As a historian concerned with food and drug regulation and with health quackery in America, I share some of the zeal of pharmacists who collect ephemera related to drugs. Moreover, ephemera constitute for me a significant segment of source material for the history I write. Let me rely on my experience since 1937 to suggest six categories of pharmaceutical ephemera and comment on how I have acquired what I have collected. My collecting as well as my history, let me say with gratitude, have been greatly aided, through most of this span of years, by the always ready and cordial counsel of that consummate collector, the epicure of ephemera, William H. Helfand.

First, then, among categories, patent medicine containers. The bottles and boxes, often with wrappers or packaged pamphlets, make both a colorful and an informative nucleus for a collection. My first major find came in a drugstore of ancient lineage that had just closed in the 1950s in the town of Virden, Illinois. The nostrums I acquired weighted down the trunk of our car as the family drove home to Georgia. Besides national brands, there were neighborhood proprietaries, like Richmond's Celebrated Nervine made in Tuscola and allegedly used in the leading lunatic asylums in the land. The second large accretion came from a friend of mine who was a pharmaceutical company detailman. His territory was the Catskills. He eagerly made my cause his own and sent me boxes of loot gathered as he made his mountainous rounds. Other friends, learning of my interest, added items to my collection. When it came time to design my book on American patent medicines prior to regulation, entitled *The Toadstool Millionaires*, I had a row of bottles photographed for use on the book's endpapers ([figure 1.1](#)). Of course, I continued to collect. After George Griffenhagen and I had written our article on the old English patent medicines in America, republished in 1992 in *Pharmacy in History* after a third of a century, George gave me a Turlington's Balsam vial. L. E. Bush, Jr., a correspondent of mine who became physician in our embassy in Saigon during the Vietnam War searched out proprietaries in the city's shops and mailed them to me just before Saigon fell into enemy hands. Based on my experience, my advice is: Collectors, tell your friends about your hobby. The rich dividends may surprise you. Occasionally I have bought a bottle at an antique show, for example, an Atlanta-made gonorrhea cure, Palmer's Hole in the Wall ([figure 1.2](#)). In Hadacol's heyday, I purchased a bottle at a drugstore to get the box top that would admit me to the Atlanta performance of Dudley LeBlanc's mammoth re-creation of the old-time medicine show ([figure 1.3](#)). The night I went, the emcee was Jack Dempsey, and Hank Williams--who currently is appearing on a postage stamp--and Minnie Pearl helped sing the Hadacol theme song, "What Put the Pep into Grandma." Almost all of my collection of patent medicine bottles, I should say, was gathered up by Michael Harris, when the American Institute of the History of Pharmacy met in Atlanta, and personally carried up to the Smithsonian.

Second to the tangible medicine containers themselves come promotional materials for them, a sprawling category of great fascination because it was patent medicine proprietors who pioneered the psychology of advertising, blazing trails that all hard-sell marketers were eventually to follow. Some lithographic posters were true works of art. In a print shop in New York, I found a multicolored lithograph of a Civil War Zouave promoting Radway's Ready Relief. Critics of quackery also resorted to prints. I bought an eighteen-century English etching that takes shrewd and satirical aim at the rich variety of then current charlatans. And Bill Helfand gave me for my collection a copy of the famous James Gillray print that pillories the late eighteenth-century American import into Britain, Elisha Perkins's metallic tractors.

Chromolithography brought smaller trade cards by the millions, examples of which may still be purchased at flea markets where I got most of mine. Through time, trade cards exhibit many moods and modes of grabbing the observer's attention. Columbus approaches the American shore and finds that Ayer's Sarsaparilla has beat him to the new land. Ayer can also appropriate the sentimental family atmosphere of the Victorian era. Lydia E. Pinkham links her Vegetable Compound for women to the nation's greatest technological achievement of the late nineteenth century, the Brooklyn bridge ([figure 1.4](#)). More accurately, one of Lydia's sons comes down from Massachusetts to open up the New York market and seeks to get a real sign hung from the true bridge but finds the cost prohibitive, so he issues a trade card instead.

