

## Section on Historical Pharmacy

Papers Presented at the Fifty-Ninth Convention

### ANTE-BELLUM DRUG PRICES.

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For the purpose of comparison and possibly, as reflecting the condition of the drug market of this country some fifty years ago, I desire to present for your consideration part of an old drug invoice which I came across recently, together with some comments and observations. The invoice in question was issued by a wholesale jobbing firm of Cleveland, Ohio, and bears date of January 27, 1861—more than half a century ago. On examination it will be found to contain some unique features, together with some interesting prices on the ordinary articles of commerce.

Among such as are particularly conspicuous, note the high price asked for potassium chlorate, \$1 per pound, while another similar salt of potassium, the sulphate, is quoted at 17 cents per pound, practically identical with the present market price. This extreme difference in cost is readily accounted for when one recalls the fact that the chlorate evidently figured in the manufacture of explosives which had been in great demand during this rebellious period of our country's history. But the greatest variation is in the case of oil of citronella, which as you will observe sold at \$7.50 per pint, while the present price is but 50 cents. Other extreme instances of unusually high prices are also noteworthy, e. g., lunar caustic \$2.20 per oz.; santonin \$2.30 per oz.; saffron \$3.00 per pound; ground cassia bark \$1.00 per pound; sulphuric ether \$1.50 per pint. Two other items, both produced mainly in the South, viz., rosin and oil of turpentine, furnish interesting comment. Scarcity of labor at this particular period caused these two products to reach exorbitant prices, perhaps the highest in their history, turpentine selling at \$2.75 per gallon and rosin at 18 cents per pound.

I herewith append the invoice, in part, picking out about twenty-five or so of the chief items and making comparisons as to present-day cost of similar items:

Name of Drug	1911 Price	1865 Price	Per Cent. of Difference
Licorice Root .....	\$0.18	\$0.28	56
Potas. Sulphate .....	.17	.17	00
Ipecac Powd.....	3.25	6.50	100
Bals. Copaiba .....	.75	1.00	33
Oil Citronella .....	.50	7.50	1400
Caraway Seed .....	.15	.30	100
Santonin .....	1.00	2.30	130
Saffron .....	.45	3.00	567
Resin .....	.03¼	.18	454
Neatsfoot Oil .....	1.10	1.85	68

Oxalic Acid .....	.16	.68	325
Ground Cassia Bark.....	.18	1.10	511
Camphor Gum .....	.60	1.50	150
Jamaica Ginger .....	.30	.70	133
Cubeb Powd.....	.70	1.00	43
Potas. Chlorate .....	.16	1.00	525
Spirit Niter .....	.60	.85	42
Sulphuric Ether .....	.32	1.50	369
Iodine .....	3.20	8.75	174
Potas. Iodide .....	2.35	6.75	187
Oil Peppermint .....	3.50	5.50	60
Adhesive Plaster .....	.20 Yd.	.40	100
N. C. Turpentine.....	.75	2.75	267
Lunar Caustic .....	.52	2.20	323
Alcohol .....	2.70	4.40	63

As will be observed, the decreased prices range from 35 per cent in the case of balsam capaiba, to 1400 per cent in the case of citronella. Taking the invoice as a whole and comparing it with present-day prices, the average increase in the twenty-five items herein enumerated is 161 per cent.

The foregoing in many instances would have shown a much greater variation had these comparisons been made a few years ago, prior to the passage of the Pure Food and Drugs Act. Since that date there has been a natural tendency to advance the cost of many drugs and chemicals, which hitherto were supposed to be of U. S. P. quality.

#### DISCUSSION.

A. W. MILLER: "If I remember correctly, in 1865, gold was selling at about \$2.50; everything was naturally two and one-half times the price it would have been if gold had been at par. About that time Oil of Citronella was sold at 50 cents an ounce, as a curiosity. The present price is 25 cents per pound by the drum in New York. Other items, such as turpentine and rosin, were sold at prices that now seem almost fabulous, such as \$50.00 per barrel for rosin. Turpentine sold for a time at \$6.00 a gallon, simply because communication with the south was barred by our army and navy. For the same reason Seneka Root and Virginia Snake Root sold at prices varying from \$4.00 to \$6.00 a pound; Opium \$25.00 per pound; Quinine \$20.00 an ounce. This was in great measure due to the fact that gold was then at a very high premium, or putting it the other way, our currency was considerably below the gold basis."

