

Patent Medicines from the Green Mountain State

by Don Fritschel

In 1876, when America held its Centennial celebration, there were 38 states in the Union. Of these, Vermont ranked in the bottom six in area, and in the bottom three in population. However, at the same time, this sparsely settled, rural state was the home to over 100 different patent medicines.

The first medical patent in this country was issued in 1796, and the term “patent

medicine”, in its purest sense, refers to medical compositions that have received patent protection. However, few of the early medicine producers applied for patents, since their ingredients would then have had to be made public, and their exclusive right to produce would eventually expire. The composition of these early medicines was a closely guarded secret, since secrecy afforded a degree of protection against imitation, and

kept the public from knowing that the ingredients might be useless or sometimes even harmful.

The term “proprietary medicines” is generally used to describe preparations where the owner of the formula claimed sole manufacturing rights. The formula was usually highly secret and the preparation usually not patented. For simplicity, both terms, “patent medicines” and “proprietary medicines” will be used interchangeably here.

In the mid-1800’s there were several dozen individual patent medicine producers scattered throughout Vermont, each with their own blend of roots, herbs, water, alcohol and even opiates. Some medicines worked, some didn’t. But the unsophisticated public kept buying, based on misleading advertising, outrageous claims and the “unsolicited” testimonials of famous people. Every conceivable means was used to promote these nostrums - handbills, broadsides, colorful trade cards, calendars, annual almanacs, dose glasses and other giveaway items, and even traveling medicine shows.



[Fig. 1]



[Fig. 2]



[Fig. 3]



[Fig. 4]



[Fig. 5]



[Fig. 6]



[Fig. 7]

One of these early medicines began in 1855, in Waterbury, Vermont, where an enterprising druggist, John M. Henry, began his career in proprietary medicines by offering “Henry’s Vermont Liniment”. An early advertisement described it as “The Best Pain Killer in the World”, and warranted it to be unsurpassed for “Rheumatism, Inflammation, Cramps, Sprains, Bruises, Cuts, Burns, Flesh Wounds, Spasms, Toothache, Sudden Coughs, Colds, Bowel Complaints, Dysentery, etc.”

Soon afterward, Mr. Henry expanded his business to become the wholesale agent, and later the manufacturer of “Reverend N.H. Downs Vegetable Balsamic Elixir”, a 25-year old remedy for coughs, colds, and diseases of the throat and lungs.

By 1867, the fledgling firm, now known as Henry & Company, had grown to recognized stature as the sole proprietor and manufacturer of several dozen medicines, ointments, dyes and flavoring extracts. In addition, the firm had taken over wholesale distribution of numerous other patent medicines from other manufacturers. Some of the more popular



[Fig. 8]



[Fig. 9]

ones were “Professor Mott’s Magic Hair Invigorator”, from Highgate, Vermont, “Newton’s Panacea” and “Newton’s Jaundice Bitters”, from Norwich, Vermont, and “Dr. Boyce’s Tonic Bitters”, from Rutland, Vermont.



[Fig. 10]

In March of 1867, the firm moved from Waterbury to a small building on Church Street in Burlington and continued its dual role as wholesale druggist and manufacturer of patent medicines. Over the next five years, there were several splits, with Henry & Company eventually ending up as three businesses: John F. Henry & Co. of New York; Henry, Johnson & Lord of Burlington; and Wells, Richardson & Co. of Burlington. Wells, Richardson retained the wholesale drug business, which was run by relatively young men whose sole business experience had been in that field. From that base, they began publicizing their products with great enthusiasm and in less than two years were supplying nearly all the druggist trade in New England and northern New York with patent medicines, chemicals, dyestuffs, paints and Wells Richardson flavoring extracts.

