

"He Ain't Sick, He's Only Got The Ager"

What is today known as the Midwest was called the western country in the first part of the nineteenth century. As lands were settled and cleared in this area, tales began to drift back east about the unhealthfulness of the western country. These tales, founded in fact, but often exaggerated, concerned a particular disease which seemed to originate in the western country; a disease in which the infected person experienced severe bouts of fever and chills - the fever and ague.

Symptoms were unmistakable: yawnings, and stretching, a feeling of lassitude, blueness of the fingernails, then little cold sensations which increased until the victim's teeth chattered in his jaws and he "felt like a harp with a thousand strings." After an hour or so warmth returned, then came raging heat with racking head pains and aching back. The spell ended with copious sweating and a return to normality.

"And on every day there, as sure as day would break

Their neighbor "Ager" came that way, inviting them to shake."

There is the story of a group of Illinois workmen who were frightened from their task of shingling a house by the shaking of a whole family, and another story of a Michigan man who shook so bad that the dishes rattled on the cabin wall. Even cattle and dogs were said to be afflicted and seen to lean against the fence and shake.

"The months of August and September are generally very sickly", wrote Gershom Flagg in 1819 from Edwardsville, Illinois, after he had been ill of fever and ague for two months, and he decided that if his health didn't improve, he would sell out and leave the country.

Epidemics were widely reported. In Indianapolis in 1821, summer and fall outbreaks of intermittent, and remittent fevers and ague occurred and one eighth of the population died. In Vevay, Indiana in the summer and fall of 1820 one in six died. During the mid 1830s in Elkhart, Indiana epidemics of typhoid and pneumonia had half the population affected.

In Michigan, as soon as the land was plowed "and the malarial gases set free...the country became very sickly...The pale, sallow, bloated faces of that period were the rule; there were no healthy faces except of persons just arrived." Bilious diseases struck Detroit in the autumns of 1819, 1823,



MacKenzie's Fever & Ague Mixture.



Label for MacKenzie's Fever & Ague Mixture.

1826. Filth in the streets and filthy drinking water scooped from the river were partly blamed. Word spread back east dulling the shining prospects of a new life in this new land:

By Digger Odell

"Don't go to Michigan, that land of ills;
The word means ague, fever, and chills."

In Ohio, James Kilbourne, journalist and legislator, described the presence of bilious fever: "Almost all were sick, both in towns and country, so that it became difficult, in many instances, to get tenderers for the sick. In many instances whole families were down at a time and many died....they have often been obliged to move back from the meadows and bottoms where they always lived, into the woods and uplands during the sickly season to escape it." The Piqua Gazette reported of the 165,000 people in the seventeen counties in a radius of fifty miles of Columbus more than half were sick in September 1823. At Cleveland in 1827 it was reported there was more fever and ague than at any time since the first settlement. The local paper in order to check the wild rumors and exaggerated reports, printed that out of over 1200 people, only 45 had died.

Many varieties of ague were described:

**"Don't go to Michigan,
that land of ills;
The word means ague,
fever, and chills."**

dumb ague, shaking ague, chill and fever each day, chill and fever on alternate days, or every third day, chills one day fever the next, whatever, it was regular, like the moon and came back in season for years until a sort of immunity was built up. The ague was seldom fatal but often reduced the resistance of the affected and made them more susceptible to other diseases.

The cause of these malarial complaints was suspected to be "marsh miasma" or "swamp paludal" (i.e. of or relating to marshes). Some gaseous substance which filled the air from the freshly plowed wetlands, swamps, or lowlands. The general agreement in the early part of the 19th century was that some substance in the atmosphere from putrid and stagnant waters caused common bilious fevers. In many places mill ponds were drained in summer

months, although some argued that the remaining mud was worse than the water in causing the disease. Others listed the causes as night air, putrid vegetable and animal matter in the air, grief, fear, lack of sleep or even intense thought.

Cures were as varied as the causes. Some doctors advocated bloodletting while other thought the lance would bring certain death. Home remedies were widely used including such ingredients as Peruvian bark, which had been used for fever treatment since the 1600s. It was from Peruvian bark (Cinchona tree bark) that quinine was first extracted in Europe in 1820. Quinine was not available in the United States before 1823, when it was first produced in Philadelphia. Its use spread rapidly. By 1824, it was offered by one J. Bates in pill form in Cincinnati. It was not, however, widely available until the 1840s. Initially, it was very expensive at \$30 an ounce. By 1846, the price was down to \$6-8 an ounce.

