



APALACHICOLA **THE TIMES**

SERVING FRANKLIN COUNTY SINCE 1885

(0)

➔ LOG IN (/LOGIN.HTML)

THE APALACHICOLA TIMES



Chasing Shadows: Treating drug addiction, a century ago



(https://epsilon.creativecirclecdn.com/neves/original/20210319-131347-598291f1-7ee1-436c-a6e8-9996a42af210-20210217_085005_1.jpg)

The former Flatauer House, at 73 Avenue E

[PAM RICHARDSON | SPECIAL TO THE TIMES]



Posted Friday, March 5, 2021 9:02 am

by Pam Richardson Guest Columnist, *The Apalachicola Times*

Some readers may be surprised to learn that the soon-to-be-realized Franklin Wellness Facility, a substance abuse treatment center slated for construction next to Weems Memorial Hospital, will not be the first drug rehabilitation center ever to exist in Apalachicola.

That distinction goes to the Flatauer Sanitarium, established in 1920 at Adolph Flatauer's residence at 73 Avenue E. Advertised as providing a "painless cure for morphine and all drug addictions," this sanitarium was established first in Atlanta, Georgia in 1917, and relocated several years later to Apalachicola.

Morphine, a highly addictive opioid, was discovered by an obscure 21-year-old German pharmacist's assistant in the early 19th century. He isolated an organic alkaloid compound from the resin of the opium poppy and found that it was 10 times stronger than processed opium. (Interestingly, this innovative methodology subsequently led to the production of strychnine in 1817, caffeine in 1820, and nicotine in 1828.)

By the mid-1820s, morphine was readily available in western Europe, and its use became even more widespread in the 1850s with the introduction of hypodermic needles. In this country, during the Civil War, soldiers received morphine to kill pain from battlefield injuries and many became addicted. Later, doctors recommended morphine to cure alcoholism and to relieve menstrual cramps and even morning sickness.

A Smithsonian Magazine article (Jan. 2018) states that, at the turn of the last century, addiction to morphine and opium powders, which could be bought without a physician's prescription, affected one in about 200 Americans and that these addicts were typically middle- and upper-class white women. Moreover, "southern whites, with the possible exception of the Chinese, had the highest addiction rate of any regional racial group in the country, and perhaps one of the highest in the world," according to *The Journal of Southern History* (Feb. 1983).

When the US government passed the Harrison Narcotics Act in 1914, it suddenly became illegal to purchase opiates over-the-counter and the immediate effect was twofold: black market sales and a rush of drug addicts to hospitals and sanitariums. But because of a gray area in the Harrison Act, physicians and narcotics clinics all too often maintained patients' addictions by continuing to supply them with narcotics. In March 1919, the Supreme Court decided this was against the law and, within two years, the federal government succeeded in closing almost all the clinics.

The Flatauer Sanitarium opened in Atlanta, GA in Nov. 1917, first at 209 Washington Street, and later at 248 Whitehall Street. An advertisement in the *Atlanta Constitution* credits Adolph Flatauer with the discovery of the "cure;" it reads, in part, as follows:

What Drug Addicts Have Been Praying For

A PAINLESS CURE

A wonderful discovery, made by Mr. A. Flatauer, of Apalachicola, Fla -

A PAINLESS CURE for MORPHINE and other DRUG USERS

If Flatauer had been a pharmacist or a physician, we might not think twice about either this claim or his setting himself up in this business. But Mr. A. Flatauer of Apalachicola was a clothing and dry goods merchant – and a successful one at that. He was a German Jew, born in 1859 in the Charlottenburg section of Berlin, who had immigrated to the United States as a teenager. He lived for 15 years in Bristol, married by arrangement a relative of his mother, and settled in Apalachicola in 1887. (Their February 1884 marriage, announced in the Early County News out of Blakely, Georgia, bears repeating for its unusual wording: “Mr. Adolph Flatauer of Bristol will on the 24th lead to Hymen’s altar, Miss Regina Goettinger of Galveston.”)

Regina gave birth to seven children, but one died after living for only one month. Also, daughter Freda was crippled in a wagon accident and then died in her teens of typhoid fever. Both are buried in Chestnut Cemetery.

Around 1900, the Flatauer family went to live in Atlanta for a couple of years for now unknown reasons. Once back in Apalachicola, Flatauer commissioned George Marshall to build a stunning 14-room mansion for his family’s residence at 73 Chestnut Street (Avenue E). The outside of this elegant house featured wrap-around verandahs and a widow’s walk, while the interior was graced with a grand staircase, chandeliers, and deadhead cypress woodwork.

