

Nature's Path: A History of Naturopathic Healing in America. By Susan E. Cayleff. Johns Hopkins University Press. 2016. 408pp. £25. ISBN 13: 9781421419039

Nature's Path is the first significant work of history to address naturopathy, an expansive, alternative approach to American healing that emerged in the late nineteenth century and of course remains embedded in the medical marketplace today. Cayleff, a medical historian and professor of Women's Studies at San Diego State University, argues in her 11-chapter book that from its earliest days the naturopathy movement was "a hybrid" and far from "a single methodology." (3) Not only that, the vision of its founders was "unapologetically radical." (5) Members of the burgeoning naturopathy movement rejected "physician authority and omnipotence," and considering many of these classically trained doctors from the most prestigious programmes around the United States were bleeding, blistering and cupping their patients, perhaps a challenge to orthodox practice was in order. Cayleff certainly believes this to be the case. Largely empathetic to the development of naturopathy, she notes that some critics may view its hybrid approach "as a weakness, a refusal to proclaim one absolute truth." Yet, Cayleff pushes back against this, suggesting "naturopaths' desire to be fluid and integrative has allowed, after much struggle, for the creation of a strong system of healing." (3)

The beating heart of *Nature's Path* is Benedict and Louise Lust, an entrepreneurial power couple whose influence is still felt. In establishing health food stores, wellness retreats, training colleges, and a publishing empire, both the German-born Benedict and his wife Louise laid the foundation for naturopathy's flourishing in the twentieth century. They promoted water cures, osteopathy, and drugless therapy. Theirs was a philosophy that pulled from multiple healing traditions. They argued stridently against vivisection and vaccination. Compulsory vaccination, in particular, was considered a heinous crime. And the Lusts ferociously attacked animal experimentation. In short, they were radicals, rabble-rousers, and outsiders. By raising issues of inequality in health care and giving voice to the so-called resisters and non-conformists, they challenged scientific medicine and the political dominance of the American Medical Association.

The book is superbly researched, thought-provoking, and makes a first-rate contribution to women's and alternative medical history. A troublesome aspect of the book, however, has to do with presentation. If Cayleff's approach to the subject matter is somewhat sympathetic, its execution is uneven. The narrative drive wanders at times. The book greatly increases the reader's knowledge on a host of topics (as described in the paragraph above), but it has a haphazard feel. It was a provocative read, but also provoked a degree of bewilderment. This objection aside, *Nature's Path* convincingly encapsulates the diversity of naturopathy, for "...within the movement's inclusivity and liberal democratic values, conservative and exclusionary beliefs also persisted." (5) The movement undoubtedly empowered women. But naturopathy was characterized just as much by division as unity. In explicating these tensions and negotiations, the book sketches a picture of a dynamic and protean movement that has many lessons for contemporary activists in women's rights, healthcare, and beyond.