THOMAS F. MAIN: "It has occurred to me that while the invoice which has been presented to this section is about fifty years old, it might be interesting for the secretary of the section to obtain a copy of an invoice which Schieffelin & Company of New York have; they as you probably know are the oldest wholesale drug house in our city. They have framed in their office an invoice from their predecessors, J. Schieffelin & Company, dated, if I mistake not, 1801, priced in the currency of the country at that time which was pounds, shillings and pence. It would be extremely interesting to have a copy of that invoice preserved by the Association with this one of 50 or 60 years later."

P. H. UTECH: "Doctor Miller's reference to turpentine recalls an incident told me by a gentleman who was one of the first refiners of benzin in America. When this exorbitant price was being asked for turpentine, he conceived the idea of using benzin as a substitute and began placing it on the market for that purpose. Desiring to give it a specific character in the minds of the public he scented it with oil of citronella and named his new product Magnolia Turpentine. There was an enormous demand for it, and it sold at about seventy-five cents a gallon, although the price of benzin at that time was about fifteen cents a gallon.

He took every ounce of benzin manufactured in Philadelphia, buying in carload lots. Upon leaving Philadelphia he sold the recipe to a friend for \$1,000.00."

DR. H. M. WHELPLEY: "Speaking of high prices reminds me that the railway hospital at St. Louis once ordered an ounce of cocaine, the purchasing agent not realizing its expensive-ness, and the bill was something over \$240.00. They kept the article rather than admit that a mistake had been made in ordering. A charity hospital would not have been able to keep it, but a railway hospital could do it, and paid the bill. At that time cocaine was selling for \$1.00 a grain."

PROF. CHARLES CASPARI, JR.: "I would like to supplement the remarks of Dr. Miller, to show what a really enterprising retail pharmacist will sometimes do. Very shortly after the introduction of cocaine hydrochloride in Europe, a Baltimore pharmacist wrote Merck & Co., Darmstadt, Germany, and asked them to send him an ounce of the salt. They were afraid to send it and cabled the price, \$435.00 an ounce. The druggist cabled back, "Send immediately." He sold the last of the ounce at twenty-five cents a grain."

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### THROWING AWAY GOOD MONEY.

In all professions and trades, the man striving to reach the top in his particular line, must be constantly learning more about this field, and there are two ways in which he obtains his knowledge.

The first is by the constant association with his business and all its details.

This daily routine familiarizes him with his business to such a degree that it gets to be almost second nature for him to conduct it. But all this merely acquaints him with his business as it is, and in order to keep from getting into a rut and to advance he has to resort to a second course, which is the reading and studying of books and magazines which are devoted to his particular business.

How many druggists read their journals with the idea of getting education from them? Not to just "skim" through them, but to read them thoroughly. None of us know it all, and even if we should come near that mark we need to be continually reminded, and that is one important thing that these journals do; they keep reminding you of certain weak places.

No, it is not good policy, or good judgment, to throw your trade journal on the table or under it, without even taking off the wrapper, leaving it to its fate as waste paper.

What you lightly throw away is often information that cannot be measured in subscription values.

You throw away the summarized experience of men who have specialized along certain lines of drug store success.

You throw away the opportunity to keep in touch with your fellow craftsmen.

You throw away the opportunity to follow the Association meetings, to keep in touch with the bills going through legislature, which bear on the drug trade, to get good live pointers for increasing your business, to learn of many new formulas which in themselves alone will pay over and over the cost of the magazine.

These are but suggestions of the extent of your losses. Only the man who really makes a tool of his trade journals with which to work out a larger business success can actually realize how foolish it is to throw away such an instrument when it is actually thrust into his hands.—*The Apothecary*.