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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Shaker Anodyne: Teetotalers' Valerian Elixir



A religious group founded in England in the 1740s, the Shakers were organized in the United States by the 1780s and lived in communes from upstate New York and New England to urban Philadelphia and the Midwest. A uniquely celibate sect of Christian teetotalers, their ecstatic singing and dancing at worship had earned them the sobriquet of “Shaking Quakers,” or Shakers. Up through the 1890s, their North Enfield (*bottom*, “Nth Enfield / N.H.”) community in New Hampshire compounded “Brown’s Pure Extract of English Valerian,” better known as “Shaker Anodyne” (*top*). The root of the English, not American, Valerian plant contained a soporific and analgesic volatile oil. Likely contributing to Shaker Anodyne’s popularity was the fact that the root was mixed into a strongly alcoholic elixir spiked with opium and an herb widely regarded as Satanic, containing hyoscyne and atropine: henbane. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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