients, much of hydrophathy has been quietly assimilated into conventional medical practice. Bathing, proper hygiene, Epsom salts soaks, sitz baths, hot and cold compresses, massage, and a keen appreciation of dietary trace minerals and the importance of proper hydration are now regarded as commonsense medicine.

President Ronald Reagan’s personal physician, Ralph Bookman, M.D., has long been urging his patients with allergies to drink lots of water to relieve their symptoms. In an interview, Dr. Bookman said, “Unquestionably, the single most important element in the treatment of asthma and other bronchial allergy symptoms is hydration. Unless adequate fluids are available to the mucus glands in the bronchial tree, their secretions will be tenaciously hard to raise. In asthma, liquids are medications... Liquids make mucous liquid. They change it from a troublesome solid that makes breathing difficult to an easy to cough up liquid. I demand that my patients drink 10

full glasses of liquid every day, and I question them constantly to make sure they understand how important it is. . . Water is best, of course, but I tell them to drink what they like. . . Any fluids will work but you must make a fetish of it.”⁶ Dr. Jackson would have agreed, word for word.

Leading Edge Diet

Health-spa diets tended to be simple, fresh from the garden, and low-meat or no-meat. If not exclusively vegetarian, as were Jackson’s, they were not far removed. Macfadden, regarded by traditional vegan natural hygienists as a milk-diet revisionist, nevertheless offered menus that were nutritious, low fat, low cholesterol, low sugar and high fiber. Though Macfadden’s expansive claims for such a diet continuously got him into trouble with regulatory authority, this is a therapeutic diet no matter who puts it in front of you. Recently, rather strict vegetarianism has been shown by Dean Ornish, M.D., to be a highly effective way to prevent and even reverse serious cardiovascular disease. This is a therapy straight out of Dansville and, as Dr. Ornish acknowledges, far more ancient sources.

The following publisher’s description of one of Ornish’s books sounds similar to, and as enthusiastic as, a Macfadden health pamphlet, and I mean that to be complimentary to both men:

“Dr. Dean Ornish is the first clinician to offer documented proof that heart disease can be halted, or even reversed, simply by changing your lifestyle. Based on his internationally acclaimed scientific study, which has now been ongoing for years, Dr. Ornish’s program has yielded amazing results. Participants reduced or discontinued medications; their chest pain diminished or disappeared; they felt more energetic, happy, and calm; they lost weight while eating more; and blockages in coronary arteries were actually reduced.”⁷

I think much of Ornish’s diet prescrip-

tion invites comparison with “Bernarr Macfadden’s Culinary Creed,” an original copy of which is in my possession. It reads, in part:

For saving money, cutting down food costs and building better health:

Use lemon juice instead of vinegar for sauces and salad dressing. Use lemon in all salads with fish dishes and wherever possible. Do not discard the green outer leaves of cabbage or lettuce.

Do not use chemically-bleached white flour or sugar.

Never discard left-over vegetable pot juices. They can be used in soups, or served as vegetable cocktails with lemon and tomato juice added. Place left-over juices and pot liquors in refrigerator, in tightly covered containers, to prevent vitamin spoilage. Cook carrot and beet tops with your soups. They contain valuable minerals. Fresh beet tops can be used as a green vegetable. Add parsley, mint, pimento, watercress and lemon wherever possible to salads and dishes. They are relishable and provide you with minerals.

Throughout winter months, continue to use as many fresh fruits and vegetables as possible to procure. They are the protective foods.

Watch fruits and vegetables for residues of insecticide sprayings containing poisons (which) frequently account for diseases of an insidious kind, difficult to trace. (If there were a better foretelling of multiple chemical sensitivity, I am yet to hear it.)

Food must be thoroughly masticated and mixed with the saliva.

Use vital foods only, those that contain all necessary vitamins and minerals.

Use salt sparingly.

All raw vegetable juices are especially recommended.

Eat plenty of dandelions found in fields during many months of year. You can make teas containing valuable nutrients from grass, alfalfa or clover leaves dried in your own kitchen.

The foods mentioned above are far better sources of vitamins and minerals than are highly processed factory foods, and before the advent of food fortification, they were the only sources. Compared to orthomolecular medicine, food-based doses of many of the major vitamins are low. Nutritional supplements were completely unavailable a century and a half ago. Vitamins were not discovered until 1895, the year Dr. Jackson died, and not synthesized until the 1930s. Strict adherence to fresh, raw or unprocessed sanatorium dining, extreme as it might superficially seem, was the only sensible orthomolecular regimen of the day.

