

News, Updates, & More



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FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

Copies of all issues of the newsletter are downloadable from the Varner Family website.

<http://home.kc.surewest.net/btvarner/VarnerGenealogy.htm>

Some files require a password to open. That password is: VarnerFamily (Case sensitive, no spaces). Please do not provide this password to anyone else. Send them to me so I can keep track of who might access the information.

QUESTIONS / NEWS

Since the newsletter began I have occasionally had some email addresses bounce back. If I am unable to find a new address, that person no longer receives the newsletter. If you know of anyone who wishes to receive the newsletter but currently does not, please let me know:

Old-Time Ozark Medical Remedies

This month's article provides some insight into medical remedies used in the time before doctors were readily available. It is interesting how maladies were likely handled by our ancestors. The focus of the information concerns the Ozark area. Much of the information comes from an article in vol. 12, issue 4 (1992) of the Gateway Heritage magazine, which was published by the Missouri Historical Society. The title of this article is: "Women's Healing Art: Domestic Medicine in the Turn-of-the-Century Ozarks" by Janet L. Allured

"In most 19th-century communities, female healers performed almost all of the tasks that professionally trained doctors, nurses, and pharmacists later assumed. By 1900, academically trained physicians were dismissing traditional female healing practices as irrational and superstitious, ineffective at best and dangerous at worst. However, a historical look at folk healing tells a different story. Far from being random or illogical, domestic medicine was based on empirical evidence, rational calculation, and the time-honored method of trial and error.

....As one resident of Taney County, Missouri, remembered: The nearest doctor was 20 miles away..... There wasn't money to buy medicine. In the

spring she would make sassafras¹ and sage tea² to condition our blood. In the summer and autumn we would eat..... anything we found growing wild, without washing it. Naturally, we would get "wormy." [Mother] knew the symptoms. Some morning before breakfast she would stir up a mixture of wormfuge [vermifuge]³ in a skillet of molasses. . . . Before night we were rid of our worms. If one of us needed a tonic Mother went to the woods, peeled some bark from a wild cherry tree, dug some sarsaparilla⁴, some blackroot⁵, and other herbs, boiled a brew out of it and gave it in regulated doses. . . . She made tea of pennyroyal⁶, mullein⁷, and tansy⁸ for our stomach cramps; slippery elm

¹ *Sassafras Albidum*, small trees/shrubs native to the eastern North America. Used extensively for food and medicine by Native Americans long before European settlers arrived and its bark became one of the first exports of the New World.

² **Sage**-Technically known as *Salvia Officinalis*, small evergreen shrub known as garden sage/common sage.

³ **vermifuge**- an anthelmintic medicine, an agent that destroys or expels parasitic worms

⁴ **sarsaparilla**- originally made from the *Smilax* plant. *smilax aspera* - evergreen shrub with a flexible and delicate stem, with sharp thorns.

⁵ *Leptandra Virginica*- tall, herbaceous perennial, tonic for the stomach, useful in diarrhea, chronic dysentery, cholera infantum, torpidity of the liver

⁶ a species of *Hedeoma*, used for colds, pneumonia, and other breathing problems, also used for stomach pains, gas, intestinal disorders, liver/gallbladder problems

⁷ **mullein**- a woolly-leaved biennial plant, asthma, coughs, tuberculosis, and related respiratory problems

⁸ **tansy**- perennial member of the aster family, used for intestinal worms, rheumatism, digestive problems, fevers, sores, and to "bring out" measles

she made poultices of and applied to boils.⁹

Nearly all remedies read like recipes, and, like special recipes, women usually learned to prepare them under their mother's supervision. Here, for example, is one woman's remedy for whooping cough:

1 ounce fresh red clover blossoms

1 pint boiling water

1 cup honey

Boil blossoms in water and strain. Add honey; bottle. Dosage: 1 teaspoon twice daily.¹⁰

Doctoring a family required a great deal of knowledge and skill. The array of natural medicaments was vast, and girls had to learn to recognize each one accurately, for mistakes could be fatal. Women also needed to know how much of each ingredient to use (often measured by the pinch or the handful), how long to boil (till soft, or till all water save a pint had boiled away), and how much to administer. Herbs could either be decocted (boiled), infused (steeped but not boiled), or demulsified (used in an ointment). The leaves of a plant might be used for one ailment, its roots for another, and its berries for still another; the seeds of some plants were medicinal even though their flowers

were poisonous. In addition, women had to know when to pick the plants to assure their potency. Most roots, for example, had to be gathered in February or March before the sap began to rise. And some plants, such as sassafras and poke¹¹, became poisonous at certain points in their growth cycle.