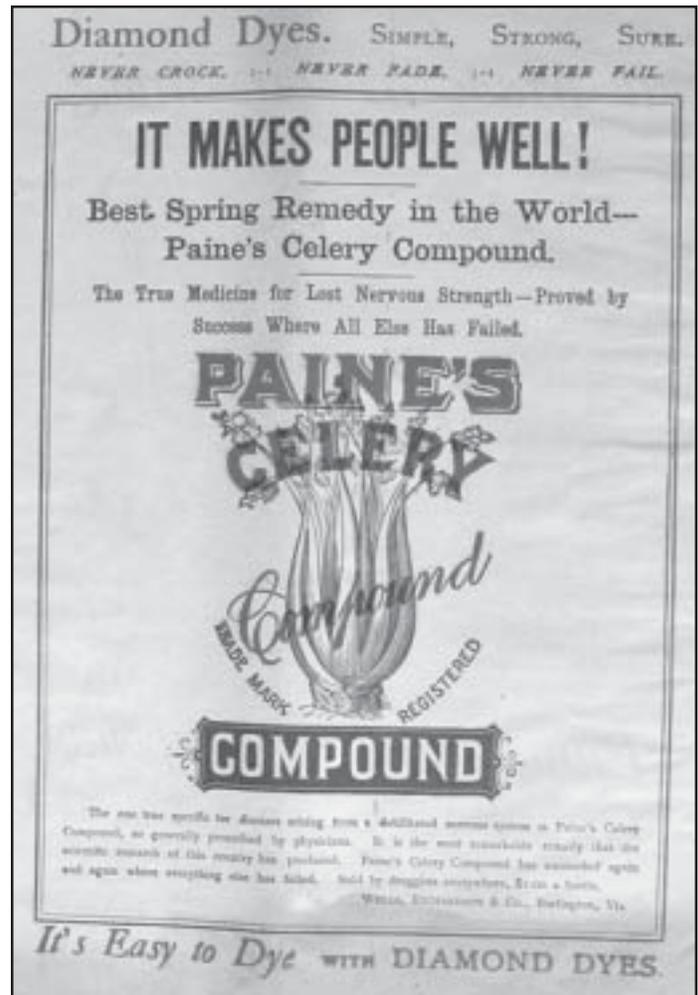
In 1874, they erected a large, commodious building on College Street in Burlington, containing a business office, factory, and warehouse. The 4-story

[Fig. 11]





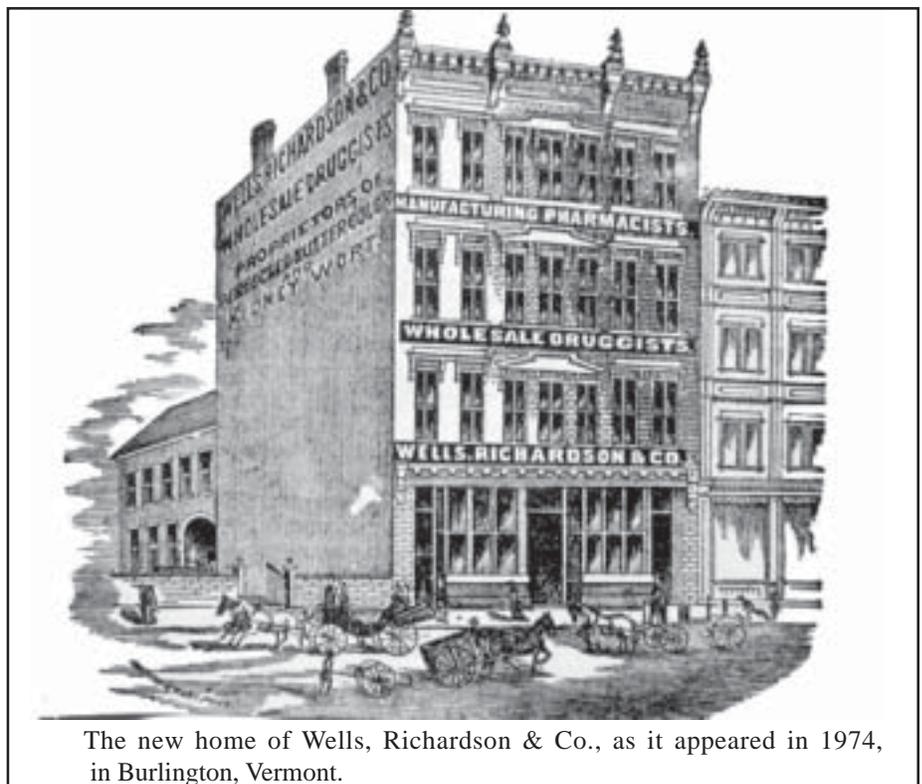
An 1883 Wells, Richardson Almanac, full of ads, claims and testimonials for their various patent medicines and other products.



