



The Historian's Notebook:

The Story of Salisbury and Salisbury Steak

by George W. Paulson, M.D.

James Salisbury was born on October 13, 1823, in New York. He was trained at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, where he received a degree of bachelor of natural science followed by a medical degree from Albany Medical College in 1850. While practicing medicine, he was assistant chemist to the New York State Geological Survey in the 1840s. Salisbury was exposed to superb medical and chemical education at Albany. He worked with Dr. Lewis Beck, author of a three-edition chemistry textbook. In the early 1850s Salisbury published several papers on the anatomy and physiology of plants. He won a prize of \$300 from the New York State Agricultural Society for his work.

During the 1840s and up until 1863, Salisbury published a series of chemical and microscopic studies of fruits, vegetables and grains. He was sure he had found the cause of blight of apples and similar fruit trees. In 1862, his leading article in the *American Journal of Medical Sciences* suggested that certain fungi found in decaying straw were the cause of "camp measles." His comments about protection by inoculation were proven incorrect since Pepper from Philadelphia failed to reproduce his results. Salisbury received particular fame for

an article republished in France in the *Revue Scientifique* in which he asserted that he could produce intermittent fever through fresh clods of earth placed in the open windows of a sleeping room. He attributed this to what he called "palmellae". Not satisfied with that assertion, he classified algoid vegetations as the causes of gonorrhea and syphilis, diseases he attributed to filaments and spores. He reported to have seen tiny circular dots within the cytoplasm of epithelial cells. It is possible that he actually saw gonococci in fresh specimens. He spent many hours evaluating fresh blood smears but his data is now considered incorrect. Apparently he recognized platelets, but attributed them to many other things. He claimed in the 1860s that he had discovered the causes of syphilis, gonorrhea, malaria, measles and rheumatism but none of his observations could be confirmed by subsequent observers. Several decades passed before bacteriology became a major subject for medical discussion; Dr. Salisbury did his work before the founders of bacteriology such as Koch and Pasteur. By the time new and

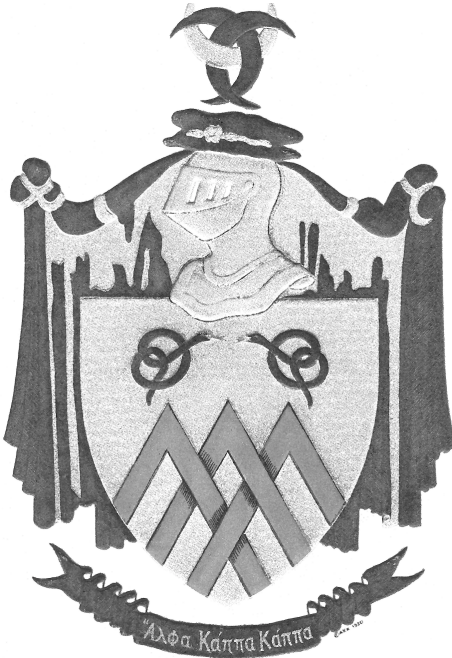


James H. Salisbury, M.D., from the National cyclopedia of biography, 1898

adequate techniques of staining to identify bacteria became available, Salisbury had already lost interest.

Experiences in the Civil War while stationed at Camp Dennison just north of Cincinnati, led him to believe that camp diarrhea was due to "consumption of the bowels." Salisbury decided it could be managed by placing patients on a diet of broiled beefsteak and coffee with "anti-fermentative" medicines. In an effort to devise an appropriate Army ration,

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History of Alpha Kappa Kappa at The Ohio State University

By Albert Van Fossen, MD

the house to the west and joining them together with an addition. The final Chapter house was erected at 466 King Avenue in 1966, and remains a rooming house to this day.

Several local alumni held National offices in AKK, including Drs. Albert Landrum, John Martin, and Anthony Ruppertsberg.

Pi Chapter entertained two national conventions in Columbus. The first was held in 1910, and the second was the 42nd held here on December 28-29, 1967.

Alpha Kappa Kappa Pi Chapter at The Ohio State University was chartered by the National Medical Fraternity on October 2, 1902. AKK had originally been organized by a group of students at Dartmouth Medical College in Hanover, New Hampshire on September 29, 1888.