Among the most commonly used medicinal plants were those with astringent qualities, such as sweet gum, myrtle, and yellow dock, which grew wild in the Ozark hills. Administered as teas, these plants shrank the swelling of a sore throat, and, though they could not cure tonsillitis or diphtheria, they lessened the danger of asphyxiation and left the patient considerably more comfortable. Packed into a poultice and applied to the skin, the astringent properties of these plants helped close open wounds and stem bleeding. Astringents were also used to treat diarrhea in adults and a condition known as "summer complaint" in children. Summer complaint, a case of dysentery contracted the first summer after weaning when the child was exposed to warm-weather microbes for the first time, could cause death from dehydration and an imbalance in the electrolytes if left untreated; therefore, immediate action was imperative. Ozark mothers dosed sick toddlers with blackberry tea, a powerful astringent,

⁹ Ruth Siler Deen, "Pioneer Remedies," 1940s?, "Otto Ernest Rayburn's Folk Encyclopedia," vol. R7, scrapbook, Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

¹⁰ Opa Lee Arnold Taylor, *Medicine Time in the Hills of Home* (Silver Hill, Ark., 1963), p. 3.

¹¹ **poke root**- a common perennial native plant, has been used to treat syphilis, diphtheria, cancer, asthma, intestinal worms, cramps, stomach ulcers, to improve digestive, urinary, and immune systems

and the children were soon out of danger.

.....how to calm colicky babies. Often they (mothers) would “blow” milk with tobacco smoke to infuse it with a hint of nicotine. Since nicotine stimulates the bowels, this technique aided the expulsion of gas. Calamus root¹², which acts on the digestive system, was also used to cure colic.

Another therapeutic tool was the poultice, which was used to treat a variety of ailments. Women usually made poultices by adding pharmaceutical agents to a soft ingredient like cornmeal or lard. They often applied the poultices hot, which brought blood to the surface and thus aided healing. When applied to wounds, poultices commonly included a disinfectant and an analgesic for cleaning and anesthetizing. When applied to the chest (onion and mustard poultices were the favorites for this area), they unclogged congested breathing passages. Not only did the heat help to relieve congestion, but the fumes from the onions and mustard loosened phlegm and provoked coughing. By helping the victim expel secretions from the throat and lungs, the poultice worked to lessen the risk of infection and forestall the development of pneumonia, a frequent cause of

¹² **Calamus root**- used to treat flatulence, colds, cough, heart disease, bowel problems, colic, cholera, menstrual problems, dropsy, headache, sore throat, spasms, toothache, and swelling

death before the widespread use of antibiotics.

In addition to fighting diseases after they struck, women also worked to forestall illness. Spring tonics were a favorite method of preventive care. Ozarkers believed that tonics restocked vital reserves of energy and nutrients, which people needed for good health. In an attempt to replenish all parts of the system, most women made their tonics from a number of roots harvested in February and March before the sap rose. Although sassafras tea was a popular spring tonic in the Ozarks, it was by no means the only one. Every family had its own favorite concoction.

The bitter taste of most herbal remedies increased patients’ belief in their effectiveness (the very chemicals which give herbs their medicinal qualities also give them their horrible taste). As one woman remarked of her mother’s mullein cough syrup: “It really works. The stuff tasted so bad that I was afraid to cough.”¹³

Below are some additional remedies that were used by folks back in the day:

Chokecherry- Officially known as Prunus Virginiana, In early American medicine, was considered one of the most important native drugs, ranked along

¹³ v12, i4 (1992) Gateway Heritage Magazine, published by the Missouri Historical Society. Article title: “Women’s Healing Art: Domestic Medicine in the Turn-of-the-Century Ozarks” by Janet L. Allured

with Sassafras. Bark of the tree was used in the treatment of small pox, scurvy, soreness of the chest and throat, lung hemorrhages, cough, colds, inflammation of the bowel, diarrhea, stomach cramps, cholera, digestive problems, gangrenous wounds, sores, pains, severe burns and wounds. When Europeans arrived in America, they learned from the Indians about the health properties of chokeberry. Pit can be poisonous.

Dandelion- Rich in vitamins A, B complex, C, and D, as well as minerals such as iron, potassium, and zinc. Leaves have often been used to flavor food and teas, its roots in coffee substitutes, and the flowers, to make certain wines. Dandelion roots and leaves were used to treat liver problems, kidney disease, swelling, skin problems, heartburn, and stomach upset.

Witch Hazel- A proven astringent, it is produced from the leaves and bark of the North American Witch-hazel shrub. Witch Hazel extract was made by boiling the stems of the shrub to treat sore muscles, cuts, insect bites, skin irritations, sores, bruises, swelling, and to stop bleeding. It has also been found to be useful in treating acne, psoriasis, eczema, ingrown nails, cracked or blistered skin, poison ivy, varicose veins, hemorrhoids, and sunburn.

