

My Drug Store Days

William B. Jensen

Department of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0172

I first decided to become a chemist in the 5th grade and soon began amassing a home laboratory and an extra large *Chemcraft* chemistry set (figures 1 and 2). By junior high school I had won several science fairs (figure 3) and had been given the run of the school's science equipment and chemicals. Diligent school councilors had noted my obsession and had dutifully mapped out what science and math courses I was destined to take through the end of high school in order to prepare for a successful major in chemistry in college.

As the oldest of three children of an alcoholic sign painter and a public librarian, I knew my parents could not afford to send me to college, since, on many an occasion, they could barely afford to pay the rent. Having, at that time, no concept of scholarships or student loans, it finally occurred to me near the end of the 8th grade that I would have to get a job and begin saving. The optimal choice was, of course, to get a job that was in some way related to chemistry and, given the limited chemical horizons of Wausau, Wisconsin, in the early 1960s, the most obvious choice – or so I thought – was to seek employment in a drug store.



Figure 1. At age 11 with my first Chemcraft chemistry set, Xmas 1960.

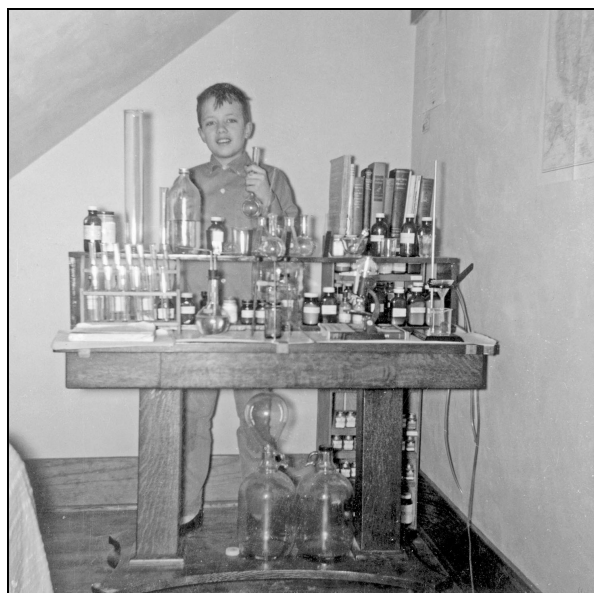


Figure 2. At age 13 with my home laboratory which at the time fit on an old library table in one corner of my bedroom.

This choice was also reenforced by a number of other factors. My youngest maternal uncle, Clyde Tracy, functioned as a role model for me when I was growing up. He had gone to college, so I would go to college; he had worked for the post office as a student, so I would later work for the post office; and, as a young teenager, he had worked in a drug store. By this time I had also begun reading history of chemistry, and especially Mary Elvira Weeks' lavishly illustrated *Discovery of the Elements*, and knew that several famous chemists had worked in drug stores – most notably the Swedish chemist, Carl Wilhelm Scheele, in the 18th century, and the German chemist, Carl Friederich Mohr, in the 19th century – so I erroneously reasoned there must be something inherently chemical about such an environment and, indeed, something that might even prove pertinent to my own education as a future chemist. Lastly, I had just finished reading a semi-autobiographical book by the American humorist, Richard Armour, entitled *Drug Store Days*, which dealt with his own adventures as a young boy working in a typical small town, turn-of-the-century, drug store,

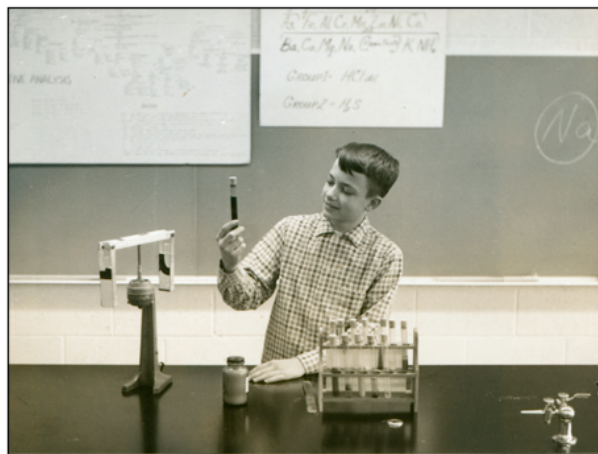


Figure 3. Practice lecture at age 14 for the regional science fair. My homemade centrifuge made from an inverted malted-milk mixer is to the left and the flow charts for my project on semi-micro qualitative chemical analysis are in the background.

and had enjoyed it enormously (1). Being naive about the liberties taken by most authors with the naked truth and especially by those dedicated to making it seem humorous, I imagined that I was destined to have similar memorable adventures. In retrospect, I forgive Armour his exaggerations, and in honor of the pleasure his small book gave me, I have decided to purloin its title for this autobiographical essay.

