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Cambria County Historical Society

HERITAGE

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HOXSEY CLINIC PART OF PORTAGE HISTORY

Fifty thousand ice cream bars imprinted with the letter “H” had been prepared in anticipation of a large crowd. A State Police escort, marching bands, and a delegation from the State Senate all converged on the football stadium in Portage to greet Harry M. Hoxsey who was there to open his Hoxsey Cancer Clinic.

It was March 1954 and the Hoxsey clinic was seeing cancer patients from all around the globe, including many from the Amish community.

Hoxsey, a naturopath from Dallas TX, did not claim he had a cure-all for cancer but that his natural methods were better than the frequently used surgeries, radiotherapy, cobalt bombs and radium treatments being used by the established medical community. Hoxsey did claim an 80% cure rate.

The “Hoxsey cure” had been passed to Harry from his father, who, while laying on his death bed, had Harry promise him he would keep the family name alive. The senior Hoxsey, a veterinarian, had once observed a cancer stricken horse eating certain roots and plants. Supposedly the horse cured itself and the Hoxsey concoction of licorice, red clover, burdock root, barberry, Cascara, prickly ash bark and potassium iodide entered the long list of false cures in medical quackery history.

At the Portage clinic, patients paid \$400 and were given a physical examination along with pills, injections or a salve. Hoxsey’s additional treatment probably had a better effect than the “cure” itself. He had his patients restrict themselves of wheat, sugar, fried foods and alcohol. Positive thinking and the idea of well being was also encouraged.

Three weeks after the Hoxsey Clinic opened, a perfectly healthy FDA inspector received the diagnosis of prostate cancer after a two-minute physical examination. Amid a hostile throng of townspeople, FDA officials seized over 500,000 pills at the Portage clinic.

At trial, Harry Hoxsey claimed he had no financial connection to the Portage clinic. A local citizen had indeed converted the former appliance store and garage into the local clinic and had hired the medical director. Hoxsey did sit through the six-week trial and defended his treatment as he had done at several previous trials across the country.

Compelling evidence in the case came as a young girl, once pronounced cured by Hoxsey, died of cancer. The young girl had previously appeared before the state senate as an example of the Hoxsey treatment. The jury condemned the Portage pills and ordered them destroyed.

The FDA now faced an unusual dilemma. It had never used a 1938 law allowing them to warn the public of “gross deception” in a medical claim. They feared that any comment on their part, even a negative comment, would attract even more patients to the clinic.

In 1956, the FDA issued its “Public Beware” poster in 46,000 post offices declaring the treatment as “worthless.” The FDA estimated that in 30 weeks it had dissuaded 3,000 people from trying Hoxsey’s futile treatment. The Portage clinic closed its doors in November 1958. (View the FDA Poster at this link: <http://www.cambriacountyhistorical.com/newsletters/pdf/FDAHoxsey.jpg>.)

Today the Hoxsey Clinic is located in Tijuana, Mexico and is operated by the descendents of Harry’s sister-in-law.

The initial cost of treatment is \$4,000 to \$5,000, not including the dietary supplements and three years of return visits. Assuming, of course, the patient lives that long.

Spotlight on Johnstown
and the
GRANDVIEW CEMETERY

John Graham McCrorey (1860-1923)

J.G. McCrorey was the founder of the McCrory Five and Ten Cent store chain. Born in East Wheatfield Township, Indiana County, he moved with his family to Cumberland County while still a boy. He returned to Johnstown, Pennsylvania at age 18 and began working in retail stores. Four years later (1882), at age 22, he opened at Scottdale, Westmoreland County, the first of what would become hundreds of McCrory chain stores. His stores would come to be considered the second of the great five-and-dime chain stores founded at the end of the nineteenth century, following F.W. Woolworth (1879) and preceded those of S.S. Kresge (1899). The latter chain was later renamed K-Mart. McCrorey is interred in the family mausoleum, above whose entrance is inscribed "McCrorey," the original spelling of the family name. J.G. McCrorey legally changed his name, dropping the *e*, to save money by not paying the cost of the extra letter in store signs.

Lt. Boyd “Buzz”Wagner (1916-1942)

Born in Emeigh and raised in Nanty-Glo, Buzz Wagner studied aeronautical engineering at the University of Pittsburgh for three years before joining the Army Air Corps in 1938. Lt. Wagner is considered the first ace in WWII, eventually shooting down eight Japanese planes. After dying in a routine flight near Eglin Field, FL in 1943, an estimated 20,000 mourners attended his funeral at Grandview Cemetery.