

How the Death of Two Utica Infants Helped Trigger the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906

By Jon Landers

On June 30, 1906 President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. The bill which took effect on January 1, 1907 was an important piece of legislation and although it was not perfect, it was a revolutionary landmark in the history of consumer protection in America. Unfortunately, the case history of the accidental death of **two Utica, New York twin infants** had been one of the examples cited in a series of articles published by the *Ladies Home Journal* on the dangers of patent medicine use. In a 1906 article the names of Adam and Eve Gnad of 25 Kossuth Avenue appeared at the top of a list of babies who had recently died after being given a patent medicine. The list was titled, "Thirteen Little Victims of Man's Greed." The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 was a result of the public outrage that was started by articles written by a journalist named Mark Sullivan for the *Ladies Home Journal* and later continued by free-lance journalist Samuel Hopkins Adams for *Collier's*, *The National Weekly* magazine. Adam's started the articles in 1905 under the cover title, "*The Great American Fraud.*" Following the campaign spearheaded by the Ladies Home Journal, his articles stirred up even more attention about quack medicines. The stories captured the attention of the American people and alerted them to the dangers associated with patent medicines.

The Utica connection started with a newspaper article that appeared in the *Utica Herald Dispatch* on January 26, 1906. In bold print, the headlines read, "TWIN BABIES DIED SUDDENLY, Coroner Dodd Investigating the Case - Were Irregularities - Doctor Preston Called to Attend Five Weeks' Old Children Who Had Been Given a Soothing Syrup - The Investigation." The commentary that followed was the tragic story of how Adam and Even Gnad died after being given a patent medicine and mentioned certain details about the parents that made the doctor and coroner a little suspicious about the circumstances surrounding the event.

An urgent call had been made to Doctor Preston to come to a house at 25 Kossuth Avenue, the home of Adam and Eve Gnad. It seems that Stanislaus Gnad, the father of Adam and Eve had administered a dose of a patent medicine named Kopp's Baby Friend to the infants and the next day they became seriously ill. Doctor Preston arrived just before they died and he decided to summon Coroner Dodd.

Coroner Dodd used an interpreter to take a deposition from Mr. Gnad. The parents of the babies lived in the same house although they were not married. The Polish couple had lived in the same boarding house in Cohoes, NY but, decided to come to Utica to work in the mills in East Utica. The mother of the children Caroline Stroncsek was married but, her husband was away in Austria. Mr Gnad claimed his son became ill and because he didn't have money for a doctor, he bought some medicine at a store on the corner of Nichols and Bleeker Streets. Gnad gave Adam four drops of the medicine which was the prescribed dosage on the label and only two drops to Eve. The infants died the next day. Coroner Dodd noticed that a good amount of the medicine was gone from the bottle and the father stated that it had tipped over causing some of the contents to be spilled.

Dodd tried to subpoena the mother of the babies but could not find her. It was stated she was out making arrangements for the burial of the children. The stomachs of the babies were removed and the contents were to be analyzed along with the medicine. Although the dosage was four drops, a rumor had circulated that the babies were given ten drops.

About one month later, the February 23, 1906 issue of the *Utica Herald Dispatch* carried a follow-up story of Coroner Dodd's decision on the death of Adam and Eve Gnad. Dodd stated that he did an autopsy on the bodies of the infants and analyzed the contents of their stomachs along with the medicine known as Kopp's Baby Friend. It revealed the babies had died from an overdose of Kopp's Baby Friend which contained morphine. His decision: "I find and decide that the said Adam and Eve Gnad,

otherwise called Zarlok, died from an overdose of “Kopp’s Baby Friend,” which was administered by their father, but without criminal intent.”

After reading of the tragic deaths of Adam and Eve Gnad, the people of Utica, NY clearly understood why the editor of the *Ladies Home Journal* and Samuel Hopkins Adams journalist for *Collier’s* had written and passionately campaigned against the evils of patent medicines.

The manufacturing and sale of Patent Medicines in the second half of the 19th century escalated into a multi-million dollar industry in America. One reason for the successful sales of these nostrums was the huge advertising campaigns bankrolled by the people and companies making the medicines. Their ads often appeared in local newspapers almost on a daily basis and made outrageous claims about their products. Patent medicine makers usually claimed their elixirs would cure almost anything but whose ingredients were a trade secret. Unknown to the consumer, many quack medicines contained large doses of alcohol and some harmful narcotics such as cocaine, heroin, morphine and opium. These were unscrupulous people who would do anything to make a buck

There were no laws in the U.S. prior to 1907 that prohibited any person from mixing any kind of ingredients, bottling it, labeling it and claiming that the concoction would cure anything. Sadly, most newspapers were reluctant to print anything negative about patent medicines because advertisements of the elixirs were a large part of their advertising revenue.

Evidence began to build against the dangerous medicines and the campaign to rein them in continued until strong public sentiment had been created against the whole business of patent medicines. Some conscientious newspapers stopped advertising patent medicines and several States passed legislation on the subject.

Finally, the public had been awakened to “The Great American Fraud” thanks to several people who were dedicated to the cause. Congress and the President could no longer ignore the reality of the patent medicines that were harming, addicting and often killing the men, women and children of our country. When the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 went into effect on January 1, 1907, it ended the “Patent Medicine Era” which was a shameful time in American History; but not before two small innocent victims from Utica, NY died at the tender age of one month and one day.

