

Curator's Choice

Doctor J. A. Brown: Tuberculosis Remedy

By: Caroline Bland and Ashley Endrusick,
students of Huntingtown High School's
Historical Investigations Class

Tuberculosis, also known as consumption, was an infectious and often lethal disease in the 1800s. Tuberculosis was the cause of more deaths in industrialized countries than any other disease during the 19th and early 20th centuries. People in the 1800s that didn't have tuberculosis were scared of getting it. Doctors and scientists wanted to continue to learn about the disease to find a cure.

For people with tuberculosis, some symptoms include coughing, weight loss, fevers, night sweats, coughing up blood, chest pain and fatigue. Until the development of antibiotics in the 1940s, patients with tuberculosis just had to live with the symptoms and pray that the available tuberculosis remedies would help to give relief.

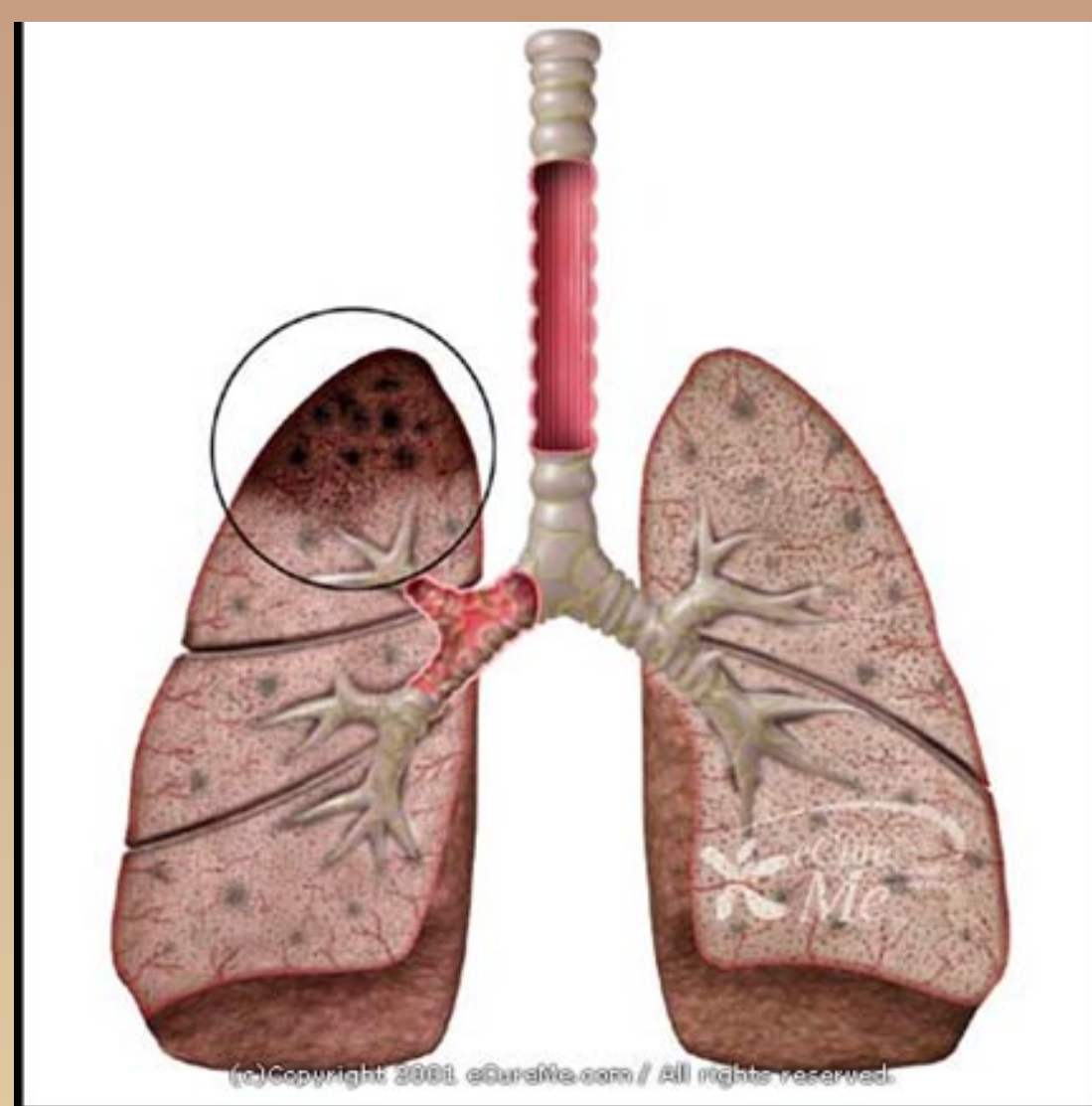


Close-up of the name Dr. J. A. Brown stamped onto another bottle similar to the mended bottle found in privy.

Doctor J. A. Brown was a root beer manufacturer in Baltimore, Maryland before he moved his operations to New York. Like many other pharmacists in the 19th century he tried to sell his version of root beer as medicine. He would promote his remedy to individuals with tuberculosis and try to sell them his product. The remedy provided some relief for tuberculosis; however, it was not a cure.

People with tuberculosis usually would get their remedy from the local pharmacies. The pharmacies were nothing like they are today. There were not sections that had different and specific medication. The pharmacies back then had bottles of medicine, remedies and other things that doctors thought would cure or help with diseases. The "root beer remedy" was probably one of the many bottles that was in the mix with all of the medicine for other diseases in the pharmacies. The pharmacies back then also would mix their remedies in the pharmacy instead of having them premade and waiting for pick up. This process was called compounding.

The name on the bottle, "J. A. Brown", is the person who created and manufactured this remedy for tuberculosis. We don't know how the patient obtained this bottle of tuberculosis remedy. We can only say that it was discarded in a backyard privy where it was later discovered by archaeologists.



On the left is a tubercular lung and on the right is a normal lung.



Dr. J. A. Brown bottle found in privy during an archaeological investigation in Baltimore, mended by Huntingtown High School's students in Historical Investigations Class.

References Used

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10515 Mackall Road
St. Leonard, Maryland 20685
410-586-8501 www.jefpat.org

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