Grand President Cook reported at the Annual Convention in 1903 regarding the Columbus chapter, "Here I found a group of young men enthusiastic for our fraternity and we had the pleasure of instituting a chapter in their own Chapter house." The Chapter house was actually two rooms rented at 1822 North High Street.

In 1906, Phi Sigma Psi, a local fraternity at Starling Medical College, petitioned to join AKK, Pi Chapter as OMU and Starling were shortly to be amalgamated. They had 113 members which further strengthened the AKK's at The Ohio Medical University.

The first Chapter house was at 688 North High Street which housed 12 men for the year. After this, they lived at various addresses: 68 Buttles, 797 Dennison Avenue, 216 Marshall Avenue and others. At no time after the first year had they been without a Chapter house or quarters. In 1923, the Pi Chapter Co. was formed by several loyal alumni including Drs. W.S. Van Fossen, A. Landrum, H. Beatty and others, to purchase a house at 199 W. Tenth Avenue. This was later enlarged by purchasing

AKK reached its zenith in 1930. At that time, there were 48 chapters active in both the United States and Canada.

By the 1970's, fraternities generally were in decline. Medical fraternities in particular were hard hit by changing socioeconomic conditions. Pi Chapter closed its doors and the Chapter in 1974.



Trustees of the Pi Chapter Welfare Co. in front of the new chapter house on King Avenue

Back, L-R: Charles Harding, Albert Van Fossen, Wendell Butcher, and John Martin

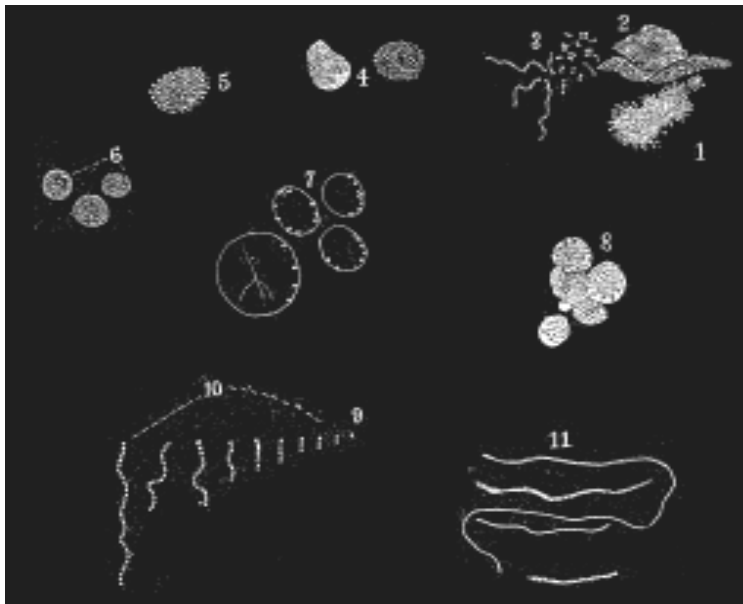
Front, L-R: Hugh Beatty, William S. Van Fossen

he actually ran an experimental project, hiring 6 laborers to live on Army biscuits and coffee alone. Within 18 days all had chronic diarrhea, including the doctor who had suffered through the same diet. However, when fed beefsteak and coffee they soon recovered.

Following the Civil War, Dr. Salisbury devoted himself to treating chronic diseases and was again busy writing. A 330 page publication presented the rationale of his dieting method. The way in which the food was prepared was to scrape or chop the meat, which was then patted into cakes with just enough pressure to hold them together during cooking - Salisbury steak. Lean beef was preferred, but oysters, fish, chicken, or game could be added. All the meats were to be cooked. The rationale was based on the concept that men and women were said to be 2/3 carnivorous and 1/3 herbivorous, and that by such a "natural" diet we can maintain healthy bodies and live longer. As if these ideas weren't outlandish enough he also suggested that fibrous tissue was responsible for most of the world's problems, including locomotor ataxia, ovarian tumors, goiter, and "sclerotic states." Partly to erase the fibrous tissue he placed patients on diets with frequent drinking of hot water. A pint was to be sipped slowly an hour or so before each meal. The writings of Dr. Salisbury include many testimonials, including one from the Duke of Argyll.