While on this interesting topic, listed are some of the common causes of death

that are listed in records of this time period:

Bright's Disease - Any of several forms of disease of the kidney attended with albumin in the urine, including especially acute and chronic nonsuppurative nephritis.

Cholera - a disease prevailing in Summer, characterized by vomiting, uncontrollable diarrhea and collapse.

Consumption - A progressive wasting away of the body, especially that attended upon pulmonary phthisis, called pulmonary consumption; hence pulmonary phthisis or tuberculosis.

Croup - Any affection of the larynx or trachea, accompanied by a hoarse, ringing cough and difficulty breathing; especially, such an affection when associated with the development of a false membrane in the air passages. See Diphtheria.

Diphtheria - An acute, febrile, infectious disease in which the air passages, and especially, the throat, become coated with a false membrane.

Dropsy - An unnatural accumulation of serous fluid in any serous cavity of the body, or in the subcutaneous cellular tissue. The various forms of dropsy affecting different parts of the body are designated by specific names.

Dysentery - A disease attended with fever, inflammation, and ulceration of the large intestine and characterized by griping pains, constant desire to evacuate bowels and the discharge of mucus and blood.

Fits - A sudden violent attack of a disorder; a stroke of disease, especially epilepsy or apoplexy, which produces convulsions or unconsciousness.

Lock Jaw - A variety of tetanus in which the jaws are locked rigidly together.

Measles - A contagious febrile disorder, commencing with catarrhal symptoms, ascoryza, conjunctivitis, and cough and marked by the appearance on the third day of an eruption of distinct red circular spots.

Palsy - Abolition of function, whether complete or partial; especially, the loss of the power of voluntary motion...or of sensation...in any part of the body.

A chronic, progressive, nervous disease, occurring in advanced life and marked by muscular tremor and weakness and a peculiar gait termed festination; Parkinson's Disease.

Pneumonia - Inflammation of the lungs; usually due to infection.

Scarlet Fever - An acute contagious febrile disease characterized by inflammation and a scarlet rash appearing usually on the second day and

ending in desquamation about the sixth or seventh day.

Typhoid Fever - An infectious febrile disease caused by a bacillus introduced into the system with the food or drinking water and characterized by catarrh of intestines, enlargement and necrosis of the Peyerian glands, enlarged spleen and mesenteric glands...a peculiar eruption appearing on the seventh to eleventh days consisting of small, slightly elevated rose colored spots which disappear on pressure and come out in successive crops and often diarrhea with discharges resembling pea soup in appearance; enteric fever.

Whooping Cough - An infectious disease usually of childhood characterized by violent convulsive cough returning by fits and consisting of several expirations; followed by a sonorous inspiration or whoop.

In 1850 the ten leading causes of death were as follows:

Tuberculosis
Dysentery/diarrhea
Cholera
Malaria
Typhoid Fever
Pneumonia
Diphtheria
Scarlet Fever
Meningitis
Whooping Cough

The following maps are from the "U.S. Congressional Serial Set" for the 10th Census (1880) and shows distribution of several of the major causes of death in the US at that time.