The Pradel Drug Store

On driving west on Scott Street in the 1960s, through downtown Wausau and over the bridges to the Wisconsin River, one would encounter the main, albeit rather small, business district for the westside of town. On the right was the huge, sprawling Curtis and Yale wood-working plant (where my future father-in-law worked) and on the left a line of small businesses in a row of tottering wood and brick 19th-century buildings, including a tire store, a key and lock store, a Buster Brown shoe store and, most famously, the original location of Sam's Pizza. When one came to the end of the Curtis and Yale plant, the way was blocked by the imposing early 20th-century building for the Palace Clothiers store, in front of which the street forked to the left and right and changed its name to 1st Avenue. Going right, around the intervening block on Callen Street, one encountered a series of bars, a phone company, a chiropractor's office, a dry cleaners, and, on coming to 3rd Avenue, a gas station and a used car lot. Circumventing the intervening block to the left instead on Clarke Street, one encountered several filling stations on the corner, a farm implement store and M&J

hardware on the left, and a drug store and hobby shop on the right, followed by Citizens' State Bank (with doctor's offices on the 2nd floor), Krambo's supermarket, and then 3rd Avenue once again with yet another filling station, a store specializing in takeout fried chicken, and the local labor temple and bar.

My family was intimately familiar with this business district, since, for many years, our various rented apartments were within walking distance. We frequented all of its stores and availed ourselves of its professional services, including banking, doctors, dentists, chiropractors, and, in my father's case, many of the bars. My mother and siblings belonged to the local Mormon congregation. This was too small to have its own church building so we met instead on Sundays in the labor hall above the bar at the corner of Clarke and 3rd Avenue. Given these facts, it is not surprising that it was in the drug store, known as Pradel's, located at 112 Clarke Street, just around the corner from Palace Clothiers, that I found my first job.

I am no longer clear on just how this opportunity came my way. My mother seems to think that she either saw it posted at the public library, where she worked, or was told of it by our teller at the Citizens' State Bank. I am dubious of the first explanation, as I was to later learn that the job was usually passed from one boy to another by word of mouth rather than advertised. The second explanation is more probable, as most adults in my world, including even bank tellers, were well aware of my interest in science and often helped and encouraged me whenever possible.

In any case, I was hired in the summer of 1962, just after I completed the 8th grade. Since I was 14 at the time, I had to file for a special work permit from the state and could only work half time, which meant that I worked 20 hours per week. I was paid 75¢ per hour and thus made a whopping \$15.00 per week. Every Friday, I would turn right on leaving the drug store and march next door to Citizens' State Bank to dutifully deposit \$10.00 of my weekly check in my newly established college fund. This was often hard for me to do, as I dearly wanted to turn left instead and spend it in the "Pet and Toy Hobby Shop" which shared the building with the drug store. This wasn't because I was an avid builder of airplane models or a collector of model trains, but because at that time the hobby shop carried a line of laboratory apparatus and chemicals under the brand name of "Perfect" (figure 4), which specifically targeted the amateur home chemist, and I would have infinitely preferred to spend my newly acquired wealth in building up my home laboratory instead. In retrospect, of course, the entire scheme seems ridiculous, since, at the rate of \$10.00 per week, I would have saved a mere \$2,080 if I had

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managed to stick with the job until graduation from high school four years later – a sum that would have barely gotten me through a year of college at the going rate in the late 1960s.

Learning the Routine

As I recall, I worked from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm Monday through Thursday, 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm on Fridays, and from 9:00 am to noon on Saturdays, though, from time to time, I would work Saturday afternoon instead. I was trained in my duties by an older boy named Chuck Giese, who had already worked there for some years and was a favorite of the owner. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, he continued to work there for some years after I had left and also trained my eventual successor. My duties consisted of tending the cash register, restocking shelves, dusting, sweeping the floor each evening after closing, and occasionally delivering prescriptions to elderly shut-ins on my second-hand, English, three-speed bicycle, which I rode to work each day after school when the weather permitted.

There were also occasional special duties. Every Friday, shortly before closing, it was my job to steam the cigars in the display case near the front door. This required that I heat a pan of water to boiling in the back room using an outdated electrical heating device that was dropped directly into the water and which I always suspected of being fully capable of electrocuting me should I be foolish enough to test the water with my finger while it was still plugged in. Once it was boiling, I was required to carry the pan of scalding hot water the full length of the drug store and place it carefully on top of the open cigar boxes in the case without spilling any. I would then close the back of the case, wait to see whether the glass top, sides, and front had properly clouded over with steam, and then leave it overnight.

