Chapter 1

The Western Health Reform Institute

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Introduction

The grand opening of the Western Health Reform Institute (WHRI) in Battle Creek, Michigan, on September 5, 1866, was a gala occasion. It was only a short time after Ellen White had focussed attention on the need for such an institution during her stirring address to the 1866 General Conference Session. Despite having limited means, some $11,000 had been raised by gift or subscription loan during a fundraising campaign spearheaded by Elders John N. Loughborough in the West and John N. Andrews in the East. On September 11 the editor of the *Review and Herald*, Uriah Smith, reported on the successful opening, noting that, "it was less than four short months ago, for the time when this matter first began to take practical shape among our people."[1] J. N. Loughborough was the first president of the venture, the name of which was soon shortened to Health Reform Institute. It was often simply referred to as "The Institute."

One of the first financial backers was John Preston Kellogg, father of John Harvey, whose name would later be inseparably linked to the institution. Kellogg had pledged his $500 with the words, "That much is a seed to start the institution and I'll venture it, sink or swim." Ellen White also pledged $500.[2] The back page of the *Review and Herald* of June 19, 1866, carried the header, "The Western Health Reform Institute." The article went on to announce that circulars were being sent "to churches, and individuals, who we think have an interest in … the health reform question." The author of the article noted that the combined subscription at that time was $2,625. Details of those signed up were provided in the "Business Department", with Ellen White's and John Kellogg's donations heading the list. Other well-known names which appeared as initial contributors included J. N.

Loughborough ($50), J. N. Andrews ($50), U. Smith ($25) and J. F. Byington ($25).[3]

The August 7 issue of the *Review and Herald* had carried an extensive update on progress, announcing the opening date—just one month away—and noting that the facility would have accommodation for 40 to 50 patients. It was asserted that, "Our establishment will have plenty of Pure, Soft Water, pure air, good moral influences, and a greater amount of sunshine than any other part of the country can ordinarily boast." Prospective patients were asked to bring with them towels, sheets (linen preferred), and either woollen blankets and one "comfortable" or one blanket and two "comfortables."[4]

The Physical Plant

A search for suitable premises which were available for purchase had led to the relatively new, eight-room cottage of Judge Benjamin F. Graves, situated on more than five acres in the West End of Battle Creek. After purchase the dwelling had been hurriedly remodelled and extended in order to provide facilities for hydrotherapy. Separate treatment rooms for ladies and gents would be needed, together with a large kitchen, pantry, dining room, store rooms for sheets, towels and blankets, and of course a huge laundry facility! The property was big enough to accommodate a number of additional buildings and the first of these was soon erected, providing room for a 200-barrel water reservoir as well as additional bath, dressing and pack rooms. Two additional acres and another cottage nearby were also purchased.[5]



Figure 1.1 The Western Health Reform Institute c. 1866

The facility had a windmill-operated pump which supplied the large volumes of water needed for the therapy programs. If the breeze was brisk the eight-foot windmill could fill a barrel with water in a few minutes or pump it up to the 300-barrel tank perched above the bath room. From there it was gravity fed either to the bath facilities or to the 50-barrel heating tank on the ground floor. This abundance of hot water enabled the staff to provide baths at exactly the temperature specified.[6]

Life at the Institute

Sources differ on whether there was just one doctor to greet patients in the days after the official opening or whether there were two. Dr Horatio S. Lay was definitely in attendance. Whether Dr Phoebe Lamson was resident at opening day or whether she joined the staff in January 1867 appears to be in question.[7] Both doctors had gained much of their experience at "Our Home on the Hillside", in Dansville, New York, a hydropathic facility operated by Dr Caleb Jackson.[8] James and Ellen White had earlier visited this institution, about which more is said later in this paper. The doctors were assisted by two bath attendants, one untrained nurse, and three or four helpers. Facilities and treatments were simple and featured every sort of bath: spray baths, ice baths, hot baths, and sitz baths. Compress rooms were also provided. In contrast to the practice of many other water-cures, physical exercise for patients was actively encouraged. Here, it had been envisaged, Adventist folk could come as "hygienic boarders." [9] Although few patient records survive, the average length of stay at the WHRI was most likely of the order of weeks, as for most other similar institutions.

