

## A BALTIMORE PIONEER IN PROPRIETARY MEDICINE

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"Krüt, steine unde wort hânt an kreften grössen hort."<sup>1</sup> These words from Freidank's *Bescheidenheit*, a popular thirteenth century booklet of everyday remarks and proverbs, clearly indicate that the healing properties of plants and herbs were known at that time. Herbal lore is age old among the Germanic peoples, as is evidenced in this statement: "... Sehr früh treten bei den einzelnen Völkern auch bestimmte Pflanzen hervor, die in besonders hohem Masse für heilkräftig gelten, und daher als Panacee angesehen werden..."<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that the knowledge of the medicinal value of certain plants was transplanted to our country over a hundred years ago by August Vogeler, who, soon after his arrival in Baltimore in 1840, became a pioneer in the wholesale drug business and was recognized as the oldest merchant in this type of profession. The following records from the *Baltimore City Directory* show the location of the establishment and briefly summarize its phenomenal growth over a period of almost fifty years:

- 1855, Vogeler, August, druggist. 9 S. Liberty Street.
- 1865, August Vogeler and Company, druggists. 5, 7 S. Liberty Street.
- 1870, Vogeler Drug Company (August Vogeler and J. H. Winkelmann; C. A. Vogeler son of August, salesman). 5, 7 S. Liberty Street.
- 1880, August Vogeler and Company, wholesale drugs. 164-166 West Lombard Street.  
Vogeler, Son and Company, drugs. 4, 6, 8 S. Liberty.  
Vogeler, Meyer and Company, importers and manufacturers. 43 S. Sharp Street.

Upon the death of the son, Charles, in 1882,<sup>3</sup> the firm which bore his name

was taken over by his wife, and the C. A. Vogeler Company became the successor of the August Vogeler Company on West Lombard. Also listed for this year was: Vogeler, Winkelmann and Company, (August Vogeler, J.H. Winkelmann, J. Vogeler younger son), Wholesale druggists, 6 S. Liberty Street.

At this time the new C. A. Vogeler Company, under the guidance of Christian DeVries, manager and senior partner, launched an extensive advertising campaign for the sale of several patent medicines, among them St. Jacobs Oil and Hamburg Breast Tea. Due to advertising and sales, both at home and abroad, and through the addition of a printing department this popularity continued for at least twenty years. In 1890 the *Directory* listed these two firms:

- Charles A. Vogeler Company, proprietary medicine. 300, 302 West Lombard Street.
- Vogeler, Son and Company, wholesale druggists and perfumers. 8-10 S. Liberty Street.

By 1900, the former company added a printing establishment, and Jerome Vogeler had a perfumery at 602 West Pratt Street. After 1901, the C. A. Vogeler Company no longer appeared; the firm of Jerome was still noted in 1902, and in 1903 the only business mentioned was the Bonnert-Vogeler Company, featuring decorated glassware.

For more detailed information concerning these druggists, the author refers now to two books, commemorating the growth of Baltimore. The first, *Half Century's Progress of the City of Baltimore*, appeared in 1887, and the data provided therein is given here in part:

<sup>1</sup> Freidank, *Bescheidenheit*, III, 6, (Halle, 1902).

<sup>2</sup> O. Schröder, *Realexikon der Indogermanischen Altertumskunde*, 45, (Strassburg, 1901).

<sup>3</sup> Date of death, August 5, 1882, listed in *Baltimore Sun Almanac* for 1883.

The Charles A. Vogeler Company, Manufacturers of St. Jacob's Oil, Hamburg Drops, Hamburg Breast Tea, Bed Star Cough Cure, and other preparations, Nos. 300, 302, and 304 West Lombard Street . . . The present co-partners of the Company are Christian Devries and Minnie A. Vogeler. The offices and works of the firm . . . extend back 170 feet to a rear public alley. The buildings are of press brick, Ohio stone, with ornamental iron-work trimmings, being five stories in height. The establishment is admirably equipped with every facility and appliance, which skill, capital, and science can supply to make it complete in every respect. The manufacturing and printing departments are supplied with powerful steam engines and presses necessary for the conduct of the business on such an immense scale. Hundreds of hands are employed, and the works are in full operation night and day. The Charles A. Vogeler Company prints daily an immense quantity of pamphlets, calendars, almanacs, posters, and circulars in twelve different languages, which are forwarded to all parts of the world . . . He (Mr. DeVries) is always to be found in his handsome offices, constantly at work. The great advertising department occupies the entire second floor of the main building. Its methods, all original, its system the most accurate, it is conceded to be as near perfection as anything in its line can approach . . . Adjoining the neat reception-room is the general office of the advertising department. All the minutiae in the original methods of handling a vast and intricate correspondence are here perfectly systematized. The system of filing letters received and contracts opened and completed is of itself a system which the manager has made the most perfect in use. Large cabinet files are arranged by the States, in alphabetical order, and in the use of which there is and can be no confusion. A letter called for is found on the instant by simply turning to its alphabetical and geographical place, nor are the clerks delayed in procuring or returning these. A document withdrawn, or in the process of reply, when used, is placed in a basket, which is an attachment of each desk, and an assistant responsible for the files is also responsible for their careful replacement and distribution . . . In the filing process there are ample accommodations for one hundred thousand documents annually.<sup>4</sup>