Editor’s note: For years I searched for the actual newspaper articles that detailed the deaths of Adam and Eve Gnad, but was not successful by cranking microfilm at the Utica Public Library. It took only a few seconds to find the articles on fultonhistory.com. Like most experienced bottle collectors I have read material on the patent medicine era and the history of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, however; it was much more shocking to read a story that took place in the city where I grew up; even if the event happened over a century ago. This story is tragic to read but unfortunately is a part of our history. The significance of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 as far as bottle collectors are concerned is that after January 1, 1907 almost all patent medicine makers ceased to use the word “CURE” on their bottles and labels because the new law required that patent medicine makers be able to prove their claim if the term, “cure” was used.



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TWIN BABIES DIED SUDDENLY

CORONER DODD INVESTIGATING
THE CASE.

WERE IRREGULARITIES

Doctor Preston Called to Attend Five Weeks' Old Children Who Had Been Given a Soothing Syrup—The Investigation.

Coroner Dodd was called late yesterday afternoon in the case of twin children, 5 weeks of age, who were supposed to be suffering from an overdose of a soothing potion for children which is known as "Kopp's Baby Friend." The children were living in the same house with their parents, who were unmarried, at 25 Kossuth avenue. One of the twins, Adam, died at 1:30 p. m. and the other at 3 p. m. The coroner made a brief preliminary examination last evening and found that the couple had formerly lived in Cohoes and only came here recently to work in the East Utica mills.

This morning through John P. Kowalsky, as interpreter, the coroner took the deposition of Stanislaus Gnad, who admitted that he was the father of the twins. He said he was unmarried, but had lived in the same boarding house in Cohoes with Caroline Stojanek, who is a married woman and the mother of the children. Last Sunday the boy was ill, but on Monday seemed better. The witness gave the boy four drops of "Kopp's Baby Friend," on Wednesday, and gave the girl two drops at the same time. That was all he gave them and he knew of no one else giving them any. He bought the medicine at the corner of Nichols and Bleecker street three weeks ago. Quite a bit of the contents of the bottle were missing, which fact he attributed to the overturning of the bottle. He said the mother seemed to love the babies and caressed and nursed them. When the babies were taken sick he said he did not employ a physician because he had no money and he did not know about applying for relief to the Charity Clerk.

Doctor Preston was called just before the death of the children and notified the coroner.

Coroner Dodd tried this morning to subpoena the mother of the babies, but could not find her, it being stated that she was out arranging for the burial of the children. Her husband is in Austria.

The stomachs have been removed from the bodies of the children and will be analyzed under the direction of the coroner. The medicine will also be analyzed. The prescribed dose on the bottle is four drops, and there is a rumor that the children were given ten drops.

PHOTO COPIES OF TWO
UTICA, NY
NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

PATENT MEDICINE CAUSED DEATH

DECISION OF CORONER DODD IN
THE CASE OF TWIN BABIES.

WHO TOOK SOOTHING POTION

Coroner Finds That Death Was Caused
by One Dose of "Kopp's Baby
Friend," Which Was Administered
by Father Without Criminal Intent.

Coroner Dodd has rendered a decision in the case of the twin Polish infants, Adam and Eve Gnad. It follows:

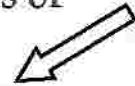
"That the said Adam and Eve Gnad, otherwise known as Zarlok, died on the 25th day of January, 1906. The boy died at about 2:30 p. m., and the girl died at 7 p. m., at No. 25 Kossuth avenue, in the city of Utica, of morphine poisoning. The evidence shows that Stanislaus Gnad, the father of the infants, had administered to them a dose of a mixture which is known as "Kopp's Baby Friend" on the night of January 24, 1906, and that the infants, whose age was one month and one day, died on the following day.

"Now, after investigating the circumstances attending such deaths, and obtaining the report of Dr. James G. Hunt and H. F. Preston, who made an autopsy on the bodies of the deceased infants, and also the report of Doctors Nelson and Smith, chemists, who made an examination of the stomachs of the dead infants, and the contents thereof, and also an examination of a portion of the mixture above mentioned showing that it contained morphine, I find and decide that the said Adam and Eve Gnad, otherwise called Zarlok, died from an overdose of 'Kopp's Baby Friend,' which was administered by their father, but without criminal intent."

UTICA HERALD DISPATCH
Friday Evening, January 26, 1906

UTICA HERALD DISPATCH
Friday Evening, February 23, 1906

Thirteen Little Victims of Man's Greed



ON THE RIGHT

Excerpt from a 1906 article
castigating patent medicines
that appeared in the
Ladies Home Journal

FRED ROGERS 2 years, 8 months old Died in April, 1904 Buffalo, New York	ADAM and EVE GNAD 1 month old Died in January, 1906 Utica, New York
BABY SWAN 3 weeks old Died in April, 1904 Cleveland, Ohio	IRMA VARGO 2 months old Died in March, 1906 Cleveland, Ohio
THELMA DORIS FERRIS 6 months old Died in August, 1905 Seattle, Washington	JOSEPH LEHDTEN 6 weeks old Died in June, 1906 Cleveland, Ohio
JOHN D. GORDARDI year, 9 months old Died in September, 1905 Morocco, Indiana	HELENSCHAFER 8 months old Died in August, 1906 Cleveland, Ohio
GÖRÖCK WILLIAM LANCASTER 3 months old Died in December, 1905 Baltimore, Maryland	BABY ZEARFUS ARVID H. JOHNSON 6 months old Died in September, 1906 Duluth, Minnesota
BABY DUNCAN 2 weeks old Died in December, 1905 Victoria, Canada	

In every case the medicines
taken were believed to be "perfectly harmless." Why
not? The labels said as much, and the parents, in their
haste to relieve their babies from pain, did what they
supposed was exactly right. But what a price they
paid for accepting without question the statements on
the labels!