Earlier, patent medicine promoters began to issue almanacs, a form of advertising that remained all through the year and rivaled the Bible in prevalence as reading matter in American homes. I was given a sizable
collection by a recently retired antiquarian book dealer whom I had patronized. On another occasion, in
Pittsburgh in the 1950s, I was given several bound volumes of Hostetter almanacs from the company's own
archives (figure 1.5). The successor entrepreneurs who were trying to revive public interest in this famous
eighty-proof Bitters hoped that what I might write would help their commercial mission. This did not
happen. The 1886 almanac was published in nine languages: German, French, Welsh, Norwegian, Swedish,
Dutch, Bohemian, Spanish, and English, with a separate English edition for California.
I am still seeking stereopticon slides that depict drugs. I have a small collection relating to the growing,
harvesting, and processing of foods, but drugs seem not to have made it into this early form of three-D
illustration.
Clipped advertisements from newspapers and magazines come, of course, within the promotional category.
From the Ladies' Home Journal for 1924, I took a pitch for Listerine, whose makers had forsaken curing
the dread diseases to concentrate on curbing halitosis. Beneath the picture of a distraught young woman
was lettered out one of the famous advertising slogans of all time: "Often a bridesmaid but never a bride."
And to return to Hadacol, I cut from the Atlanta Journal during 1950 an advertisement in which promoter
Dudley LeBlanc brazenly paired himself with Abraham Lincoln (figure 1.6).
Pamphlets and books about drugs are a third category, a wide-ranging one indeed, spanning the boundary
between ephemeral and more lasting documents. William Swaim, in the early nineteenth century, had been
a bookbinder before becoming a patent medicine proprietor, so his treatise promoting Swaim's Panacea was
a bound volume (figure 1.7). Criticisms of Swaim and his Panacea were launched by medical societies in
Philadelphia and New York in pamphlets that remained unbound. All these publications I acquired in
second-hand bookstores in New York.
I have a shelf of books assembled through the years that together provide a sort of index to proprietary
medicines, containing brief material, mostly critical, about them. The works include an edition of Charles
Oleson's Secret Nostrums formula book, the three American Medical Association Nostrums and Quackery
volumes, two similar books published by the British Medical Association, John Phillips Street's The
Composition of Certain Patent and Proprietary Medicines, several editions of the American
Pharmaceutical Association's Handbook of Non-Prescription Drugs, and George Griffenhagen's
indispensable assemblage of Henry Holcombe's articles from philatelic journals about the history of firms
that issued private die proprietary medicine stamps in Civil War and Spanish-American War days. I turn to
these sources frequently in trying to answer letters or phone calls asking for information about specific
proprietary medicine brands.
The range of books, old and new, from fiction to monographs, with some relevance to drugs, or quackery
more broadly, or other aspects of food, drug, device, and cosmetic regulation, goes beyond the purse of the
most affluent collector to acquire. Through visits to antique bookstores and perusal of dealer's catalogs, I
have gotten my share and have much enjoyed doing it. These include Samuel Thomson's New Guide to
Health, or Botanic Family Physician, S. Weir Mitchell's fictional Autobiography of a Quack, H. G. Wells's
novel Tono-Bungay about a rascally nostrum promoter, and Grete de Francesco's The Power of the
Charlatan in English translation and in the original Swiss edition. Indeed, my book cases overfloweth.
A fourth category of collectibles for pharmacists is business papers, including old prescriptions, like those
David Cowen and his collaborators have subjected to computer analysis to see if therapeutic practice in the
mid-nineteenth century conformed to contemporary medical theory. My foray into this field consists of the
purchase from a dealer in the mid-fifties of a small collection of nineteenth-century correspondence that
came from Birchall and Owen, an Illinois drugstore. In 1985 an article based on this material was published in
Pharmacy in History as "The Marketing of Patent Medicines in Lincoln's Springfield." Abraham Lincoln
bought ledgers for his law office from Birchall and Owen but apparently not drugs. From another druggist,
Charles Coreau, who was Lincoln's next-door neighbor, I discovered on a recent visit to Springfield, the
future president purchased castor oil and cough candy. This pathway deserves further exploration.
A second small collection of business papers was given me by the man, a friend of mine, charged with
disposing of the archives of an Atlanta drugstore chain when it went out of business. The documents
consist mainly of Patent Office forms from the turn of the century signifying that various proprietary
medicine labels devised by chain officials had been duly registered. This proprietor, Joseph Jacobs, was
one of the "Three Atlanta Pharmacists" I profiled in 1989 in Pharmacy in History.
Regulatory materials relating to drugs constitute a fifth collecting category. Many public documents like
the hearings and reports of congressional committees can be secured by purchase from the Superintendent
of Documents or without cost by request from one's senator or representative. Among those I acquired was
the multivolume set of hearings conducted by Senator Estes Kefauver prior to enactment of the 1962
amendments to food and drug law that contained the proof-of-efficacy provision regarding the release of new drugs. When I began research, the Food and Drug Administration records officer gave me indexes to the first 20,000 Notices of Judgment published at the conclusion of cases brought under the 1906 Food and Drugs Act. The indexes are a most useful part of my reference shelf earlier mentioned. That records officer, John McCann, also gave me two volumes of guides to the decimal index system by which the Bureau of Chemistry, later FDA, began about 1920 to file its miscellaneous records. Case jackets and the records of dealing with companies that are regulated form separate archival series. The miscellaneous records, as of the time of my indexes, ran from 000.1, charts showing agency organization, to 883.93, ammonia water, the 900's being left open for use by the branches of FDA. One of the index volumes is numerical, the other alphabetical, from abalones to zylose sugar. Of course, the numbering system has been periodically updated. Such volumes are indispensable in planning research related to Food and Drug Administration regulatory activities.