Sanatorium diets (and you can pick any sanatorium you wish, from Battle Creek to Tijuana) were and remain quite high in vitamin C (from fruits, raw milk and sprouted grains), relatively high in vitamin E (from nuts, seeds, whole grains and wheat germ), and very high in carotenes (from fruits, vegetables and vegetable juice). Macfadden emphasized all such foods, and the man surely loved carrots more than any person known to history.

Fasting

Because Macfadden happened to be on a short fast when he died, his death has often been wrongly attributed to fasting. That he completed innumerable fasts throughout his entire long and doctor-free life is generally downplayed. As a matter of fact, for decades he routinely fasted every Monday, year after year, with many additional extensive fasts. Macfadden was known to all for his long workdays and notorious for his physical stamina. This is a man who could rip a deck of cards in half, twice over, and repeatedly lift 100 pounds overhead with one hand.⁸ No wonder a young man named Angelo Siciliano became a Macfadden protégé and would later achieve his own fame as Charles Atlas.⁹

Upton Sinclair was another Macfadden supporter. After fasting for seven days,

Sinclair wrote, "I have been about and busy every minute of the day and until late at night. I have walked miles every day and have felt no weakness to speak of. I shall continue the fast until I feel hungry."

He did so, and after 12 days concluded: "The fast is not an ordeal, it is a rest."¹⁰ The Pulitzer Prize winner, who fasted frequently, lived to be 90.

While he did suggest one- or two-week fasts in some of his writings, Macfadden primarily endorsed short fasts and, in particular, habitual undereating. In his Creed, he wrote: "If no appetite at meal time, wait until the next meal" and "To prolong life, do not eat to repletion. Stop when you could enjoy more, or better still, fast on water alone or fruit juices for one day each week." These are hardly reckless recommendations. Indeed, widespread adoption of the overall mindset of therapeutic fasting ("when in doubt, leave it out") would do our overfed, overweight Western society much good. Gerontologist Roy Walford, M.D., recommends systematic undereating (with the addition of high doses of supplemental vitamins) in order to increase human lifespan by as much as 40 years.¹¹ Other physicians, notably Alan Cott, M.D., have authored how-to books recommending fasting for weight loss and also to promote general health and well-being.^{12,13}

Medical Politics

While Macfadden endured harsh attacks from medical-political forces of the mid 20th century, Dr. Jackson operated what his grateful patients affectionately called "Our Home on the Hillside" the century before, during a time when allopathic medical associations and the pharmaceutical industry were yet to gain the exceptional governmental and media influence which they maintain to this day. Between the end of the Civil War and the start of World War I, there was still freedom of choice in health care in America. Home-

opathy, herbology, naturopathy, hydrotherapy, the brand-new profession of chiropractic, and, of course, all manner of patent medicine men competed shamelessly for your body. It was an ideological open season, when no one delivery system had preeminence. I am not sad to see the passing of the covered wagon medicine-show quack. (Well, maybe he did not so much pass as relocate to magazine ads and television commercials.)

It is a great loss that most countries of the world have since invested so very heavily, and often exclusively, in pharmaceutically based healthcare. Such a single-party system inhibits a patient's choice and, in my opinion, inhibits a patient's recovery far more.

How different things must have been when the 122-bed "Home on the Hillside" was not only the health center of the Northeast, but "was once the largest hygienic institution in the world."¹⁴ The sanatorium even had its own rail spur. What made the nature-cure hospital so popular, even in a location as remote as Dansville? Perhaps it was the water, or the huge organic vegetable gardens. Perhaps in the beginning it was Dr. Jackson's personality, which by all accounts was impressive. In later generations, certainly Macfadden's charisma was an important factor. But perhaps it was simply the sanatorium's success rate that brought in the crowds. Nutrition-based therapy works. It worked then and it works now.

The times have changed since Jackson's and even McFadden's day. People no longer flock to grand health hotels to "take the cure." But there is nothing stopping us from making our homes into our own personal health retreats. Daily routines can be the same health-boosting program of whole-foods diet and life-affirming exercise that once led thousands to their "Home on the Hillside" in Dansville, where the roots of orthomolecular medicine literally sprung from the ground.

*Founded on rock. For suffering ones
and weary,*

*A home, secure from worldly care
and strife;*

*Nature, the healing mistress, tends
its portals,*

*Beckoning with gentle hand to paths
of life.¹⁵*

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