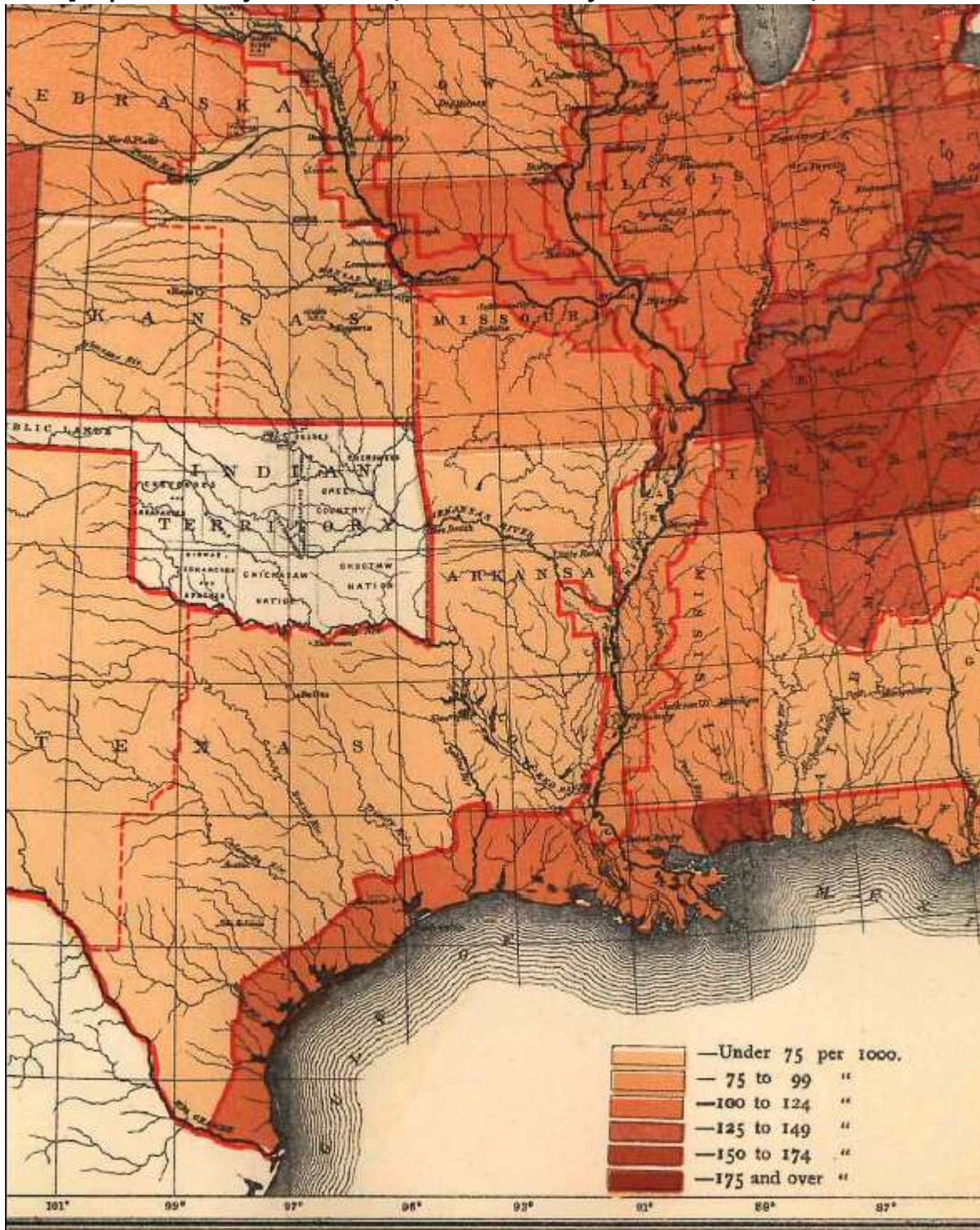
Distribution of deaths from diarrheal diseases as compared with total deaths from known causes. [Dept. of the Interior, 10th Census of the United States, Sheet 10]



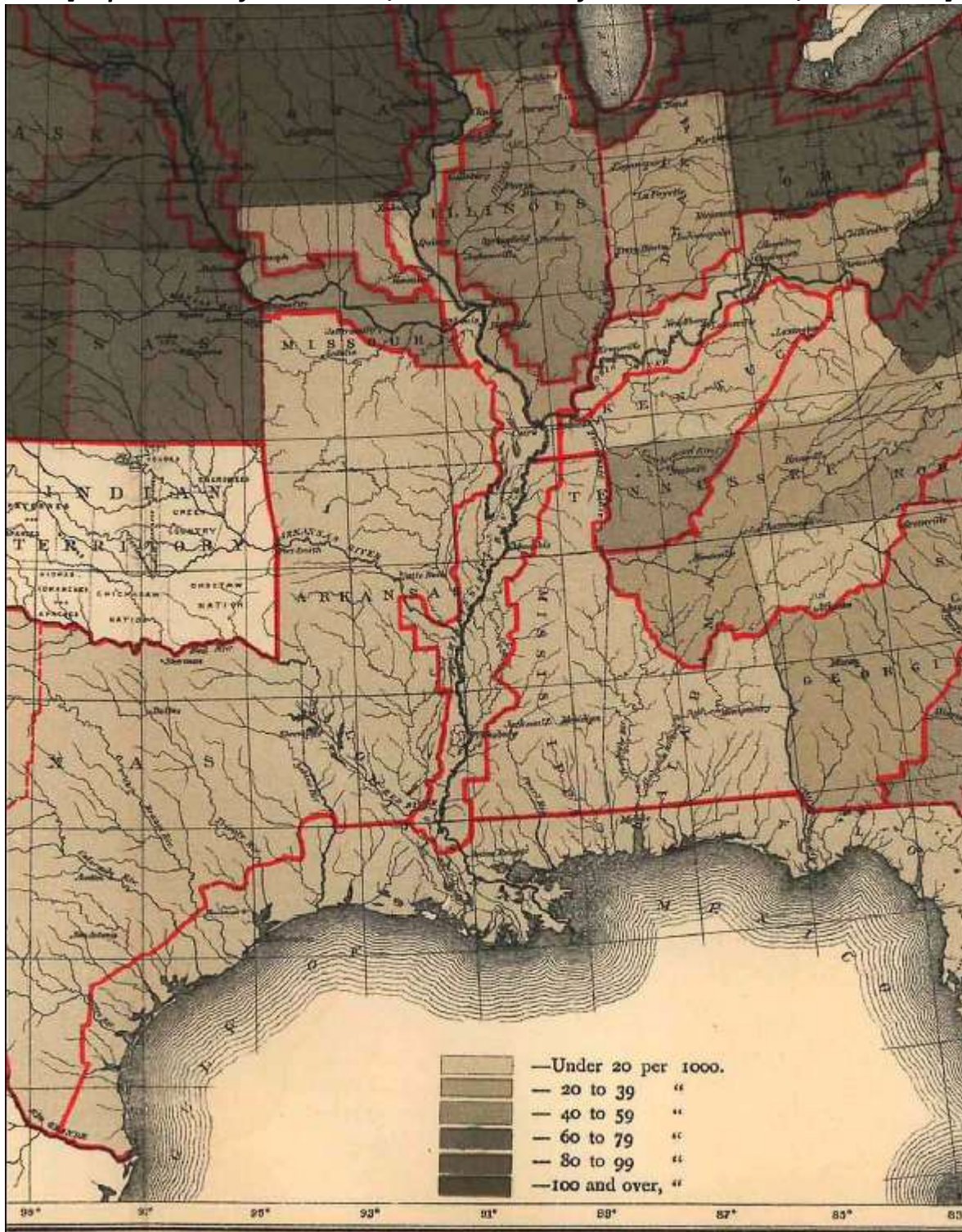
Distribution of deaths from pneumonia as compared with total deaths from known causes. [Department of the Interior, Tenth Census of the United States, Sheet No. 13]