The epidemics of the 1820s and 1830s set the stage for the patent medicine peddlers, doctors, and companies to introduce a wide variety of bottled products. The introduction of these new medicines came both from the western states themselves as well as established companies back east. There were medicines for ague, fever, febrifuges (fever reducer), biliousness, and malarial diseases offering relief to the suffering western public. Some brands established themselves and continued for decades while others were short lived and quickly drifted into obscurity.

Ohio had a large a number of such remedies. One of the earliest was embossed **Birney's / Febrifuge**, an aqua embossed rectangular medicine that was put out in the 1830s in Cincinnati, Ohio. In Cleveland, in the mid 1850s an embossed medicine first appeared. The bottle is aqua, 6 1/2", with an open pontil and is embossed, **Mackenzie / Ague & Fever Mixture / Cleveland Ohio**. The bottle pictured and sold in the Greer sale was originally found in a drug store in Northeastern Ohio. The same company put out another bottled product embossed **Mackenzie's Tonic Febrifuge**, with a 2" x 1" rectangular panel into which a metal pill box fit. Another Cleveland physician, Dr. Marcus C. Parker was selling his "Indian Ague and Fever Specific". His wholesale and retail drug business began in 1841 and lasted at least until 1863.

Thirty-five miles southeast of Cleveland, in the small town of Garrettsville, Ohio two examples of an unlisted bottle were found. The bottle pictured is aqua, open pontiled, 5 5/8", rectangular, embossed on the side panel, **Dr. Bartges // Fever & Ague Mixture**. The bottle has that deep aqua



Iron pontiled Dr. Mann's Ague Balsam.

color typical of midwestern pontiled bottles. In the small town of Plymouth, Ohio, south and west of Cleveland another medicine appeared in an iron pontiled, deep aqua, 7 1/4", bottle embossed, **Dr. H. Austins / Genuine Ague Balsam. / Plymouth, O.** Austin's products begun in the 1850s were still being advertised in 1879 under the name of Austin's Ague Drops. A very similar bottle was put up by S.K. Mann Company of Galion only a few miles down the road. These two products were undoubtedly com-



Unlisted Dr. Bartges Fever & Ague Mixture.

petitors. It too, is deep aqua, 7", iron pontiled embossed **Dr. Mann's / Celebrated Ague Balsam / Galion Ohio**. The bottle is also known with an open pontil. The Mann's product was advertised as early as 1855. Further south and to the west the W.S. Lunt company of Family Medicines put out an embossed aqua pontiled **W.S. Lunt's // Ague Killer / Findlay O.**, 6 3/4" high. This company was also the proprietor of a product called "Great Western Liniment." Findlay lies in the midst of the Ohio interior plains region. Thousands of years ago glaciers cover this part of Ohio leveling the land and depositing a layer of soil estimated to be one hundred feet deep. As the glaciers melted, they left a large body of water, much of which evaporated or drained off to leave present day Lake Erie. When the first pioneers arrived a large area of this section was still so marshy and difficult to drain that it was known as the "Black Swamp".

Moving farther south down what is now Interstate 75 to Troy, Ohio, just north of Dayton. Here was the origin of **Brandriff's / Vegetable Antidote for Ague / Troy Ohio** an aqua, 7 1/4", iron pontil bottle. Many later smooth base variants exist suggesting he was a business for at least a few years probably in the early 1860s. Some variants have a Piqua address instead of Troy. Dayton proper had its own ague doctor. Milton G. Harter began in business in Dayton in 1855. One of his early sellers was **Dr. Harter / Ague / Specific**, a 5 1/4", aqua



Dr. Roger's Indian Fever Cure introduced in the 1850's by Amon Scovill of Cincinnati.

medicine. His most famous product was not introduced until 1885, the well known Dr. Harter's Wild Cherry Bitters.

