

# Hunt's Remedy

**Fear of ILLNESS and DEATH  
were used to promote this  
nineteenth century nostrum**

By Cecil Munsey

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## Origins

To sell patent medicines, according to one turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century writer, "You may wheedle him, cajole him, intoxicate him with promises, tickle his fancy or *frighten him out of his boots*." The latter is the approach used to promote HUNT'S REMEDY, the "*Great Kidney Medicine that cures dropsy and all diseases of the kidney, bladder and urinary organs – never known to fail.*"

According to historian Henry W. Holcombe, the old man represented in **Figure 1** is the one who put *Hunt's Remedy* before the public. "If he were alive today he would look upon his labors with pride and thankfulness. The consciousness of having done good to a vast number of suffering fellow beings would be a reward for this philanthropic man."



**Fig. 1**

According to local legend there was a very important ingredient in the *Remedy*, the name of which has not been passed down in history. The unnamed ingredient was a root dug from the ground. It flourished in old pastures and along the roadside in portions of the U.S. It was well known to the early Dutch settlers of the Island of Manhattan. Prior to 1700, Dutchmen drank a mixture of the root, and

other vegetable substances, in their Schnapps. The old Brevoort estate, now the vicinity of Broadway and Eleventh Street in New York City, was noted for growing the root. What is now the heart of the city was then open fields.

Dr. David Hosack was a noted physician in New York City who had an extensive practice during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and until his retirement in 1835. Local historians recorded that Hosack and the influential Brevoort family encouraged the use of the root-based medicine as it cured many cases of liver, kidney and bladder troubles. Dr. Hosack gave his recipe to a number of his pupils. One of the pupils, it is said, saved the life of a Mr. Hunt, a New York City resident, who was afflicted with Bright's disease (kidney malfunction) and Dropsy (excess water in body tissue). He was cured, after taking the medicine for about a year. His "bloated flesh," according to the locals, was reduced, and his vigor restored.

In 1860 a cured and healthy Mr. Hunt obtained a copy of Hosack's hand-me-down recipe for the medicine that cured him and began to manufacture it as "Hunt's Remedy." He sold it widely and regular

and homeopathic physicians used the medicine from its introduction. Supposedly it had larger sales in New England than any other proprietary medicine.

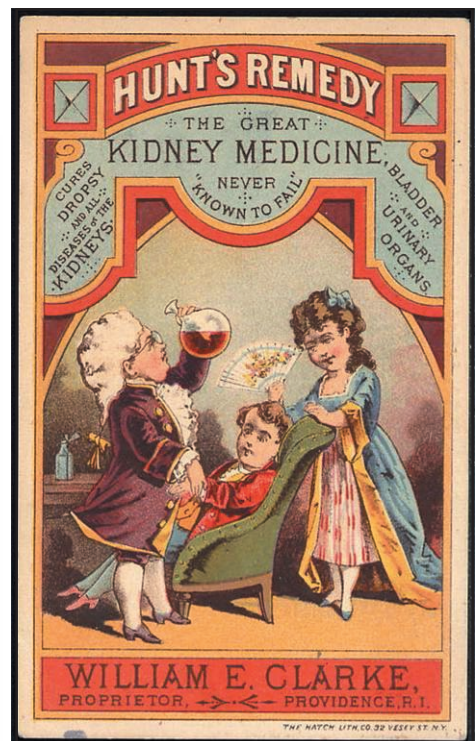
The Revenue Act of 1862 required that a revenue stamp be affixed to each bottle manufactured. Mr. Hunt did not take advantage of the new law that allowed for the creation and use of "private die" revenue stamps – he utilized standard generic government-issue revenue stamps.

After Mr. Hunt's death, his widow continued to manufacture (**Figures 2-3**) the *Remedy*. The late Dr. John C. Peters of New York City assisted Mrs. Hunt in improving the recipe; and finally in 1872, she sold the revised recipe and the right to make the medicine.

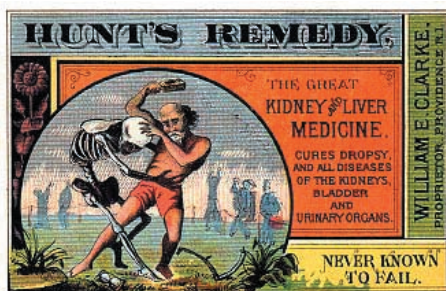
## A New Owner

On May 9, 1872, Hunt's Remedy ("The Great Kidney Medicine") was purchased by William E. Clarke, an apothecary of Providence, Rhode Island (**Figure 4**).