Sixthly, and finally, and sadly, as all collectors know, not every item that one desires can be acquired. A rare prize may be available but too costly, or it may already be securely in the possession of another collector, a library, an archive, or a museum. Sometimes, in such cases, one's purpose may be served, if only second best, by acquiring an image. Documents, including pictorial ones, may be photographed or photocopied in some other way. Occasionally, the collector's own camera may get the job done. For example, I photographed a mammoth poster on the wall of an old country store in the mountains of north Georgia showing George Washington, the Father of Our Country, in the act of promoting an expectorant and a vermifuge. And I captured on film a medical mountebank vending his dubious wares in a Renaissance Italian city, the scene a vignette in a broader urban design on antique wallpaper exhibited in a wallpaper museum in a castle in Kassel, Germany.

Sometimes images come from life. The Italian mountebank may be deemed an ancestor of American medicine showmen. This mode of nostrum promotion flourished in the late nineteenth century and dwindled almost to extinction during World War II. In the autumn of 1979, the Smithsonian Institution focused its folk-culture attention on folk medicine. Included was a revival of the old-time medicine show guided by Brooks McNamara, author of the excellent historical volume on the subject, Step Right Up, and by William Helfand. The show was presented by real entertainers and spielers called back from retirement. Rehearsals were held in the Harrington Hotel. I was in Washington to participate in a symposium on folk medicine, so I observed rehearsals and attended the first performance on the Mall, making images of what took place. First came entertainment: music by Greasy Medline, Snuffy Jenkins, Pappy Sherrill, and Hammie Nixon; then a skit by Mrs. West, Bronco West, and Bob Noel. Finally, Doc Milton Bartok made his lugubrious pitch. Later, it needs to be added, the show moved to a North Carolina village where it was filmed for television, then traveled to New York City for a run at the American Place Theatre on 46th Street.

Bottles and boxes, promotional materials, books and pamphlets, business papers, regulatory documents, and images, six allied categories of intriguing collectibles for pharmacists. They can quicken the heart with the thrill of the chase and can inform the brain, adding new dimensions of knowledge and perspective.