Prospective patients were attracted by the announcement, "Whatever may be the nature of their disease, if curable, they can be cured here." Two months after its opening Dr Lay reported that the current patient list included persons from nine different states: Vermont, Rhode Island, New York, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa, as well as from Canada.[10] Patients appear to have found life quite congenial, despite the strict routine, lectures, the rigours of the treatments, the exercise and the plain food. On a visit to the Institute a few weeks after its opening John H. Waggoner, "… was reminded of H. W. Beecher's compliment to Dr Scudder, when he said that it must

be pleasant to be a heathen and have such a missionary! So I could almost envy the sick who have such associations, and means of recovery."[11]

Two meals per day were served, the tables laden with fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and whole-grain foods. Meat and highly spiced dishes did not appear, nor did tea or coffee. The first Thanksgiving dinner was described as being, "such as kings might admire, epicures relish, and the worst dyspeptics partake of, and grow fairer, fresher, and happier." [12]

Entertainments, of which there had to be some provision, remained a vexed question, although Institute directors attempted to conduct these "within proper limits." The songs, charades, pantomimes, poetry and non-alcoholic toasts, which formed a part of the first Thanksgiving, caused Ellen White some misgivings, lamenting, as she did, the worldly amusements found at other water-cures. Sometimes she was implicated, which made it worse. On one occasion she was asked if she herself played these frivolous games and even whether she sometimes carried a checker board around with her! Her denial was emphatic.[13]

By modern standards the cost of treatment at the new Institute appears to have been very moderate. The charges ran from $5 to $7 per week, including room, wholesome food, all treatments, nursing and medical care. For those unable to attend the Institute in person it was possible to obtain prescriptions by letter. These were available at a cost of $5, the same fee charged for a personal consultation.

The financial stability of the fledgling venture was precarious, even though all patients paid weekly in advance. This was due in part to Ellen White's somewhat ambivalent attitude concerning the charges to be made for treatments. While she was aware of the fact that many similar institutions had failed after an operational honeymoon and certainly did not want The Institute to follow this track, she had some reservations about profiting from other persons' illnesses, and so did not feel at all comfortable about charging to excess.[14] The balance would prove hard to find, with finances ebbing and flowing considerably over the next few years. One thing was certain, however. There was no shortage of the sick and ailing.

The State of Medicine in Nineteenth-Century America

Early nineteenth-century America was decidedly rural. In the year 1800 only 33 American towns had populations of more than 2500. However, despite this seeming health advantage America was sick! Jefferson had earlier expressed the expectation that liberty and the pursuit of happiness would "foster a healthy nation" and that, in contrast to the great and pestilential cities of Europe, "America would be a healthy outdoors, full of sturdy freeholders."[15] Instead, sanitation in American towns was virtually non-existent, effective personal hygiene almost unknown and disease rampant. Understandably, "doctors" of every persuasion thrived.

It is instructive in this context to review briefly the medical environment of the time. American physicians of the mid-nineteenth century used a pharmacopoeia which was based on a very limited understanding of physiology and of the underlying pathology of disease. In the early- and mid-1800s common allopathic medicine included such harsh procedures as leeching, phlebotomy (extensive bloodletting, often to the point where the pulse was "at last suppressed"), cupping (the drawing out of even more blood by the use of evacuated glass suction cups), blistering (the administration of second degree burns with subsequent lancing and draining of the blisters), dehydration, purging and vomiting. These tender ministrations were often assisted by diabolical "drugs", such as:

- Nux vomica (strychnine)
- Calomel (mercurous chloride, a toxic laxative), which was used as a purgative or cathartic. It was used generally but particularly in the treatment of syphilis. This compound is now perhaps used principally as a fungicide in horticulture.
- Opium, a narcotic that has been widely used since ancient times. A common form was laudanum, a tincture of opium in alcohol. It was recommended by English physician, Thomas Sydenham, for pain, sleeplessness and diarrhoea. He wrote, "Among the remedies which it has pleased Almighty God to give to man to relieve his sufferings, none is so universal and so efficacious as opium."

- Tartar emeric (an antimony-based emetic), which had been widely used in cosmetics during ancient times and was taken in Roman times by Pliny the Elder for medicinal purposes. It was used until recently to treat leishmaniasis and as an antiprotozoal drug.
- Fowler's solution (an arsenical mixture)
- Vapours of vinegar
- Cream of tartar
- Jalap
- Spiritus aetheris vitriolici (an ether and sulphuric acid derivative)
- Digitalis
- Quinine[16]