An 1880 booklet, loaded with “unsolicited” testimonials, praising the miraculous curative powers of *Paines Celery Compound*.

building housed several manufacturing areas, two steam elevators, a chemical lab, and extensive advertising and printing operations. Over the next 25 years, their advertising budget grew from a modest \$4,000 to over \$500,000 a year. Every new product was heavily promoted, but none more so than “Paines Celery Compound”, a blood purifier and nerve tonic. They purchased sole rights to this product from M.K. Paine, a druggist in Windsor, Vermont. The amber, bitters-type bottle, with PAINES / CELERY COMPOUND on two of its recessed panels, was shipped nationwide and has been found in nearly every state in the country. The medicine was a huge money maker for them until the enactment of the Pure Food & Drug Act of 1906. The Celery Compound formula included 21% alcohol.

By contrast to the “big business” of Wells Richardson, another very successful patent medicine was being produced as a one-man operation, in a backyard shed, outside the



The new home of Wells, Richardson & Co., as it appeared in 1974, in Burlington, Vermont.



“M.K. Paine, Druggist & Pharmacist, Manufacturer the Celebrated Green-Mountain Balm of Gilead & Cedar Plaster..”



“Compliments of N.A. Gilbert & Co., Scotch Oil, Cures Spavins, etc., without blister or blemish.”

TRADE CARDS FROM VERMONT PATENT MEDICINES



“Dr. Ingram’s Nervine Pain Extractor. Vegetable Liver Pills. Prepared by Dr. H. A. Ingram & Co., Vergennes, Vt.”



“Higgins T & C Compound, Higgins, Greene & Hyde, Rutland, Vermont.”



“Dr. G. S. Green’s Blood Purifier and Nerve Tonic. ‘Pure Blood Good Health’.”



“Kendall’s Spavin Cure.” Card reads, “Golly! I nebber will let dat pickaninny ride dat yar hoss agin unless he stops usin’ Kendall’s Spavin Cure, ‘cause it limbers him up so. In all my ‘sperience in the hoss line I nebber seed such ‘provement in a animile afore. Facts am stranger dan friction.”



“Lactated Food, 150 meals for \$1.00. It makes them healthy, happy, hearty! That’s why they love it. Pamphlet free. Wells, Richardson & Co., Burlington, Vermont.”

AMBER, SMOOTH BASE, VERMONT MEDICINE BOTTLES

ARNICA & OIL – LINIMENT

C.C. DOTY & CO.

KENDALL'S SPAVIN CURE

(Also, reversed "N"'s variant of above)

KENDALL'S SPAVIN TREATMENT

(Embossed celery stalk) – CELERY / COMPOUND [Fig. 8]

PAINES – CELERY / COMPOUND [Part of Fig. 9, front]

SCOTCH – OIL

SMITH'S – GREEN MOUNTAIN / RENOVATOR – ST. ALBANS, VT [Fig 10]

THORN'S / HOP & BURDOCK / TONIC – BRATTLEBORO, VT.

AQUA, SMOOTH BASE, VERMONT MEDICINE BOTTLES

ANTI-APOPLECTINE / AND / PARALYSIS CURE – DR. G.S.GREEN –

ENOSBURGH FALLS, VT.

BANCROFT'S / INSTANT RELIEF – MARSHFIELD, VT.

REV. N.H. DOWNS – VEGETABLE – BALSAMIC – ELIXIR

HAMILTON'S – OLD ENGLISH – BLACK OIL

HENRY'S /ARNICA /TINCTURE

HENRY'S /ELECTRIC / OINTMENT

HENRY'S / HIVE SYRUP

HIGGINS T&C COMPOUND, RUTLAND, VT.