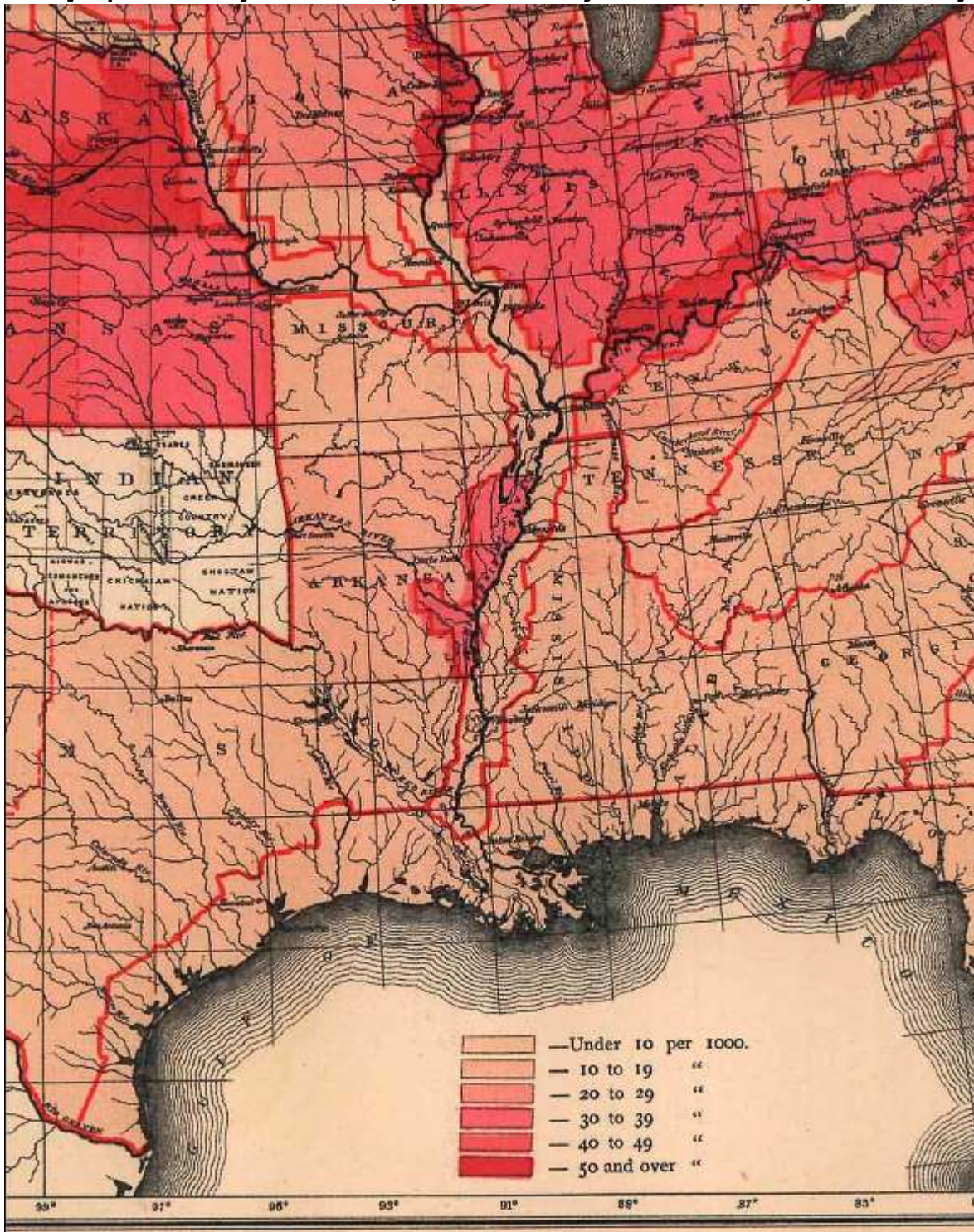
Distribution of deaths from consumption as compared with total deaths from known causes. [Department of the Interior, Tenth Census of the United States, Sheet No. 12