An early edition of *The Health Reformer* carried an indicative, although possibly exaggerated, account of a tragic conversation of the period. '"You have lost your baby, I hear,' said one gentleman to another. 'Yes, poor little thing! It was only five months old. We did all we could for it—we had four doctors, put mustard poultices all over it, blistered its head and feet, gave it nine calomel powders, leeched its temples, had it bled, and gave it all kinds of medicines, and yet after a week's illness, it died."'[17] Indeed, Thomas Hood wrote in 1844:

> I'm sick of gruel, and the dietetics,
> I'm sick of pills, and sicker of emetics,
> I'm sick of pulses, tardiness or quickness,
> I'm sick of blood, its thinness or its thickness,-
> In short, within a word, I'm sick of sickness![18]

It was indeed a fertile environment for alternative medical treatments. One of these was the celebrated water-cure, a treatment mode dating from the late-eighteenth century, the development of which is briefly reviewed below.

Preissnitz and the Hydropathy Heritage

In 1790 a 13-year-old Austrian peasant, Vincent Priessnitz, injured his wrist and found that when he used his good hand to pump water on to

his injury the pain subsided noticeably. No doubt the Austrian water was freezing cold and his hand was probably numb! Sometime later, at the age of 17, he was run over by his horse-drawn wagon. He was considered by the medical profession at the time as being very unlikely to survive.[19] Again he used water treatments to effect an excellent recovery, following which he began to advocate the water treatment publically.

Eventually he established the world's first sanatorium for hydrotherapeutics in Gräfenberg, Silesia, in 1822. He subsequently expanded this to the Spa House, a sanatorium of 30 beds, in 1846. After a time his preoccupation with these programs was such that, "Priessnitz was not able to attend to the education of his children, neither could his wife take charge of them, her whole time being devoted to the management of the extensive establishments." By the time of his death, in 1851, there were hundreds of "water-cure" centres in Europe.[20] Preissnitz's treatments of wet bandages, soaks, baths and showers, all using water fresh from icy, Alpine streams were certainly not for the faint-hearted. Although some doctors were impressed with the success of these treatments, others definitely were not. One such critic called Priessnitz the "Water-Daemon of Graefenberg"![21]

Across the Atlantic the editor of *The Medical Examiner and Record of Medical Science* (Philadelphia), in spite of pronouncing hydrotherapy to be the "reigning humbug in Europe," observed that it was just the sort of thing for which Americans would probably fall "with the greatest gusto".[22] He was right!

The Popularisation of Hydrotherapy (the "Water-Cure") in America

Joel Shew, Russell T. Trall and Mary Gove

As noted by Numbers, the three persons most instrumental in bringing hydrotherapy to America were Joel Shew, Russell Thacher Trall and Mary Gove. Shew, a medical-school graduate, had occasional contact with Priessnitz in Grafenberg and in about 1844 he opened a water-cure in New York City that closely copied the Austrian technique. About the same time Trall, a graduate of Albany Medical College, opened a similar facility, also in New York. Trall, however, soon went

well beyond just the water treatments, also urging adequate exposure to air and light, regular exercise and sleep. He had found these to be more effective than conventional medicine in his own case of "persistent ailments". Because it included more than simply water treatment he called his treatment system "hygeio-therapy".

Mary Gove opened a third New York water-cure in 1846. She and her second husband, Thomas L. Nichols M.D., also opened a small school, the American Hydropathic Institute, to train hydropaths, for whom there was increasing demand. However, the Nicholses soon turned to other ventures, whereupon, in 1857, Trall opened his own "Hydropathic School" in New York, later to be renamed the "Hygeio-Therapeutic College." In 1867 some of Trall's operation was moved to Florence Heights, New Jersey, and renamed the Eastern Hygeian Home. In 1869 his school, the Hygeio-Therapeutic College, also moved to the new location, where the young John Harvey Kellogg would later attend. Meanwhile water-cures mushroomed and within five years of their appearance there were over twenty facilities operating in nine states.[23]

At his establishments Trall expounded the virtues of vegetarianism and the use of whole grain (Graham) flour, personal hygiene, abstinence from tobacco, physical exercise and sensible dress. He was particularly opposed to the tight-lacing of women's clothes. The *Water Cure Journal*, which Trall took over from Shew, achieved a very wide following. He also published a number of magazine articles and books, such as *Water-Cure for the Millions* and *The Hydropathic Encyclopedia*. At a time when regular bathing was considered unnecessary, even dangerous, the sentiments contained in these publications came as something of a shock, almost like the treatments themselves, which were quite austere.

