

Section on Historical Pharmacy

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REMINISCENCES OF PHARMACY IN THE ROCKIES.

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As one of the pioneer pharmacists of this state I have been asked to tell something of the conditions of pharmacy in the early days when Colorado was on the fringe of civilization. This I take pleasure in doing, but I must warn you that there is little excitement in my experiences; in fact I had more excitement in New York City before I came to Colorado than I ever had here. That was the time of the "draft riots" in New York in 1863 when we had to board up the windows of the drug store where I was then employed for protection against riotous mobs. I never have had to board up a drug store in Colorado.

My early experience in the drug business was in New York. I graduated from the New York College of Pharmacy in 1865, and like many other young men of that time took Horace Greeley's advice and "went West," settling down in Central City, Colo., in 1866, and opening a drug store there. Central City at that time was the largest city in Colorado, Denver being only a small town, deriving its population and prosperity from the rich mining region of which it was the center. At that date our city boasted of six drug stores, all prosperous and friendly, and all conducted by educated pharmacists. There were then only three drug stores in Denver.

We had no price cutting then. Most of our trade was strictly professional, there being comparatively few patent medicines sold, and such as we carried sold at an average of 50 percent over the regular prices in the East. Hostetter's Bitters, Ayers, Hood's, Schenck's and other old time proprietary remedies were in good demand, Ayer's especially, I being the first general agent for Ayer's goods in the Rocky Mountain country. Strange to say, perfumery was very popular and I sold vast quantities of Lubin's extracts and soaps, the favorite brand, at one dollar per bottle or cake. Hair oil was another great favorite and I reaped an honest profit by dispensing lard oil perfumed with bergamot, under the popular name of "Bear's Oil," at 25 cents an ounce. Much of my business, as with other druggists then, was the supplying of chemicals used in the mining industry, quicksilver being one of the principal items. Most of these chemicals were obtained from St. Louis, that being the headquarters of the overland shipping trade.

The mention of quicksilver reminds me of one exciting experience. I had in 1873, when Central City was almost wiped out by a fire that destroyed most of the stores and houses there, in stock twenty-three tanks, or flasks, of quicksilver, and as these were very valuable, I made special efforts to save them from de-

struction, so we risked cremation and managed to get out twenty-two tanks and dumped them in a deep well nearby. Later I had these tanks rescued, it being necessary for me to call on some expert mining workmen, so deep was the well. This is the only instance I can recall in the history of mining for precious metals in Colorado when mercury was mined from a well. The twenty-third tank—note the number—had to be left in the store, and after the fire was over, everything burnable being burned up, I found it apparently unharmed in the ruins of my store, but on closer examination the tank was found to be absolutely empty, the intense heat of the fire opening the seams of the iron container and literally boiling off the quicksilver in vapor through these openings.

In those days druggists were compelled to buy or order staple drugs and chemicals in large quantities because of the length of time required for shipment and the high freight charges. In making up my orders on the wholesale firms supplying this territory I would order a quantity of each article sufficient to last me for six months or a year, for when the stock of any article was sold out it was out, generally for some months. We Colorado druggists also had to be very careful in timing our orders to prevent damage to goods by climatic changes in transit. Thus, every preparation that would freeze at low temperatures had to be ordered far enough ahead of the time of delivery so that it would be in transit over the plains and mountains during the summer season, this often requiring three or four months. It was customary to send in our principal orders twice a year, so that shipments could be made at the most advantageous time. We had even then both fast freight and ordinary freight classification and, of course, appropriate charges. The "fast freight" had mules for motive power and the average time was three months between Colorado and eastern cities and the cost of fast freight shipments being 22 cents a pound. Ordinary shipments and heavy drugs and chemicals came to us by ox teams, and six months was the usual time between the sending of an order and the receipt of the goods. This class of freight cost 10 cents a pound, everything in those days being reduced to pounds instead of tons.

In those days goods were shipped in bulk and often several druggists would combine their orders so as to secure original bulk packages and thus cheaper freight charges. Naturally we made most of our galenicals, it being cheaper to buy the crude drugs and alcohol, and make them, than to pay freight on finished products. Another factor was the cost of packages. Everything shipped by the old-time freight wagons had to be as compact as possible and packed in containers not liable to breakage. Usually we had little trouble from deterioration of goods during their long transit across the continent, as shippers understood conditions and packed goods to meet the strenuous conditions of overland or water shipment. Some things, though, did give trouble, especially pills, the old-fashioned proprietary kind.

These, you know, were not protected by sugar or gelatin coating, so in spite of liberal dusting with licorice powder, we would frequently find boxes of pills in which the heat, etc., had caused the pills to become soft, and adhere in a mass. I believe I sold the first sugar-coated pills introduced in this territory, Ayer's Liver Pills, the price of which was 50 cents a box, and no trading stamps.

Business was done mostly on a cash basis. There was very little barter, the

only business of that character being done with the Indians of nearby villages who used to offer furs, etc., in trade for their wants. To the Indians we sold large quantities of perfumery (but very little soap), and patent medicines, especially the kind that had a very bitter or strong taste. I had to disappoint an eastern friend who once asked me how I used to estimate prices by weighing the rough gold offered by miners for goods, by telling him I never estimated—Colorado folks had real money and plenty of it even in early days. Conditions were not so rough nor were we so uncivilized as people of eastern states imagine, and except for the necessary crudities of a new country and our isolation by distance from pharmaceutical manufacturing centers, the drug business was pretty much the same as is still found in small country villages.

We had our share of Indian warfare when the Utes went on the warpath, in 1866 to 1867, when Colorado was practically cut off from all communication with the eastern states for months, but except for the isolation and inability to replenish stocks we druggists suffered little.

As eastern members no doubt observed while passing through the state, Colorado has few native plants used medicinally. Mountain sage is probably the most important native drug and the first shipment of this drug commercially, by the way, was made by me to Parke, Davis & Co. This plant is believed to possess valuable properties by the Indians and it has been used since the early pioneer days for treatment of what we call "mountain fever." The native drugs upon which Colorado's early prosperity was based were handled by druggists only in small quantities. I refer to gold and silver, so we had to depend on our skill as pharmacists and use foreign drugs to collect even the small amounts of these native drugs we handled.

There are so many things that seem commonplace to the pioneer which are wonders to the novice that I hesitate in offering even these brief reminiscences. I have no "wild and woolly west" experiences that I can recall, so I trust that members will pardon my lack of exciting incidents. Just one final word, we Colorado druggists have always been pharmacists in the true sense of this term, and I know our successors, the younger men, will uphold our traditions.

SOME OLD-TIME BROOKLYN DRUG STORES.

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In 1796 appeared the first directory of Brooklyn, which was really only a sort of appendix to the New York directory. No druggist is named in this volume but there appears the name of John N. Barbarie, Physician, on Main Road, probably Fulton street, and very likely this country doctor handed out medicines.

In 1799 a German apothecary named Kempe or Kempff opened a drug store in the village. The location is in doubt but was probably in the vicinity of Fulton or South Ferry. This business was succeeded to by the son of the founder and in 1860 the second Mr. Kempe was succeeded by his nephew, Mr. Louis Lehn,