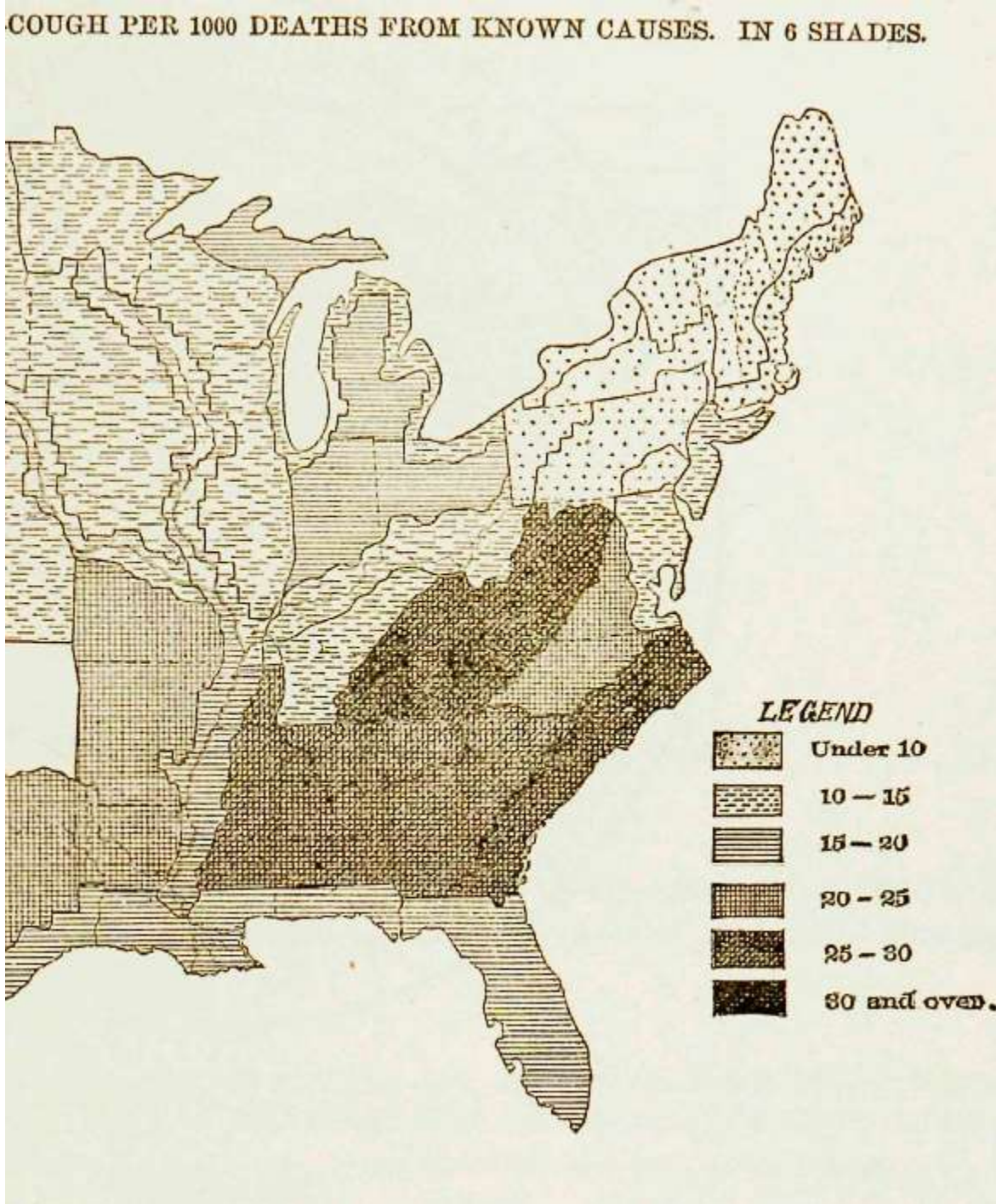
Distribution of deaths from diphtheria as compared with total deaths from known causes. [Department of the Interior, Tenth Census of the United States, Sheet No. 3]



