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### Folklore Term Paper: Folk Medicine

Edward J. Matey

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Folk Medicine

Edward J. Matey  
F.O. 11

## Folk Medicine

For many years folk beliefs were used to diagnose and cure diseases. Medical science has taken over the cure of sicknesses and diseases; however, "homecures", folk beliefs and practices, sometimes referred to as "pow-wow" practices, are still believed in and used by many. Sometimes they are used in cases where medical science has failed; often in place of any medical aid. These folk practices cannot be completely discarded because they have proved successful for many years as cures and preventatives. Since medical science is in the limelight as the most readily accepted cure, these folk cures have slid into the background; however the average family, especially in the Pennsylvania Dutch areas or country districts, has had at least one experience with home cures or pow-wowing.

One day while talking to "Mazie" Ulmer, the cook at our fraternity house, she offered several cures for worts:

"If you have worts and you accidentally run across an old bone buried by a dog or placed by a dog, you should rub the bone on the wort and carefully place the bone back in its position when found. Your wort will then disappear within a few days. You should be cautioned however, not to go out looking for a bone, but should run across it accidentally."

"A more simple cure for worts is to rub the juice from milk weed on it and the wort will disappear." She claimed her brother used this method and the wort disappeared.



She recalled several remedies for mother used for colds and coughs. One was a solution made from mullen leaves, lemon juice, rock candy, and water. "Boil the mullen leaf in water, then strain it and add lemon and rock candy. Boil this until you get a thick syrup." This is to be an excellent cure for colds.

"Another home cure for coughs is a mixture of molasses, butter and vinegar."

A cure for a sore throat is:

"When retiring at night remove your right stocking and while it is still warm turn it inside out and wrap it around your throat placing the sole of the stocking against your neck."

\* Betty Gibbs, a local elderly waitress, showed me a recipe for a cure for Dyspepsia. This recipe was written on paper that had been preserved for years.

#### A Cure for Dyspepsia

1 oz. Elechampane root  
 1 oz. Comfrey  
 1 oz. Blood root  
 1 oz. Indian turnip  
 2 oz. Garlick

Put the above in 1 quart of water. Boil to 3 half pints. Strain and add 1 pint of honey and 1 gill of Holland gin to keep it from fermentation.

Dose one half a wine glassful three times a day. If constitution will allow take a larger dose.

#### Another cure for dyspepsia

1 oz. pulverized rhubarb root  
 1 oz. caraway seed  
 1 tablespoonful orange peel  
 1 pint of whiskey

I asked several waitresses at the Stevens House Hotel, who were Lancaster women if any of ~~them~~ them had ever heard of Mrs. Kanneck, the woman who is supposed to have cured so many Lancaster people without medical aid.

One waitress said that when her son was young he had frequently "wet the bed". She took him to see Mrs. Kanneck who told the mother to rub the kidney area with olive oil and recite the "Lords Prayer". This she did and the son was cured.

Another waitress tells of the time when she was younger and she had a rash and her mother took her to Mrs. Kanneck. Mrs. Kanneck told her to recite the Lords Prayer while she circled the rash nine times with her finger. It cured her of the rash. The waitress also recalls in later years when she was afflicted with a rash she tried the procedure herself--circling the area nine times and saying the Lords Prayer, but it brought about no cure.

I talked to several other people when said they had been to Mrs. Kanneck with their children for minor afflictions such as sores and rashes and the cures all seemed to be about the same with the woman asking the patient to recite the Lords Prayer usually three times every night and stressing they must believe in the cure to be cured.

The bartender at the Toby Tavern offered a cure for liver grow. That is to rub the afflicted area; however a man must be cured (worked upon) by a woman and a woman to be cured must be worked upon by a man.



Another waitress also told me of the time she had her son in a barber shop on King Street in Lanc. The barber noticed the boy had several warts. The barber said I can cure the boys worts for a penny. She gave him a penny. The barber then rubbed the penny on the wort. Within a few days it went away. Several years later the waitress herself had a wort on her finger and she went to the barber and for a penny he healed her wort. The barber shop is Bransby's Barber Shop on West King Street near Van Scivers.