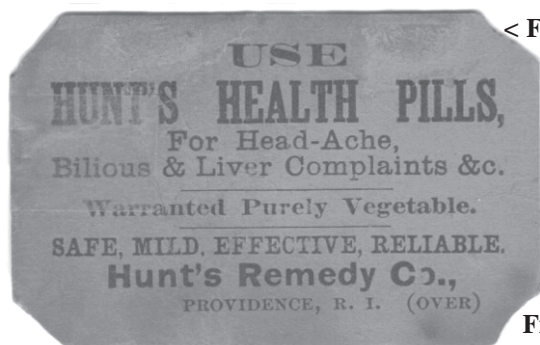
**Figure 11**



**Figure 15**



**Figure 7: Tradecard sold for \$525 in 2000.**



&lt; Fig. 2



Fig. 3 &gt;

Being an astute businessman, few months later, he registered the name “HUNT’S REMEDY” as a trademark with the Library of Congress at Washington, D.C.

William E. Clarke, who’d been a practicing pharmacist in Providence since about 1860, went off to the Civil War in 1862. In 1863 he mustered out and returned to Providence where he married Emma Mason and went back into the pharmacy business.

In 1864, he was operating an apothecary shop located at 233 South Main Street in Providence. Within three years he had moved to 28 Market Square selling medicines, perfumery and the usual toiletries of the time.

A short time later he opened a second shop located at the corner of Broad and Mathewson Streets.

Mr. Clarke wasted no time in beginning the manufacture and promotion of Hunt’s Remedy. For example, beginning on June 3, 1873 there was in nearly every issue of *The Opera Glass*, a newspaper in Providence, a small advertisement such as this:

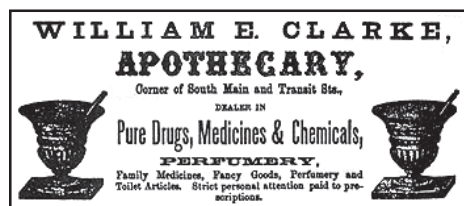


Figure 4



Figure 5

“Hunt’s Remedy – The Great KIDNEY MEDICINE; A Positive Remedy for Dropsy and all diseases; Of the KIDNEYS, BLADDER and urinary organs. For Sale by all druggists.”

Sales evidently were increasing because the next year advertisements were more than twice as large.

Within a year or so Mr. Clarke introduced *Hunt’s Health Pills and Liver Cure*, familiarly known as “Little Gems” (Figure 5). They claimed to cure “*Sick Headache, Nervous Headache, Bilious Disorders, Jaundice, Malaria, Costiveness, Dyspepsia, Indigestion, Dizziness, Drowsiness, and All Liver Trouble.*”

In 1872, Clarke closed the Broad Street shop, but kept the Market Square store operating for seven or eight more years. That was the same year in which he took over Hunt’s (kidney) Remedy that was located at 310 South Main Street in Providence.

Clarke ran this company from 1872 until 1885, all the while manufacturing his own CLARKE’S INFALLIBLE EYE WASH, CLARKE’S TOOTHACHE DROPS, and CLARKE’S FLORENTINE DENTRIFICE as well as HUNT’S REMEDY.

Few bottles used for Hunt’s Remedy remain from that early period and those that do are not found in large numbers and consequently are of definite interest to collectors. In 1938, historian Henry W. Holcombe described the bottle featured in Figure 6 as follows:

The blue-glass [aqua] bottle measured 65 by 35 by 175 mm. tall. In raised letters [embossing] on the front was ‘HUNT’S REMEDY’ and on the back ‘William E. Clarke, – Providence, R. I.’ in two lines of capitals. The label was die cut, rounded at the top, printed in black, and measured 43 by 117 mm. The direction sheet folded around the bottle. The outside wrapper, printed in black and red, in four panels, was 258

by 230 mm. over all. The facsimile signature of ‘W. E. Clarke’ appeared on the back panel. The top and bottom were sealed with red wax, while the 6¢ private die stamp was affixed to the top of the wrapper.

In 1872 when Clarke purchased the rights to Hunt’s Remedy, one of the assets Mrs. Hunt turned over to Mr. Clarke was the rights to the unregistered trademark that Mr. Hunt had developed to represent his Hunt’s Remedy (Figure 7). [An example of that early trademark, imprinted on a trade card sold at auction in 2000 for \$525, a large amount of money for a trade card.] Hunt’s trademark offered the image of man fighting off a skeleton with the aid of a bottle being used as a club. Soon after Mr. Clark took ownership of Hunt’s Remedy in 1872, he redesigned the old trademark. He retained the same theme – an image of a man fighting off a skeleton with the aid of a bottle used as a club (Figures 8-9).

In the late 1880s another soon-to-be-famous patent medicine vendor copied, without apology, Hunt’s Remedy’s advertising logo. William Radam’s Microbe Killer featured the copied theme of a man battling a skeleton with a spiked club (Figure 10) in his extensive advertising and on his now-famous bottle (Figure 11).

Unlike the late Mr. Hunt, Mr. Clarke came to realize the advertising- and image-advantage of having a private die revenue stamp for his Hunt’s Remedy. In late 1878 Mr. Clarke directed the National Bank Note Company of New York (under contract from the U. S. Government) to engrave dies for both sizes of his Hunt’s Remedy. The proof of the 6¢ black revenue stamp to be affixed to the large \$1.75 bottle (Figure 12) was approved in January 1879. The proof of the 3¢ blue stamp for the smaller 75¢ bottle (Figure 13) was approved in April 1880.