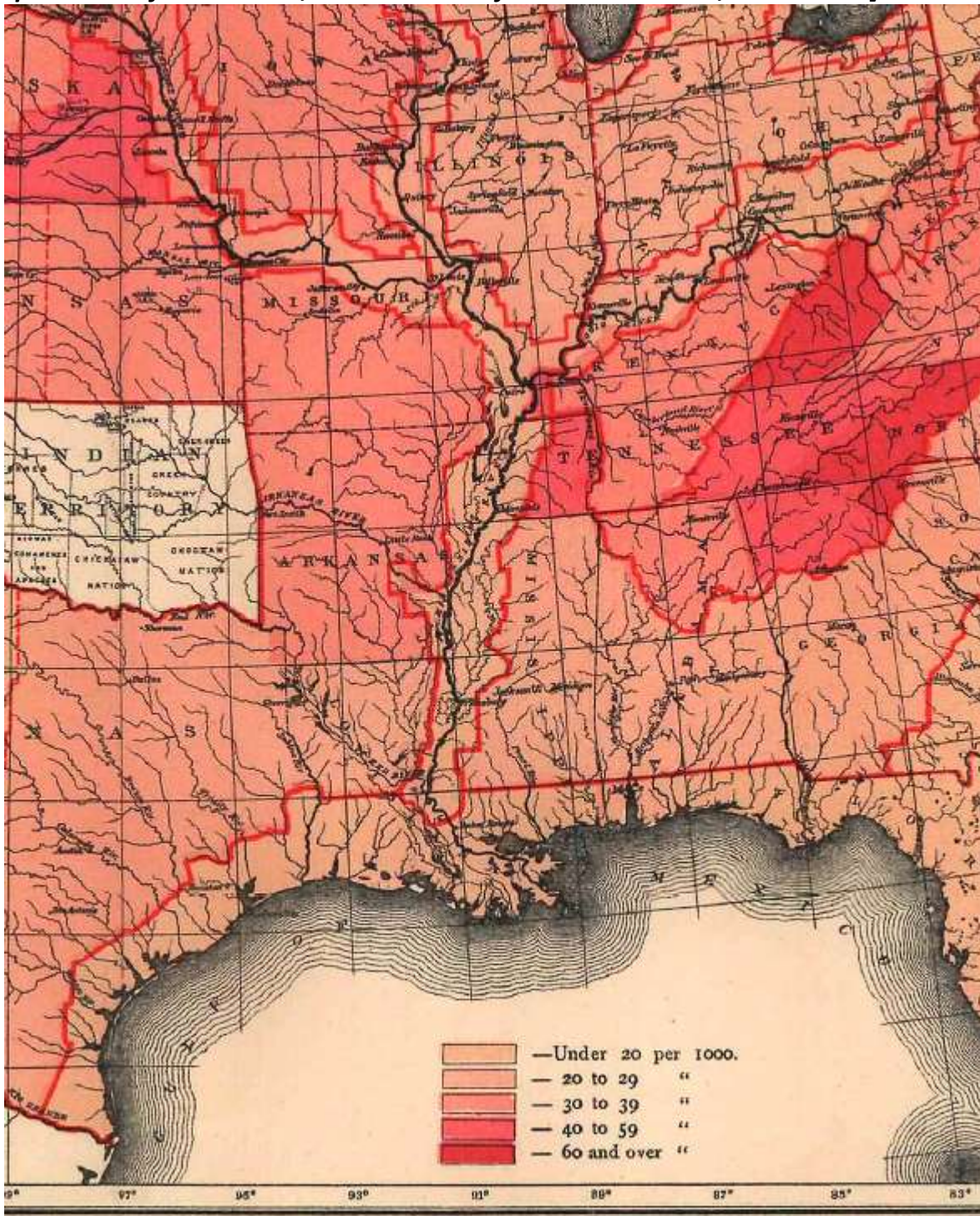
Distribution of deaths from scarlet fever as compared with total deaths from known causes. [Department of the Interior, Tenth Census of the United States, Sheet No. 2]