Another woman I asked if she knew any home cures or pow-wow cures said she had a booklet on them and that I could copy some of them. The booklet was on "Egyptian Secrets". It offered some of the following interesting cures:

To stop bleeding

Take a small bone of a human and put it into the wound and it will stop the bleeding.

To cure Rhumatism

Take 15¢ worth of sweet oil and 5¢ worth of saltpetre. Mix; stand in warm place. Shake well after 24 hours and take .

To restore manhood

Buy a pike as they are sold in fish markets, carry it noiselessly to running water, let whale oil run into the snout of the fish, throw the fish into the running water and then walk the stream upward and you'll restore your strength.

To cure toothache

Write on a piece of paper: "Quosum senioba zenni tantus lect veri" and hang it on a piece of string over the back.

## Salve for itchy hands

Take meadow rice boiled in olive oil. Mix beeswax, there-  
with so that it becomes a salve. Grease hands with it.

## Cure for colds or diahrrea

Take 3 tablespoonfuls of brandy and 20 lumps of loaf sugar,  
1 teaspoonful grated nutmeg,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teacup of hot water. Take as  
hot as possible.

## Imbibbing too much

Take fungus of a linden tree,  $\frac{1}{2}$  quart of old wine,  $\frac{1}{2}$  quart  
of water. pour the latter on the fungus and let it draw for  
24 hours and drink morning, noon and evening thereof one teaspoon.

## Cure for Dysentery

Boil an egg and eat it as hot as possible without bread  
or salt.

People who are supposed to have powers to cure by using  
"pow-wow" methods are not allowed to practice by law. However,  
they are sought after by many and have helped many. They  
cannot charge a fee, but do at times take gifts for their help.  
However, among the few "pow-wow" doctors there can be found a  
few imposters or those that give harmful information to  
their patients. In reading a pow-wow book I came across an  
excellent illustration of this: "A certain man in Steelton,  
which adjoins the city of Harrisburg went to a so-called pow-  
wow doctor in his home town. He went there feeling very much  
dejected, and run down. The pow-wow man's advice was sought.  
This is what he was told to do according to the accounts  
available: He was to have nightly \_\_\_\_\_ with his wife,  
week after week, until the pow-wow doctor should order otherwise.



under penalty of certain conditions made at the time. But nature stepped in and the wife complained of her inhuman treatment to a justice of the peace, who ruled that he had no jurisdiction in the matter, but that she should complain to the state department, which we understand she did, and thus the story gained credence. The health of both the man and the woman was about ruined, which caused the latter to seek some form of relief. For a pow-wow doctor to suggest such a "cure" is most reprehensible, to say the least.<sup>1</sup> This story is to show some of the bad publicity that some pow-wow doctors give.

Belief in these cures is slowly decreasing and the present generation has less confidence in them than the last. Possibly with the passing of the next generation, all believers will be gone, but that cures can be achieved without medical science by "home cures", folk beliefs and practices has been proven over and over again and help through these cures is available *To Those* who wish to believe in it and try it.

<sup>1</sup> "The Pow-wow Book", A. Monroe Aurand, Jr. 1929.



Information received from Mary Ulmer, cook at the Phi Kappa Sigma house. She didn't know too many stories and in fact told me most of them several days later after she had tried to recall them. She is a middle aged woman and has lived in This section of Pennsylvania most of her life.

Information received from Betty Gibbs, Mary Kienzle, and several other unknown waitress at the Stevens House Hotel. Since I work at the Stevens House on a part time basis and know that most of these women were long-time Lancaster residents I asked them one evening while at work if they knew any "home cures" or pow-wow cures. It was then they gave me the information I used. The bar-tender from the Toby Tavern happened to be there at the time of the discussion and he offered his bit. The conversion took place at a "lunch period" for the waitresses after serving a party.

Information received from "Egyptian Secrets" was from a person who asked to be kept unknown. In fact the person had planned to lend me the book, then because a friend had told her that it was unlawful to have the book refused to lend it to me. And after a little persuasion, I was permitted to come to her house and copy a few of the cures. I asked her if she had ever used any of the cures and she said "no", but that she believed they would work. And that they had wanted to try the "cure to protect a person in battle" on her brother before he went overseas and he refused, and was later killed. They believe they may have saved his life if he had been willing.