Wet-sheet packing, consisting of a cold, wet inner sheet surrounded by a thick, outer layer of blankets was thought to "correct morbid and restore healthy secretions," in addition to "soothing the nervous system". The patients would first shiver, then sweat, for up to two hours. Other treatments involved rubbing "energetically and perseveringly" with wet sheets in order to drive internal toxins to skin pores, from which they could be rubbed away. The douche, consisting of a forceful flow of crisp, cold water directed at the rapidly numbing

patient awaited the more indomitable. Such treatment was said to "arouse the absorbent system." The sitz bath, in which patients could sit for the symptomatic relief of aching muscles was also "recommended as a revulsive" for "affections of the head and chest" … as well as a "corroborant" for disorders of the lower abdomen and pelvis. Alternatively, patients could be prescribed the "wet dress, a course cotton or linen garment to be worn at night." The prodigal intake of cold water through the mouth and frequent colonic irrigation at the other end of the digestive tract were also encouraged.[24]

Dr James Caleb Jackson and Dansville

In 1858 Jackson took over an ailing Water Cure in Dansville, New York, which had been built just a few years earlier adjacent to a strongly flowing, mineralised spring, Breakout Creek. This facility, which he named "Our Home on the Hillside" (often abbreviated to "Our Home"), soon gained a nation-wide reputation. Jackson's adopted daughter, Dr Harriet Austin, a strong advocate of women's dress reform and the inventor of the "American Costume", assisted him. The water cure offered the usual variety of baths, showers, wet sheet wrappings and douches. Diet was also an important facet of the "Our Home" experience. Jackson did not permit the consumption of red meat, sugar, tea, coffee, alcohol or tobacco. Instead, residents were fed an abundance of vegetables, fruit and unprocessed grain. Granula, an early whole-grain breakfast cereal developed and manufactured by Jackson, not only featured on the dining room menu but significantly bolstered the institution's funds through external sales. Dansville became a well-known centre of healthful living, with a number of leading health reformers of the period presenting lectures at "Our Home".[25] Jackson strongly opposed the administration of "drugs", writing at one time:

> In my entire practice I have never given a dose of medicine; not so much as … had I taken the homeopathic pellet of the seven millionth dilution, and dissolving it in Lake Superior, given my patients of its water. I have used in the treatment of my patients the following substances or instrumentalities: first, air; second, food; third, water; fourth, sunlight; fifth, dress; sixth, exercise; seventh, sleep; eighth, rest; ninth, social influences; tenth, mental and moral forces.[26]

Jackson published a number of books and pamphlets on health and hydrotherapy, including *Hints on the Reproductive Organs: Their Diseases, Causes, and Cure on Hydropathic Principles* (1852), *The Sexual Organism; And its Healthy Management* (1861), *Consumption: How to prevent It, and How to cure It* (1862), *How to treat the Sick without Medicine* (1870), *American Womanhood: Its Peculiarities and Necessities* (1870), *The Training of Children* (1872), *The Debilities of Our Boys* (1872), *Christ as a Physician* (1875) and *Morning Watches* (1882).

It was from "Our Home" that Jackson wrote to James White:

> I advise you to come yourself to our house, and make yourself acquainted with our ways of doing things. I do not see how, with our great family, we could well take care of yourself, wife, and three sons, without subjecting you to such expense as, unless you are a rich man, you could not afford to pay. But we could take care of you by having you lodge out of the house and give you all the information we possibly can at our clergyman's price, which is to charge for board and treatment to clergymen, $2.50 per week, they paying the price of their own lodging. Your lodging will cost you about $1.00 or $1.25 per week ...
>
> We shall be happy to do anything we can for you in the way of giving you information, or extending to you any courtesies whereby you may be better qualified and fitted to do your work and to do it well.[27]

From Dansville to WHRI

Ellen White had first discovered Jackson at the time of the diptheria epidemic of 1862–3 through an article of his to which she had been referred. She read that Jackson vigorously opposed the allopathic medical treatments and the drugs and diets of the day, substituting simple foods, fresh air and water treatments in the event of sickness. With some apprehension she had adopted his recommendations when her own two sons showed alarming symptoms of the disease. Understandably, the recovery of the boys certified the value of Jackson's simple methods in the minds of the Whites. Indeed, they were so impressed that they, and some other church leaders, arranged with Jackson to visit "Our Home" later in 1863, meeting the staff, watching proceedings, eating at the tables, listening to health lectures

by Jackson and others, and participating in the program. This visit followed Ellen White's first vision on health principles, given on June 5, 1863.