In 1890 appeared *Illustrated Baltimore: The Monumental City*. This has a citation for the firm of Vogeler, Son and Company at Nos. 8, 10, and

12 South Liberty Street. The physical structure is mentioned only briefly; however, the date of August Vogeler's arrival in Baltimore (July 27, 1840) is given and also information concerning the international trade of the house.<sup>5</sup>

The two most widely advertised proprietary medicines were St. Jacob's Oil and Hamburg Tea; of the two, the former was hailed as "the wonderful preparation, so popular and firmly established in every part of the civilized globe as the greatest pain-curing and healing remedy known to mankind and recognized as the most remarkable discovery in medical science of modern times." In the year 1882 at the New Zealand International Exhibition it received "the magnificent first prize medal . . . together with the highest diploma for being, according to critical tests, the best pain-curing remedy."<sup>6</sup>

The Company established branches in various parts of the United States and Canada, also in Mexico, South America, Australia, and England.<sup>7</sup> Experienced salesmen visited practically every state in the Union, and advertising appeared in newspapers throughout the country.

Some of the ads simply showed a reproduction of the well-known label — "a venerable old man, arrayed in the costume of a monk, and suggesting at once notions of wisdom and benevolence"<sup>8</sup> — together with the long list of aches and ailments that a fifty-cent bottle would cure. Others were elaborate in voicing attestations as to the intrinsic worth of the medicine:

(I) Hazael, the champion walker of the world, said to a New York reporter, "St.

<sup>4</sup> *Half-Century's Progress of the City of Baltimore*, 138-139, (New York, 1887).

<sup>5</sup> *Illustrated Baltimore: The Monumental City*, 93, (New York, 1890).

<sup>6</sup> *Half-Century's Progress*, 138.

<sup>7</sup> In *Baltimore, Seine Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, (Baltimore, 1887) one of the sketches on Baltimore German business companies deals with the house of Charles A. Vogeler. After mentioning the fact that the company had branches in such far distant places as London, San Francisco, Melbourne etc. the text (p. 309) concludes: "Die Vogeler Comp. kann daher mit Karl V. behaupten, dass in ihren Domänen die Sonne nie untergeht."

<sup>8</sup> *Illustrated Baltimore, op. cit.*, 93.

Jacobs Oil is a wonderful medicine; I do not know what pedestrians would do without it, for it their best friend. A rub of St. Jacobs Oil after leaving the track makes a new man out of one and fits him again for the contest."<sup>9</sup> (2) "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick"; and never was a physician hailed with more genuine enthusiasm than the venerable monk, St. Jacob, reminding one strangely of the forest odors, lingering sunsets and the bright green meadows of far-away Germany. I say welcome, because he comes, bringing healing and consolation in his hand to snap the cords of human suffering and set the pain-racked body free. Like the ancient Druids, he quickly finds favor with all classes, and why? Because the remedy is simple, cheap and effective.<sup>10</sup>

For a period of several months there appeared, almost daily, in a leading western newspaper, *The Denver Republican*, a series of limericks, which, in themselves, are prize material for collectors and may, indeed, be considered as forerunners of modern radio commercial jingles. Unfortunately, space permits the quoting of only a few (the author has collected almost one hundred), which may serve as typical examples:

- (1) A pain-stricken farmer of Worcester,  
Who couldn't walk as he useter,  
Tried St. Jacobs Oil,  
And this man of toil  
Now kicks sky-high if he chooseter.<sup>11</sup>
- (2) A mother-in-law out at Pike's Peak,  
With sore throat could scarcely speak,  
St. Jacobs Oil cured her,  
And those who endured her  
Say she talked right along for a week.<sup>12</sup>
- (3) A lame old nag they called Dot,  
Was cured right up on the spot,  
And in every race  
He got the first place,  
St. Jacobs Oil helped him to trot.<sup>13</sup>
- (4) A gouty old man in Jamaica  
Was kicked by the horse of a baker,  
The pain he endured  
St. Jacobs Oil cured,  
And he cheated the undertaker.<sup>14</sup>

Among the various publications of the Vogeler Company, two were dedi-

cated almost exclusively to the two above-mentioned patent medicines—*Dr. August Koenigs Hamburger Familien Kalendar*, first printed in 1880, and *Vennor's Weather Almanac* which made its initial appearance in 1883.