Cincinnati was home to Amon Scovill, who operated a large wholesale druggist business there. He introduced many successful brands among which was his Indian Fever Cure. The Cure was first referred to in testimonials around 1851. To date only smooth based specimens are known. The bottles are embossed, **Dr. Rogers // Indian Fever // Cure**, on fancy indented panels.

The epidemics of Malarial diseases attracted attention nationwide. Some of the largest and best known drug enterprises developed products to meet the demand. Dr. David Jayne of Philadelphia came out with two products, both of which are scarce and



Ayer's Ague Cure comes in smooth based and open pontil variants.

so probably never achieved the fame of his other medicines. The first is a 7", aqua, pontiled bottle, embossed, **Dr. D. Jayne's Ague Mixture / Philadelphia**. The second, probably offering the same medicine in pill form, is a round 2 3/4", pontiled bottle embossed, **Jayne's Ague Pills**.

James Cook Ayer ran a highly successful business beginning in 1841 in Lowell, Massachusetts, selling his Cherry Pectoral, Sarsaparilla, and Hair Vigor. He invested his profits in cotton and paper mills and even had a town named after him (Ayer, Massachusetts). In 1858 he introduced his Ague Cure. The 7", aqua bottle is embossed, **Ayer's // Ague // Cure // Lowell, Mass**. The bottle comes in both pontil and smooth based and was quite successful, last-



Bonpland's Fever & Ague Remedy.

ing well into the middle of the twentieth century. Numerous examples have been dug in the Midwest.

Other national concerns cashing in on the mysterious western disease include: the Loudon Company of Philadelphia, which produced a **Louden & Co. Fever & Ague Pills**, 2 1/4", round, open pontiled; from New York came **Christie's Ague Balsam**, found in open and iron pontil; perhaps the most beautiful bottle in this category is the **Wynkoops & Co's Tonic Mixture New York / Warranted to Cure / Fever &**

DR. C. DELERY'S
INDIAN
Vegetable Febrifuge

Certain Cure for all Miasmatic Fevers, viz: Chills & Fever, Remittent and Intermittent Fevers. Acts especially in obstinate fevers, &c., &c., &c.

DIRECTIONS:—Adult, a table-spoonful three times daily, before meals. Child, a table-spoonful twice daily, before meals.

After the Fever has been broken, continue the same dose for 15 days, as in chronic and obstinate cases a permanent cure cannot be expected, unless this rule be strictly observed.

EDGAR DELERY, Proprietor,
BAY ST. LOUIS, MISS.
Price, \$1.00

Edgar C. Delery patented the label for his medicinal compound in August of 1876. Delery was a native of Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi. Febrifuge is a word meaning "fever reducing".

Ague, rectangular, cobalt blue and open pontiled.

An enormously successful concern was operated by George G. Green of Woodbury,

NEVAJO AGUE CURE.

No Quinine. No Arsenic.

DIRECTIONS:

A **ADULTS**—ONE TEASPOONFUL AT NIGHT; to be taken in a small quantity of sugar and water. If the bowels are not moved by morning repeat the dose once a day until they are moved. After that takes place take 10 to 20 drops twice a day for three or four days.

CHILDREN—One half the above quantity, to be taken in a small quantity of water and sugar. If the effect be griping, or the evacuation of the bowels be too severe, moderate the dose. Adhere strictly to directions. Price, \$1 per bottle. Money returned if a cure is not effected.

*Thos. A. Wilson, Proprietor
Lodi, Cal.*

Thomas A. Wilson of Lodi, California registered this label for Nevaajo Ague Cure in April of 1883.

New Jersey. His father, Lewis M. Green had begun the wholesale druggist business in 1866. George took over in 1872. The Ague Conqueror was introduced in 1880 and he advertised it heavily. The bottle was smooth based, rectangular, aqua, embossed **G.G. Green Prop // Ague Conqueror // Woodbury, N.J.** So profitable was his business that he owned hotels in California, and his almanacs show pictures of his yacht, his mansard-roofed mansion surrounded by spacious grounds and his laboratory. The business continued until at least 1923.

