

did you know? why spas in the old days

By James M. Boles



Before modern medicine discovered effective cures for the ills of mankind, a group of unique medical facilities flourished in Western New York from the 18th well into the 20th century.

Shortly after the discovery of black mineral water in 1891, Alden, NY became a town famous for its bathhouses and sanitariums. With promised favorable outcomes for rheumatism, hysteria, alcoholism, nervousness, partial paralysis, and many other ailments, thousands of patients traveled to Alden to “take the cure.” The baths claimed to have high mineral levels of chlorine, bromine, calcium, magnesium, more sodium than seawater, and operated for over 50 years, closing in the 1960s. The baths were seen as a treatment not a cure so patients would return for ongoing therapy to manage their disease.

Since mental health care was crude and seldom effective in those days, the baths and sanitariums were also used

to care for diseases of the nervous system. At best, the facilities were a place to rest, often in a peaceful setting, to eat good food, and receive attention to the various problems a person was struggling with.

A legacy of special diets, herbal remedies, baths and fresh air treatments are still available at resorts and spas, and many of these items, including health foods, spring waters, teas, vitamins and minerals, and health drinks can be found in most grocery stores.

About the Author: James M. Boles, Ed.D. is a former CEO of People Inc. and current senior researcher at the Museum of disABILITY History, 3826 Main Street, Amherst. Museum visitors are welcome. See <http://museumofdisability.org> or call (716) 629-3626.

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