Although Ellen White was very impressed with the principles of diet and health reform presented at "Our Home" and also with the efficacy of the "water-cure", she had serious reservations about the social and recreational pursuits at Dansville, particularly the cards and dancing. At the 1866 General Conference she had called for a health institute to be established which would be true to Adventist principles. As we have seen, this quickly led to the Western Health Reform Institute.

Conclusion

The WHRI, which inherited significant characteristics of "Our Home on the Hillside", set the pattern which would soon be followed by other Adventist health institutions. The hydropathic treatments offered at Battle Creek persisted for 130 years in some places, such as Australia. In the 1870s and '80s the WHRI came under the defining influence of Dr John Harvey Kellogg, whose influence on Adventist health, particularly its attitude to the employment of scientific techniques and technology, would be long-lasting, as elaborated in Chapter 6. In Australia the story of this legacy may be traced in the history of the Sydney Sanitarium, now the Sydney Adventist Hospital. Chapters 2 and 3 take up this story.

Notes and References

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[2] Warren L. Johns, ed., *The Vision Bold* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977), 46–48.

[3] "The Western Health Reform Institute," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, xxviii: 3 (19 June, 1866): 24.

[4] "The Western Health Reform Institute," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, xxviii: 10 (7 August, 1866): 78.

[5] Michael W. Campbell and Jean Davis, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopaedia, 2nd ed.*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and

Herald , 2013), 862; Ronald L. Numbers*, Prophetess of Health, 2nd ed*. (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 104.

[6] Johns, ed., *The Vision Bold*, 46, 47.

[7] Johns, ed., *The Vision Bold*, 47; Richard W. Schwartz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: a History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1995), 109 state that Lamson was there at the opening while Campbell and Davis, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopaedia, 2nd ed*., 862 states that she came later.

[8] Schwartz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: a History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 109.

[9] Advertising, *The Health Reformer*, 1:5 (December, 1866), advertising on back (un-numbered) pages. (Similar advertisements appeared at the back of a number of editions of this magazine.)

[10] Schwartz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: a History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 109; Johns, ed., *The Vision Bold,* 47; Numbers*, Prophetess of Health, 2nd ed*., 105; *The Health Reformer*, 1:4 (November, 1866): 64.

[11] John H. Waggonner, "Visit to the Health Institute," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, xxviii: 22 (30 October, 1866): 173. Also in John H. Wagonner, "Visit to the Health Institute," *The Health Reformer*, 1:4 (November, 1866): 57.

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[15] Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1997), 416, 405.

[16] Dores E. Robinson, *The Story of Our Health Message; The Origin, Character and Development of Health Education in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,* 3rd ed. (Nashville Tennessee: Southern Publishing Association, 1965)*,* 13–22, 109; David Armstrong and Elizabeth M. Armstrong, *The Great American Medicine Show* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), 1–11. The quotation from Sydenham is from Rosemary H. Waring, Glyn B. Steventon and Steve C. Mitchell, *Molecules of Death* (London, UK:

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[17] *Health Reformer* 1:8 (March, 1867): 127; also referenced in Schwartz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 100.

[18] Hood, T. (1844). "Fragment," in Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity*, Frontpiece.

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[20] Metcalfe, *Life of Vincent Priessnitz*, 64, v.

[21] Sandra W. Moss, "Fountains of Youth: New Jersey's Water Cures, GardenStateLegacy.com Issue 2 (December, 2008). Retrieved from www.gardenstatelegacy.com/files/Fountains_of_Youth_Moss_GSL2.pdf (27 September, 2015); Originally quoted in Harry B. Weiss and Howard R. Kemble, *The Great American Water-Cure Craze* (Trenton: the Past Times Press, 1967), 13.

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[23] Numbers*, Prophetess of Health, 2nd ed*., 64–72.

[24] Numbers*, Prophetess of Health, 2nd ed*., 64–72; Moss, "Fountains of Youth: New Jersey's Water Cures"; Also Weiss and Kemble, *The Great American Water-Cure Craze*.

[25] David Gilbert, Dansville's "Castle on the Hill". Retrieved from http://dansville.lib.ny.us/historyo.html (3 March, 2015).

[26] James C. Jackson, M.D., *How to Treat the Sick Without Medicine* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1868), 25, 26, quoted in Numbers*, Prophetess of Health, 2nd ed*., 75.

[27] J. Caleb Jackson, Letter to Elder James White, 13 August, 1863, quoted in Robinson, *The Story of Our Health Message; The Origin, Character and Development of Health Education in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,* 3rd ed., 98.