In the former is portrayed, with fitting illustrations and verses, a love affair between a fair damsel and a gallant youth which ensues from a night quarrel between two cats on the roof:

Laute Liebe macht Verdruss  
Für manchen, der es hören muss,  
Es hat schon manchen böß gemacht,  
Wenn er dadurch vom Schlaf erwacht

Es pflanzt sich die Geschichte fort  
Auf selbe Art, nicht weit von dort.  
Durch jene, die vom Dache rennen  
Lernen sich zwei Menschen kennen.

O zarte Sehnsucht, süßes Hoffen,  
Gott Amors Pfeil hat sie getroffen.  
Doch Katzen und Mondscheinnacht,  
Die haben ihn krank gemacht.  
Doch zarte Liebe rettet ihn  
Mit Dr. Koenigs Medizin.  
Und unsern Lesern völlig glar,  
Führt er sie zum Traualtar.<sup>15</sup>

*Vennor's Weather Almanac* extolls St. Jacob's Oil on every page, and the reader finds the Great German Remedy marking sea lions on the West Coast; doctors voting a straight ticket for it; a British Admiral, in battle near the city of Alexandria, communicating with an American vessel to secure a supply of the medicine for the injured of his fleet; and a world traveler consulting the Sphinx as to a cure-all for his aches.<sup>16</sup> An enthusiastic admirer of St. Jacob's Oil submits a parody on *King Bruce and the Spider*, entitled *The Deacon and the Fly*:

Old Deacon Brown had sat him down, in  
gloom to meditate,

<sup>9</sup> *San Francisco Morning Call*, June 19, 1882.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, April 12, 1882.

<sup>11</sup> *The Denver Republican*, April 16, 1883.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, April 23, 1883.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, May 24, 1883.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, June 30, 1883.

<sup>15</sup> *Dr. Koenigs Hamburger Familien Kalendar*, 1880.

<sup>16</sup> *Vennor's Weather Almanac*, 1883.

With solemn "phiz " on Rheumatiz, and  
 his unhappy fate,  
 He'd tried enough of worthless stuff—it  
 did no good, and so  
 He'd set his face toward the place where  
 all good deacons go.  
 A little fly, just passing by, attacked the  
 Deacon's ear.  
 Though he "shoo'd" 'twas not subdued,  
 but still did persevere.  
 The Deacon blest the little pest and  
 slapped with all his might;  
 But all in vain, it came again, to carry  
 on the fight.  
 Soon he arose and blew his nose; then  
 joyfully did cry:  
 " In vain I've fought, but I've been taught  
 a lesson by this fly!  
 No more I'll struggle, nor will I ' shuffle  
 off this mortal coil,"  
 But like the fly, again I'll try—I'll use St.  
 Jacobs Oil."  
 He used the oil; with little toil he rubbed  
 his side and arm;  
 The ailment dread most quickly fled; the  
 Deacon runs his farm.<sup>17</sup>

It is only natural that the phenomenal advertising campaign of, and the popularity accredited to, these proprietary medicines aroused the author's curiosity in respect to the origin of their titles. Research revealed that senna leaves of the genus *Cassia*,<sup>18</sup> a bitter but valuable purgative herb, form the basis of Hamburg Brust Tea.<sup>19</sup>

The intriguing name, St. Jacob's Oil, bears evidence of long-existent folklore. The basic ingredient of the remedy was the herb commonly referred to as ragwort or groundsel of the genus *Senecio*, which has several subdivisions, among them *jacobaea*. This latter term, however, is not looked upon as the origin of the title of this medicine, rather it honors a distinguished Danish botanist, Johann Adolph Jacobaeus. *Senecio jacobaea* is a very common plant or herb in Europe; it has a rather sharp odor and a cluster of bright yellow flowers.