The dry goods business continued to thrive, in a row of three brick buildings Flatauer built at the present site of Centennial Bank after a 1906 fire consumed his original wood-frame building. In 1913, under his ownership, the Dixie Theater was built. Then, in 1917, Flatauer relocated his family to Atlanta and established his sanitarium for curing morphine addiction.

Judging from the number and content of newspaper advertisements, the clinic prospered. The family, however, did not fare as well. In 1919, Regina, age 60, fell victim to the Spanish flu epidemic and the family buried her in Atlanta. The Sanitarium continued to operate in Atlanta until the end of that year and then re-opened in the Flatauer’s home in Apalachicola in March 1920.

But, it was in business for only a few months. On June 15, distressed to the point of despair over his wife’s death, Flatauer shot himself in the abdomen and died. He was buried in Magnolia Cemetery the next day. His death certificate, filled out by his daughter Tessie, gives Flatauer’s occupation as “dry goods merchant.” No mention is made of the sanitarium.

So many questions arise out of these facts! How and why did a successful clothing and dry goods merchant in Apalachicola decide to go into the treatment of drug addiction in Atlanta? Was Flatauer's "painless and efficient cure" simply another drug? Did the US government shut him down in Atlanta? Did he move his operation to the small, backwater town of Apalachicola, hoping to proceed unnoticed?

Sadly, the answers to these questions were buried with Adolph Flatauer. A small hint, however, came the other day from Bill Deen, of Tampa, whose grandmother was Adolph and Regina's daughter, Rosely Flatauer. She told Deen that her father had developed a cure for morphine addiction, but that "there was some problem with the government," and that it "may have had something to do with what was in it."

Adolph Flatauer's house has been exquisitely restored, and it will be one of the featured locations for the Apalachicola Area Historical Society's event "If This House Could Talk," planned for this coming May 2 through 15. Creative storyboards will be on display in front of many Apalachicola houses, and maps showing their addresses will be available. If the Flatauer house could talk, imagine the stories it would tell!

Pam Richardson is a member of the board of directors of the Apalachicola Area Historical Society. She can be reached at stoneoak2003@yahoo.com

Flatauer descendant authors World War II novel

Jim T. Barfield, a retired attorney and judge from the Atlanta area, is a great-grandson of Adolph Flatauer as well as the author of a novel for young adults entitled *Boxcars*. The book tells a compelling story of young love flowering amid the difficult and dangerous circumstances created by Nazi Germany.

David Flatauer, one of the protagonists, is on the run from the Nazis, when he meets Elsa, a Romani or gypsy girl, who has escaped from Auschwitz. As they struggle to survive the Holocaust, they become involved in an increasingly complicated relationship.

As a child in the early 1950s, Barfield spent a lot of time with his grandmother Clara (Adolph Flatauer's oldest child) when his parents were busy attending to patients at their polio clinic. He vividly remembers watching Clara cook using recipes sent to her by her German relatives, and listening to her tell stories of them. Too often, these stories would end with Clara in tears because no word had come from these relatives since the war. It was presumed that all had perished at the hands of the Nazis.

Barfield's intention in writing *Boxcars* was to provide young people with factual information about what happened to the Jews during World War II and to instill in them a commitment to no recurrence of such evil on their watch. Three songs, written and sung by Barfield, complement *Boxcars*. Search YouTube for Jim Barfield and *Boxcars*, *Mad at the World*, and "*Mother and Child*."

Barfield is donating a hardcover copy of his book to the Apalachicola's Margaret Key library.

This article originally appeared on The Apalachicola Times: Chasing Shadows: Treating drug addiction, a century ago (<https://www.apalachtimes.com/story/news/2021/03/05/chasing-shadows-treating-drug-addiction-century-ago/6895598002/>)

Comments

NO COMMENTS ON THIS ITEM PLEASE LOG IN TO COMMENT BY CLICKING HERE (</LOGIN.HTML?REFERER=%2FSTORIES%2FCHASING-SHADOWS-TREATING-DRUG-ADDICTION-A-CENTURY-AGO%2C615>)



(<https://nevesbanners.creativecirclemedia.com/www/delivery/cl.php?>

bannerid=88&zoneid=3&sig=fd651c1789672c99e79b063ea2a89f934bcf5fd4b33e9ccea989a2862bd7042a&oadest=https%3A%2F%2Fmydermspecialists.com%2F)

OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

Carrabelle tees off on new golf cart rules (/stories/carrabelle-tees-off-on-new-golf-cart-rules,20508)

Christmas smiles for miles and miles (/stories/christmas-smiles-for-miles-and-miles,20287)

This weekend in Gulf and Franklin (/stories/this-weekend-in-gulf-and-franklin,20506)

Simon, Shoaf named to education committees (/stories/simon-shoaf-named-to-education-committees,20406)

Top News & Sports: - SEC charges former FTX CEO Sam Bankman-Fried