Could there have been anything to the Salisbury diet? Clearly bad teeth were universal, or nearly so, and proper mastication was difficult for many. Food was relatively abundant and cheap, and possibly Salisbury's diet was effective in reducing weight by eliminating some of the fat present at the time in the average diet. Dr. Salisbury himself lived to be 81.

Dr. Salisbury's professional partner, J. M. Lewis, M.D. served as superintendent of the Newburgh State Hospital for the Insane and his patients were treated to the diet, as were those who went to one of the two diet homes Dr. Salisbury established. Salisbury's later days were spent in Cleveland, where he had significant land hold-



Salisbury's illustrations from his work on typhoid fever from Salisbury's Microscopic examinations of blood, 1868.

ings, suggesting that the Salisbury diet was at least profitable for him. He was honored with advanced degrees and became a member of many learned societies but seems never to have been active in local medical societies. Perpetuation of his name depends on his diet, but more importantly the Salisbury steak.

Note: Salisbury was ahead of his time in his acceptance of the theory of a specific germ causation of disease, and obviously had the courage to advance this before it was proven by others. He had clear technical ability beyond any of his contemporaries, but he failed to follow through with his research just as others, now more famous, began to see the promised land of bacteriology.

More information on the story of James Salisbury, the Salisbury diet, and Salisbury steak may be found in The Ohio State Archeological and Historical Quarterly, Vol. 59, pages 352-370, October, 1950, by L. Cummer.

Notes from the Curator

To any interested readers, there is a publication called *Scalpel and Tongs*, the American Journal of Medical Philately. For more information on this group, please contact Frederick C. Skvara, MD, P.O. Box 6228, Bridgewater, NJ 08807. (e-mail: fcskvara@bellatlantic.net)

There is interest in the origins of the Hamilton Hall clock. If you have any information to share about this medical landmark (or any other landmark in Central Ohio), please contact Barbara Van Brimmer

The fall lecture has tentatively been planned for September 29th. Dr. George Paulson will be speaking about grave robbing. More information will be forthcoming.

Displays

In the main hall of the Medical Heritage Center, new displays are available for viewing. The south display “In Their Own Time: technological creations of the past” is an eclectic collection of medical equipment developed during the actual practice of medicine.

The north display “Treating Thyself: home remedies of the 1800-1900’s” features books used for the treatment of everyday health problems. Rural populations generally used these treatises in lieu of finding a doctor.

Some of the recent donations are also on display. The displays may be viewed Monday-Friday from 1-5 p.m. through December.

Recent Donations

The Medical Heritage Center thanks those listed for their recent support. If you are interested in making a donation to the Center, please contact Barbara Van Brimmer, 614-292-4891.

Donald F. Bowers, DDS: Hayden Gillette archival collection, books and artifacts · John A. Burkhart, MD: bedpan, book “Grundriss zum Studium der Geburtshilfe”, in honor of his son Timothy, a medical student at OSU · Julie Conry: Medical Center prints · Ivan Gilbert, MD: Hypodermic syringe · Willis H. Hodges, M.D.: books · John E. Hohmann, MD: OSU nursing uniform of his mother, Corinne Cowell Hohmann · Tom Lewis, MD: books and instruments · Virginia Palmer: Syringe (wood and brass), bloodletting device · Drs. George and Ruth Paulson: books · Charles F. Sinsabaugh, MD: artifacts and books · Marilyn A. Strayer MD: Donated EKG machine from Ben Franklin Hospital · Ronald Stuckey, PhD: books, archival materials · Albert W. Van Fossen MD: AKK fraternity archive, books and artifacts from Dr. William S. Van Fossen

Monetary donations:

Kathi and Jack Faulstich · David Goodman · Charles H. Hamilton, MD · Dr. Edwin and Nancy Hamilton · Paul S. Metzger, MD · Drs. George and Ruth Paulson · Joann Sparks



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