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## **HISTORY CORNER**

### **Intervention Keeley Style**

William L. White\*

The most famous and controversial treatment for addiction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Dr. Leslie Keeley's Bichloride of Gold Cure. Dr. Keeley franchised his cure procedures through more than 120 Keeley Institutes scattered across North American and Europe. These Institutes became the preferred drying out institutions for the rich and famous in the 1890s. But the problem then (as today) was this: Even where there are financial resources to pay for such treatment, how can the afflicted person be convinced to enter such a treatment institution?

There were four general resolutions of this dilemma: self-motivation resulting from the accumulated pain of addiction, company pressure upon an alcohol/drug-impaired employee, pressure from families and legal commitment of the inebriate (for as long as four years). Family pressure to enter treatment sometimes involved processes similar to what today would be called "intervention," but these processes did not always go as planned, as is revealed in the following account from Alfred Calhoun's 1892 book, *Is It a Modern Miracle? A Careful Investigation of the Keeley Gold Cure for Drunkenness and the Opium Habit*.

As this story unfolds, a family at its wit's end responds to the chronic drunkenness of one of its members by hosting a meeting of all concerned. The upshot of this meeting is that the young man in question, who we shall call Robert, was to be sent to the Keeley Institute headquarters in Dwight, Illinois, to undergo the Keeley Cure. Seriously doubting Robert's ability to make this trip on his own, the family enlisted the aid of his uncle to accompany him during the travel to Dwight.

On the following day, Robert and his uncle set off for the long trip to Dwight. Robert pleaded with his uncle to stop periodically for alcoholic refreshment on the grounds that this was the only way to stave off the onset of “DTs.” The uncle agreed to such stops, willing to humor his young nephew in any manner that would keep them moving toward Dwight. But the additional catch was that Robert refused to drink such medicinal libation unless his uncle would join him. Although quite an abstemious person, the uncle agreed to imbibe with his nephew as long as they could keep proceeding to Dwight.

So at each stop, which seem to increase in frequency as the pair neared Dwight, both Robert and his uncle downed various alcoholic concoctions. By the time the now well-oiled pair reached Dwight, both were in a state of considerable intoxication, although they looked quite different. Robert, whose alcohol tolerance was massive, didn’t look too worse for the wear. His uncle, however, whose alcohol tolerance was virtually non-existent, was nearly unconscious by the time they entered the doors of the Keeley Institute.

Upon their arrival, Robert admitted his uncle to the Keeley Institute and absconded with his uncle’s prized car. It took several days to get the uncle sobered up and the nephew located, returned to Dwight, and admitted to treatment. Getting someone in treatment then, as now, was not always easy. But some of the 19<sup>th</sup> century treatment centers did find ways to keep people in treatment once they were finally admitted: At admission, they took all of their clothes and all of their money!

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