

Maria Stein museum showcases memories of past natural health remedies

Sisters of Precious Blood treated people with dips in pools, teas and



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These tea sets are part of the large display from the Kneipp Springs Health Sanitarium on Sylvan Lake, Ind. At the right are rubber stamps to mark teas and loose teas bottled above the stamps. The display is at Heritage Museum in Maria Stein Center.

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MARIA STEIN — For thousands of years, tea has been served for pleasure, treatment, protection and rebellion. At one time in Great Britain tea was thought to be harmful to health and even lead to moral decay.

That changed in more ways than one as tea took a health spotlight especially for one local group of nuns. From 1901-1976, Kneipp Springs Health Sanitarium on Sylvan Lake, Ind., was owned and operated by the Sisters of the Precious Blood. They acquired the grounds for \$25,000.

Maria Stein Center's Heritage Museum maintains a large display of items and information from what would now be termed a health spa.

"It was a beautiful place, 80 acres, with a working farm. Many of the sisters from here served there. It was based on hydrotherapy treatments discovered in Germany by Fr. Sebastian Kneipp and later brought to this country by (other priests). The treatment was, of course, the water as well as herbal teas and exercises. Then antibiotics came along," Sister Regina Albers told the newspaper. "But isn't it interesting how we're all getting back to the natural approach to health."

But, before the antibiotics, Kneipp Springs was a thriving place serving thousands of people every year. Nutrition played a large part of the natural, holistic approach and the fact that the majority of food and tea herbs were raised on the farm.

Fort Wayne, Ind., native Tom McKiernan, now a retired vice principal of Seton Catholic High School

in Cincinnati, was a teen working on the Kneipp Springs farm in the 1950s. When he and his family visited the Relic Chapel at Maria Stein and the Heritage Museum a few years ago, he was pleasantly surprised to see the Kneipp display.

Sister Regina asked McKiernan if he would write down his memories. He did and his memory book provides a well-written personal view of how things were there more than 50 years ago.

"It was wonderful working there. My family had a summer home on Sylvan Lake and the day after school was out we'd head there for the summer, and these were great summers for a city boy," McKiernan told the newspaper via telephone Thursday afternoon.

He described the sanitarium, which was about 30 miles north of Fort Wayne, as a "very early homeopathic treatment spa for whatever ailed you. The regimen was based on teas, herbs and water treatments ..for nerves, arthritis, rheumatism and digestive distress."

He recounted his days working at what he now calls an early version of health spa." There was the hydrotherapy, of course. I remember one treatment where you would stand and you were sprayed with a high pressure hose with alternating cold and hot water," he said.

The young McKiernan recalled "taking the waters" himself. He would stand in the men's wading pool of "ice cold spring water" then walk through the "finely

manicured grass.”

However, he was involved with the teas only as providing muscle to get the two acres of herbs in for processing. "We helpers did most of the work around the farm and grounds, but only certain sisters were permitted to cut the teas and herbs. After we carried the leaves to the third floor attic, a sister would put each in a specific pile or box for drying," McKiernan said.

Sister Margaret Schlachter, the first superioress of the sanitarium, was well acquainted with the Kneipp system having traveled to Germany in 1895 to take the treatments and to study what became known as Kneipping.

"We had only one mule on the farm and he was used exclusively in the herb gardens because mules have smaller hooves than horses," McKiernan said.

Many people came to Kneipp Springs for healing and to relax. McKiernan reiterated several times how beautiful was the building and the landscaping.

"The main building was a large, pretty, red brick structure. It had a wraparound sun porch and the guests would sit there most of the day, reading, talking, sipping tea and falling asleep in large padded rocking chairs," he wrote in his memory book.



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Women take the waters at Kneipp Springs Health Sanitarium on Sylvan Lake, Ind. in this photos from the collection at Heritage Museum at Maria Stein Center. There were two wading pools, one form and one for women. The women's pool was secluded behind a large stand of trees for modesty purposes, although only ankles were exposed.