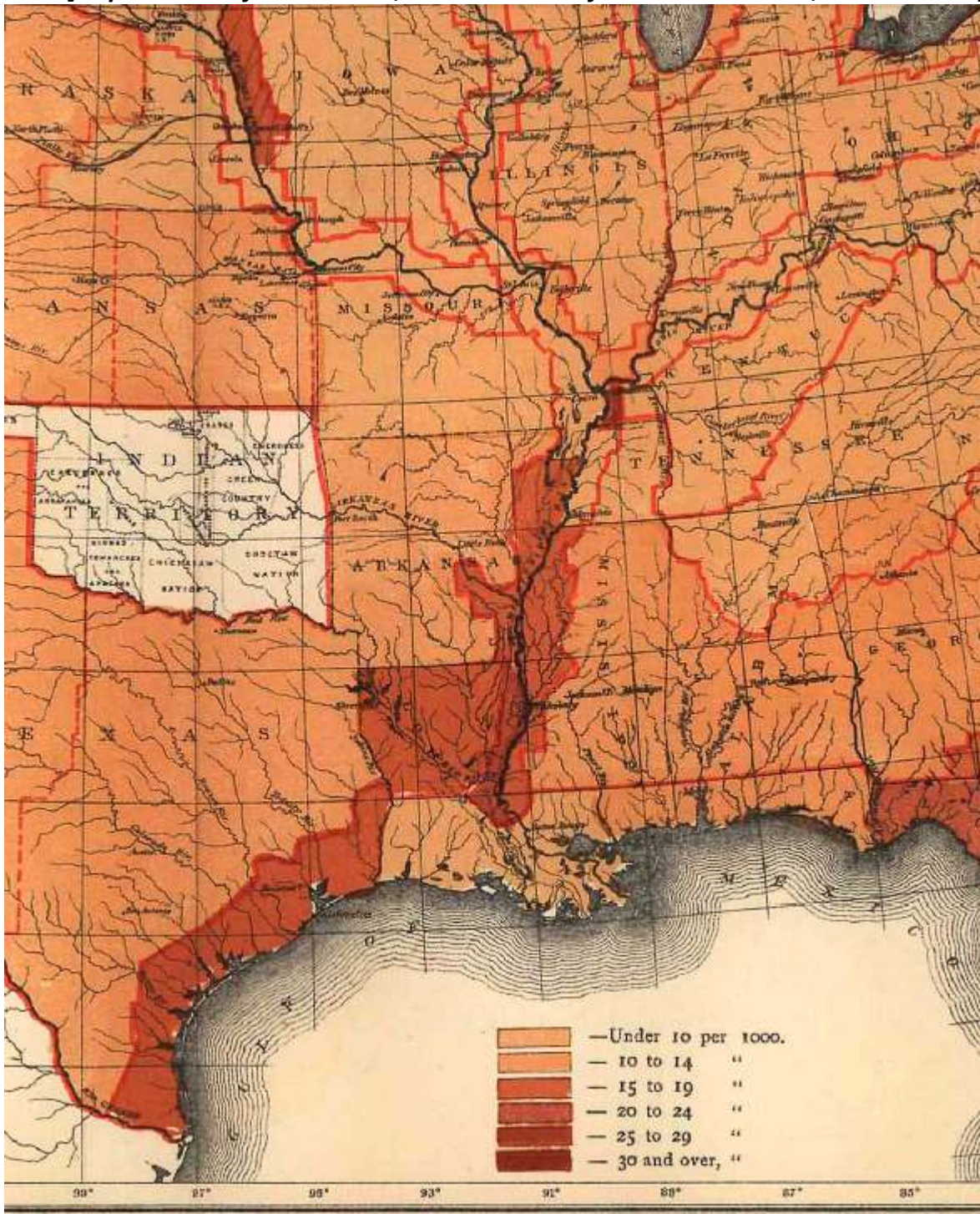
Deaths from hooping-cough [i.e., whooping-cough] per 1000 deaths from known causes.



Distribution of deaths from croup as compared with total deaths from known causes. [Department of the Interior, Tenth Census of the United States, Sheet No. 4]



Distribution of deaths from child-birth as compared with total deaths from known causes. [Department of the Interior, Tenth Census of the United States, Sheet No. 17]



The full size images for the above maps are located on the website. It is amazing how far medicine has come. Think of what our ancestors had to endure.

George Varner of Missouri Direct Line DNA

Hope this summer will see some progress on this front.

George Varner (1789-1861)
 Samuel Philip Varner (1846-1896)
 Francis Logan Varner (1874-1939)
 Norman Walter Varner (1912-1997)
 Raymond Walter Varner (1942-200xs)
Mother Lela Corrnnett
Jason Raymond Varner (40)
Mother Christine Elizabeth Swillium
Micha? Dority Varner (38)
Mother Nancy Dority
Norman Fredrick (Butch) Varner (68)
Mother Alice Ethlene Brown
Michael Logan Varner (43)
Michael Lee Varner (36)
 George Henry Varner (1880-1946)
 Henry Edgar Varner (1919-2003)
James Varner (??)
William Varner (??)
Henry Lee Varner (55)

2015 Newton/Varner Reunion

The 2015 Newton/ Varner family reunion will again be held in Bolivar at the same facility. The event will occur on Saturday May 23rd. We will have the facility between 10am and 4pm. Most attendees arrive just before lunch.

Think about what you would like to have occur during the event.

The address is:
 1850 W. Broadway St.
 Bolivar, MO.

As always, please contact me with ideas for future newsletters.....

Bruce Varner