In German nomenclature it has a variety of names—*Jacobskraut*, *Jacobsstab*, *Johannisblume*, *Kreuzkraut*, etc. Concerning its medicinal value, "es war früher Volksmittel gegen Krampf und Blutungen,"<sup>20</sup> and "eine beliebte Heilpflanze, die sollte besonders gegen Geschwulst und Wunden heilkräftig sein."<sup>21</sup>

The naming of plants and flowers in honor of some particular saint became very popular after the rise of Christianity and persisted so long that even the great Linnaeus in his time (1707-1778) protested against it.<sup>22</sup> *Webster's New International Dictionary* lists some forty plants, herbs, and flowers bearing a saint's name, among them, Saint James' (German Jacobs) wort. The original reason for this homage to saints was the hope of gaining their favor, but later the only significance attached to such an appellation was the fact that these plants blossomed on or near the feast day of a saint.

Saint James' Day falls on July twenty-fifth and this is, in all probability, about the time of the blossoming period of the plant that bears his name, so called "from its being used for the diseases of horses, of which this great pilgrim saint was the patron, or owing to its blossoming on his festival."<sup>23</sup>

The wondrous cures attributed to oil are also age old. In *Deuteronomy XXXIII, 24* we read, " Let him dip his foot in oil," and in an old manuscript of the third century is found the legend that Adam, in the hour of a terrible illness, sent his son Seth to Paradise to fetch oil from the tree of life to heal his pain.<sup>24</sup> Also, there are references to various saints in the Roman Catholic Church from whose remains a healing oil flows; very well known among these is Saint Wal-

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Of interest to Marylanders: " The American or wild senna is the *Cassia marylandica*, a perennial abundant in the southern United States." See *Encyclopedia Americana*, XXIV, 564 (Chicago, 1940).

<sup>19</sup> R. Dorstewitz and G. Otterbach, *Drogenkunde*, 37, (Sammlung Göschen 413, Leipzig, 1908).

<sup>20</sup> Willard N. Clute, *The Common Names of Plants*, 74, (Indianapolis, 1942).

<sup>21</sup> *Der Grosse Brockhaus*, XVII, 290, (Leipzig, 1934).

<sup>22</sup> Hermann Reiling, *Unsere Pflanzen in Sage, Dichtung und Geschichte*, III, 61, (Gotha, 1904).

<sup>23</sup> W. S. Thistleton-Dyer, *Folklore of Plants*, 260, (London, 1889).

<sup>24</sup> Georg Rietschel, *Weihnachten in Kirche, Kunst und Volksleben*, 136, (Leipzig, 1902).

burga, niece of the great missionary Boniface.<sup>25</sup>

So much for legend and folklore. For a sounder basis of the medicinal value of the oil in plants, one need only glance through *Drogenkunde*,<sup>26</sup> which gives over forty of these, all indigenous to Europe. Since *Johannisblume*, *Jacobskraut*, and *Hexenkraut* are listed in *Brockhaus* as synonymous terms for the species *Senecio jacobaea*, it is quite possible that the word "oil" in St. Jacob's Oil arose from a confusion with the oil of *Johanniskraut* and *Hexenkraut*, described in the above mentioned book as follows, "der wässerige Ausguss ist seit alters bewährt gegen Blutungen. Häufiger jedoch wird ein öliger Ausguss daraus bereitet-Johannisöl . . . das wirkt heilende Wirkung aus, besonders bei alten Beinschäden."<sup>27</sup> The *Johanniskraut*, however, belongs to the genus *Hypericum*.

Returning now to Baltimore's pioneer druggist in proprietary medicine, the author was able to discover that August Vogeler was a member of the German Society of Maryland, served as its manager in 1853, and made a

financial contribution in 1877.<sup>28</sup> Since all the research for this article was obtained exclusively from newspapers, almanacs, directories, and published reports, it has been impossible to obtain additional information about the personality and life of August Vogeler. However, all respect is due him and his associates for their pioneering work in advertising in an era without radios, television, and other convenient methods of communication, and as for his interest in proprietary medicines, let us look to the Old Testament: "The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth and he that is wise will not abhor them."<sup>28</sup>

#### SOURCE MATERIAL

The directories, almanacs, calendars, booklets, reports, etc. in the Maryland Room of the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore were most valuable. Except for occasional advertising, newspapers provided very little information about the Vogeler Drug Company.

The author's interest in this company was aroused by the series of limericks in *The Denver Republican*; research was carried on in Baltimore and Washington, D. C. during a leave of absence in 1951-1952.

<sup>25</sup> Related to the author by Lady Abbess Augustina, O. S. B., Convent of St. Walburga, Eichstätt, Bavaria.

<sup>26</sup> Dorstewitz and Otterbach, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Louis P. Henninghausen, *History of the German Society of Maryland*, 168, 178, (Baltimore, 1909).

<sup>29</sup> *Apocrypha; Ecclesiasticus*, XXXVIII, 4, 5.