A.O. HOOD – EXCELSIOR / LINIMENT – WINOOSKI, VT.

DR. H.A. INGHAM'S – NERVE PAIN CURAL

DR. H.A. INGHAM'S – NERVE PAIN EXTR

KENDALL'S – SPAVIN CURE – FOR HUMAN FLESH

NEWTON'S - OPODELDOC

PAINES – CELERY COMPOUND (yes, in aqua!) [Fig. 11]

S. SMITH / GREEN MOUNTAIN RENOVATOR / EAST GEORGIA, VT.

SMITH'S / GREEN MOUNTAIN / RENOVATOR – EAST GEORGIA, VT.

WEEKS – MAGIC – COMPOUND – ST JOHNSBURY, VT

In addition to the proprietary medicine bottles listed above, Walton's Vermont Register, a business directory published annually during the late 1800's and early 1900's, contained advertisements for the following patent medicines:

Allard's Black Oil, Enosburgh Falls

N.K. Brown Teething Cordial, Montpelier

Brown's Bronchial Elixir, Burlington

Brown's Fluid Extract Buchu, Burlington

Dr. Doty's Pain Panacea, Bradford

Dr. Doty's Cough Balsam, Bradford

Dr. G.S. Green's Blood Purifier and Nerve Tonic, Enosburgh Falls

Dr. B.J. Kendall's Pectoral Elixir, Enosburgh Falls

Maxham's Magic Balm, Bethel

C.F. Storrs Pulmonary Balsam, Winooski

O.F. Woods Vegetable Dysentery Cordial, Westminster & Bellows Falls

Most of these undoubtedly came in bottles, some probably embossed.

It is particularly interesting to note that the most successful patent medicine proprietors did not rely on the curative powers of their products but on the power of advertising. It was an age of promoters and salesman, entrepreneurs and free-wheeling vendors, businessmen and showmen. And somehow, the little state of Vermont, with its agricultural economy and rural lifestyle, managed to capture more than its fair share of the patent medicine industry. Among its populace, it seems that the Green Mountain State had an abundance of independent, no nonsense, sometimes shrewd individuals who had learned that "It doesn't matter what it is.....if you promote it, they'll buy it!"

Photo Descriptions:

Heading: Map of Vermont, from O. W. Gray's *Atlas of the United States, with General Maps of the World*, published in 1874.

[Fig. 1] SMITH'S - GREEN MOUNTAIN - RENOVATOR, EAST GEORGIA, VT "Stoddard" amber, iron pontil mark, 6 3/4" tall.

[Fig. 2] I. NEWTON'S - PANCREA - PURIFIER - OF THE - BLOOD - NORWICH, VT., yellow-amber, "open" pontil scar, 7 1/2" tall.

[Fig. 3] SANDERSON'S / BLOOD RENOVATOR / MILTON, VT., aqua.

[Fig. 4] SMITH'S - ANODYNE / COUGH DROPS - MONTPELIER, aqua, "open" pontil, 5 1/4" tall.

[Fig.. 5] VERMONT LINIMENT, both the J. M. HENRY & SONS and the JOHN F. HENRY & CO. variants. Both are from WATERBURY, VT.

[Fig. 6] T. H. TAYLOR - BRATTLEBORO / VT., aqua, "open" pontil, 8 1/2" tall.

[Fig. 7] DR. WOOD'S / AROMATIC SPIRIT - BELLOWS FALLS, V.T., aqua, iron pontil mark, 7 1/2" tall.

[Fig. 8] Earliest CELERY COMPOUND, cabin-shouldered, amber, with an embossed celery stalk on opposite panel.

[Fig. 9] *Paines Celery Compound*, *Baxter's Mandrake Bitters*, and a sampling of Well's, Richardson's other early products.

[Fig. 10] A "St. Albans" *Green Mountain Renovator* and box, circa. 1898.

[Fig. 11] Later PAINE'S - CELERY COMPOUND, in scarce aqua color.

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