While printing technology of the time was able to print in many colors, the government only offered private die revenue stamps in one color. That made Clarke’s trade cards for Hunt’s Remedy much more colorful than its single-color revenue stamps. Consequently Hunt’s Remedy print advertising, in color, is quite expensive

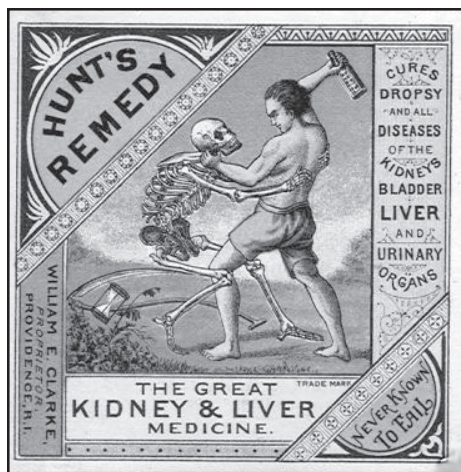


Figure 8: Redesigned 1872 tradecard



Figure 9

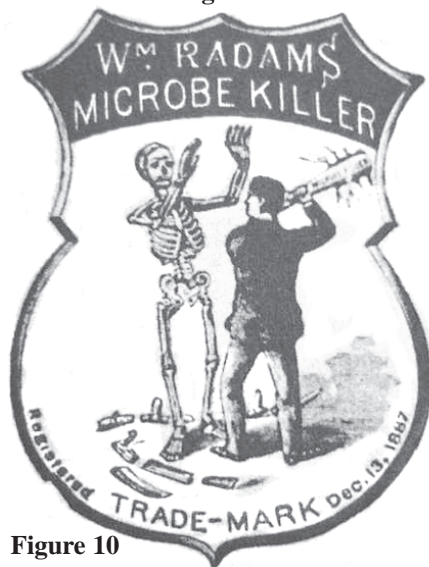


Figure 10



Fig. 12: 1880 private die revenue stamp

today in the collector marketplace. A rare specimen of the earliest Hunt's Remedy trade card, circa 1860 (Figure 7), as briefly mentioned before sold at auction for over \$500 in 2000. Recently more than \$300 was paid for an example of the 1872 redesigned trade card (Figure 8). Another famous and popular, but not so expensive or hard-to-get trade card used to promote Hunt's Remedy (Figure 14), featured a pretty young girl dressed in a sailor suit. Another popular trade card for Hunt's remedy is the one shown as Figure 15.

#### Another New Owner

In 1882, Clarke was joined by another registered pharmacist, Edward R. Dawley, who, after working for Clarke for several years, became the company's secretary in 1884. A year later Dawley became proprietor of the company and moved the business to 112 South Water Street. Clarke completely sold out to Dawley in 1886, and became an agent for the Eagle Machine Company, 288 Dyer Avenue, but after only a year quit to work at the Quaker Medicine Company, 6 South Water Street. Clarke remained there until 1891 when he left to become the City Clerk in Providence.

In 1873, Edward R. Dawley was also listed as a partner in "Mason, Dawley, Wheaton & Co." in Providence. The firm was famous for producing "Alpine Hair Balm" (Figure 16) that was invented in 1860 by partner Charles A. P. Mason, an apothecary in Providence.

Dawley continued to run the Hunt's Remedy Co., relocating again in 1894 to 451 South Main Street. Hunt's Remedy was manufactured and marketed in redesigned bottles (Figure 17) and (Figures 18-19) for several years thereafter and then the nostrum seems to have dropped out of sight altogether.

By 1903 Edward R. Dawley had quit the business and became a "city collector" until his death in 1906.

#### Finale

A century later, in 1998, a commemorative 32¢ postage stamp (Figure 20) honoring the 1906 Pure Food



Fig. 17



Figure 13



Figure 14



Fig. 16: Alpine Hair Balm



Fig. 18 (L): Hunt's Remedy Co., dime sample  
Fig. 19 (R): Hunt's Remedy sample box.



Figure 20: In 1998, a commemorative 32¢ postage stamp honoring the 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act was issued.

and Drugs Act was issued. The stamp was part of the U. S. Postal Service's "Celebrate the Century" program honoring the most memorable and significant people, places, events and trends of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The modified image is from a proprietary revenue tax stamp and trade card (Figure 8) for the nostrum, Hunt's Remedy. According to post office literature, "...the stamp purports to show the product's effectiveness through the allegorical vision of Death being slain by a bottle of Hunt's Remedy."

As most collectors of bottles understand, Hunt's Remedy was only one of thousands of such products flooding the U.S. market at the time the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act was passed. It was without a doubt, however, one of the most colorfully advertised patent medicines of its time.

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