New Orleans, city on the delta, was prime territory for the fever doctors. Numerous pontil age examples of medicines are known from that city. Among them are: **B. LaPlace Chemist / Fever & Ague Mixture / N. Orleans**, an aqua iron pontiled rectangular medicine put out by Bazile LaPlace, who operated a drugstore for over twenty years. He was the sole agent for the "French Tropical Fever and Ague Mixture". Other New Orleans bottles include: **Dr. J. Speed's / Fever Tonic / New Orleans**, an extremely rare, six sided, pontil medicine; **O.O.**



Amber 1890's Alexander's Sure Cure for Malaria, Akron, O.

Woodman's / Fever Cure / N.O. pontiled, aqua, 4 1/2"; and **Sickles & co. Druggists 40 Canal St. New Orleans Fever & Ague Mixture**, rectangular and open pontiled. The swampy nature of the area made it fertile ground for fever cures.

A list of fever and ague medicines would be extensive and cover much of the country especially the south where they were often advertised as chill cures. Many, many other



Neff's Ague Cure. Label patented 1870.

- Ayer's Ague Cure James Cook Ayer established 1841, 1858 ague cure died 1878, then Frederick Ayer until turn of century Sterling products 1938..ague cure 1921, ague remedy 29-30 and 41-42. channeled his money into cotton and paper mills, had a town named after him (Ayer, Mass.)
- Scovill put out Fever and Ague Pills..
- Austin's Ague Balsam-Advertised 1879 Austin's Ague Drops (see Fike page 22)
- Bonpland's Fever & Ague Remedy...1849
- Bodley's Ague Balsam, 1892
- Cantrell's Ague Mixture..advertised 1844
- Carson's / Ague Cure / Jamestown, NY - 1900 advertised embossed
- Christie's Ague Balsam..Abel H. Christie 1846 - he died in 1852, NYC
- Dailey's Blackhawk's Indian Vegetable Anti-Bilious Pills..1855..Louisville, William Daily, M.D.
- Farr's Ague Tonic
- J. C. Mendenhall & Co. / Evansville, IND // C.C.C. // unknown.. Certain chill Cure advertised 1889 aqua use of word chill seems to be used in south..Tennessee..Miss, Raymond's Pepsin Chill Tonic...Greenville tn..Swamp Chill and Fever Tonic Fort Smith Ark..Reed's Chill Cure..Clarkville Texas...Wood's Tasteless Chill Cure, Bristol Tennessee
- G.G. Green Prop // Ague Conqueror // Woodbury, N.J. 1878-1923..owned hotels in California, his almanac shows pictures of his yacht, his Mansard-roofed mansion, spacious grounds and laboratory.
- I. Hatch Febrifuge Mixture..1900...Birney's Febrifuge..1830..Cincinnati...Dr. Sappington's Vegetable Febrifuge Pills....
- Great Western Fever Panacea
- Roger's Indian Fever Cure 1876 1910
- Spillman's // ALTERNATIVE // AGUE // TONIC Dr. Wm. Spillman Columbus, MS 1850-60..with and w/o pontil
- Long's / Standard / Malaria / Cure co. / Rochester / N.Y.
- W.S. Lunt's // Ague Killer / Findlay O.
- Mackenzie // Ague & Fever / Mixture // Cleaveland Ohio
- Mann's Ague Balsam 1859 - 1900..S.K. Mann & Co. 1859 advertisement in Cleveland paper...has brought health and happiness to many families through out the western country...This balsam is only recommended for one class of diseases, viz; those produced by Malaria..testimonials from 1857-58.

bottles exist which were made for this malady: Jamestown, New York produced a Carson's Ague Cure; Raymond's Pepsin Chill Tonic was made in Greenville, Tennessee; in Rochester, New York there was a remedy called Long's Standard Malaria Cure Company; pictured is a label registered in 1870 for Neff's Ague Cure; from Lodi, California a small label was registered for Navaho Ague Cure; Edward Delery of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi registered a label in 1876 for his Indian Vegetable Febrifuge; in Fort Smith, Arkansas there was a Swamp Chill and Fever Tonic; Reed's chill Cure was made in Clarkville, Texas; and Wood's Tasteless Chill Cure was produced in Bristol, Tennessee. A more complete list would probably number into the hundreds.

Ague was the most common ailment in the western country. So inescapable it was that many refused to regard it as a disease, but like hard work, a concomitant of the frontier as expressed in the following: "He ain't sick, he's only got the ager".....

