Healing the masses

In North Carolina, as in other states, the decades after the Civil War witnessed a dramatic rise in the number of patent medicines that were sold in general stores, by pitchmen from wagons, and through mail orders. Many of these concoctions promoted themselves as "surefired" cures for illnesses ranging from deadly cancers to the common cold. While the curative claims of these nostrums were usually bogus, their widespread promotion in newspapers and through colorful signage established mass-marketing strategies that continue in American advertising to this day.

"Patent medicine"

Patent medicine generally categorizes the assorted tonics, pills, ointments, powders, and other compounds that in the 1800s and early 1900s were widely sold. Although many of the names and label designs of these dubious mixtures were trademarked, very few of the "medicines" were ever officially patented by the federal government and had their ingredients and their alleged health benefits recorded in Washington, D.C.

⇐ Trade card for J. H. Wells, Druggist, ca. 1900.

⇐ Advertisement for Goose Grease Liniment, undated.
Log cabin pharmacy, 1910

Introducing modern medicines to the backwoods of North Carolina and coaxing residents away from their homemade remedies were no easy tasks, especially for a woman in the early 1900s. Shown here is one of the first pharmacies in Henderson County. Located between Edneyville and Bat Cave, it was operated by Dorothy Sharpe, who is standing at the right in the photograph.

⇐ Photo from the North Carolina Collection Photo Archives.

Turpentine, Kerosene, & Vinegar

“Folk medicine,” like patent medicine, should not be dismissed or categorized entirely as quackery, although there were many outlandish treatments that mountain folk used to combat diseases and relieve their aches and pains. Turpentine, kerosene, and vinegar served often as bases in homemade liniments and tonics. Among the many remedies documented in this
[Believing that a headache was caused by an excessive flow of blood to the head, some residents tied a rag or bandanna (some believed it must be red) tightly around the head to curtail blood flow. More often than not, the rag was soaked in turpentine, camphor, or vinegar.


The "curing powers" of tobacco

While various cancers, emphysema, and other deadly illnesses are well documented and firmly linked to tobacco, for over four centuries smoking...
"Come back strong"

Judging by the number of medications that have originated in North Carolina for indigestion and headaches, our Tar Heel ancestors must have suffered mightily from "sour stomachs" and chronic head pain. Products such as Bromo Seltzer, Vick's VapoRub, and numerous headache powders, including Goody's, Stanback, and B.C., have their origins in this state. Even Pepsi-Cola originally sold in New Bern, N.C., as "Brad's Drink" was marketed in the 1890s as a cure for dyspepsia (upset stomachs).

Vick's VapoRub

A popular remedy for the common cold and congestion, "Vick's
VapoRub" was invented by Lunsford Richardson (1854-1919), a drug-store owner in Selma, N.C. This ointment is composed principally of camphor and menthol, an ingredient derived from mint and other plants. In 1898, Richardson named his "home-brewed" product after his brother-in-law Vick.

Dear Madam:

Allow us to introduce to you little Miss Emma Hazeltine Woodley, the charming eight-months-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. M. M. Woodley of Lancaster, S.C. Early in life, several months ago we should say, this little lady learned that there is no drink like Pepsi-Cola and she has been drinking it daily since that time.

That it agrees with her is evidenced by the accompanying picture. She is as fat as a butterball, has a disposition as sunny as the clime of Italy and is growing stronger and prettier as the days go by.

Mr. and Mrs. Woodley say that Pepsi-Cola did it. Little Miss Emma can't talk yet but when she grows old enough, she will daily give praise to this delicious beverage.

The above is said seriously and by request of Mr. and Mrs. Woodley who realize fully their moral responsibility in declaring Pepsi-Cola an absolutely harmless, wholesome beverage, delightful, refreshing, nourishing and beneficial to young and old.

Ask your doctor. He knows.

Give the children all they can hold. Pepsi-Cola is downright good for their health. Order it by the case; it is an economical custom now well established in the best of homes—twenty-four bottles cost only ninety cents.

Yours truly,

THE PEPSI-COLA BOTTLING WORKS.

"Fat as a butterball"

Invented by New Bern druggist Caleb Bradham in the 1890s, Pepsi-Cola continues to be marketed today with the slogan "Born in the Carolinas." This book examines in detail the history of this refreshment, which was originally sold as a remedy for upset stomachs under the name "Brad's Drink." In 1897, the beverage was renamed Pepsi-Cola to underscore one of its ingredients, pepsin, an enzyme that aids digestion. The Pepsi-Cola Company also touted the benefits of having babies drink their product.
The circa-1905 letter from the bottling works in New Bern encourages mothers to have their babies drink Pepsi. It ems the example of little Emma Woodley, an eight-month-old girl who it claims had grown healthy and "fat as a butterball" enjoying Pepsi everyday.

⇐ Bob Stoddard, *Pepsi: 100 Years* (Los Angeles: General Publishing Group, 1997).

Mass-marketing relief

An advertisement for "Stanback's Headache Powders" dominates the background of this photograph of a parade in downtown Spencer, N.C., during the 1920s.

⇐ Photograph courtesy North Carolina Office of Archives & History.

Bromo-Seltzer

Since it was first formulated in 1888, Bromo-Seltzer is still widely marketed as a liquid remedy for both headaches.
and indigestion. The blue Bromo-Seltzer bottle is the type of container in which the product was sold between 1890 and 1930. The medication's inventor, Isaac Edward Emerson, was a native of Chapel Hill and an 1879 graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1881, he moved to Maryland, where he became a multi-millionaire selling Bromo-Seltzer and other remedies developed by his Emerson Drug Corporation. Later he shared some of his wealth with his alma mater. In 1914, Emerson donated $26,000 to the University to fund the construction of a needed athletic field for baseball and football. Named in his honor, Emerson Field continues to serve the campus as an all-purpose site for intramural sports and other student athletic activities.

Bottle, molded blue glass inscribed with raised lettering on its side “BROMO SELTZER / EMERSON / DRUG CO. / BALTIMORE M.D.” and the numerals “33” on its bottom, ca 1895; height 4” (10 cm), diameter 1.5” (3.6 cm).