When I worked Saturday afternoons, I was usually required to spend my spare time wrapping the boxes of women's sanitary napkins kept in the display near the front counter in brown paper – a quaintly Victorian service that we proudly provided to our female customers under the pretense of preserving their privacy. Whether this really worked is debatable since every one concerned knew what was really in the plain brown packages. I distinctly recall working one Saturday afternoon when a girl I went to Junior High School with came into the store to make such a purchase. I knew what she wanted the moment she entered. Spotting me behind the counter and no pharmacist in sight, she immediately froze and her face took on a look of sheer panic. There was a long case of greeting cards and birthday cards to the immediate right of the center



Figure 4. Some chemical bottles and a box of test tubes bearing the “Perfect” brand name that was once a staple of hobby shops throughout the United States (Oesper Collections, University of Cincinnati).

aisle that extended the entire length of the store, from the front door almost to the service counter, and to this she stumbled. She consumed a full 15 minutes slowly making her way up one side and down the other, picking up one card after another, and looking around every few minutes in the desperate hope of spotting the pharmacist, who, unknown to her, was probably sleeping at the desk in the back room. Finally, all hope gone, she proceeded to the display of ominous brown boxes, picked out one, and set it on the counter in front of me, while mumbling in a barely audible voice – “It’s for my mother.”

The special job I hated the most, however, was cleaning the front windows on Saturday morning, both inside and outside, with a bucket of hot soapy water, a sponge, and a squeegee on a pole, especially in the winter. Every missed speck of dirt and every streak of unremoved rinse water were clearly visible on a sunny morning from the darkened interior of the pharmacy and, try as I might, I never mastered the art of removing all of them.

The Wrong Role Model

The building at 112 Clarke Street that housed the Pradel Drug Store was built around 1900. It contained two store fronts and, according to the Wausau City Directory, by 1912 a young pharmacist by the name of George William Pradel was operating a drug store in the left side of the building, even though a larger, more established, pharmacy owned by William Albers was located just around the corner on 1st Avenue next to the future site of Palace Clothiers (2, 3). Pradel maintained his store until his death at age 54 in 1934 (4),



Figure 5. Typical 19th-century or early 20th-century pharmacy display bottles, also called furniture bottles, like those I discovered on the basement landing at Pradel's Drug Store.

after which his widow apparently continued the business for some years by relying on a variety of hired pharmacists. However, sometime in the 1940s, she finally sold it to a pharmacist in her employ named Ewald C. Schulz, and it was Schulz who was still running it under the Pradel name in the 1960s and who was responsible for hiring me.

When writing the first draft of this essay I could not, for the life of me, remember Schulz's first name, probably because I was required to always call him Mr. Schulz and so never knew what it was in the first place. Luckily, I later discovered an old tax return which gave his full name. When I first met him, he was a heavy-set, bald man in his late 50s who lived in a ranch-style house on the west hill and who drove a Cadillac. Since he employed two other pharmacists – one in his 30s, who was actually a nephew, and the other quite elderly, whom he may have inherited from the widow Pradel – he seldom worked in the store himself. This arrangement suited me just fine as I soon came to loath the man.

If I had expected some kind of mentoring from Schulz in the science of pharmacy, let alone chemistry, I was soon to be disappointed. As far as I could determine, he had no interest in either subject, but had instead degenerated into a petty, local businessman obsessed with maximizing his profits by any means pos-

sible, and it was only the latter wisdom that he was willing to impart to me. Thus he proudly explained to me that he had cleverly retained the Pradel name for the store so as not to lose the loyalty of its original customers. Sometime after purchasing the business he had paid a firm of manufacturing chemists in Chicago to make up a large variety of generic products (mostly in the line of hair care) which we sold under the Pradel label in order to save on overhead and of which we had many additional cases in storage in the basement.

I doubt whether either of the other two pharmacists were paid much. Schulz had helped finance his nephew's sojourn in pharmacy school and I think the nephew accepted low wages as part of a scheme to pay him back. As for the elderly pharmacist, I was once asked to deliver a package to him at his home on his day off and was shocked to discover that he lived in a run-down, single-story, working-class house on the southwest side of town that was definitely substandard compared to my own home.

The same desire for extreme economy was also apparently behind the practice of hiring underage boys to perform the grunt work around the pharmacy. Indeed, in searching the internet for references to the Pradel Drug Store, I discovered the 2010 obituary of a former Wausau resident named Gordon Graveen which stated that as a teenager he had worked at the Pradel Drug Store (5). Based on his birth date, this was probably between 1945, when Graveen turned 14, and the early 1950s, when he was drafted to fight in the Korean War. Given the starting date, Graveen may well have been the first in a line of teenagers hired by Schulz after acquiring the business from Pradel's widow. The obituary also stated that he was paid \$6.00 per week, or roughly a third of what I was to receive nearly two decades later.

The true turning point in my relations with Schulz came, however, with my discovery of the shelves on the landing to the basement. These contained a collection of older bottles of chemicals and drugs, some old pharmacy and chemistry texts dating from around 1900, and about a dozen fancy, glass-stoppered, pharmacy display bottles with hand-painted labels (figure 5) – the pitiful remnants of the original pharmacy. I dearly wanted these for my home laboratory, but when I asked Schulz if I could purchase them, he refused. He explained that, after purchasing the business he decided to modernize it, so he ripped out the original dark oak shelving, drawers and counters and replaced them with its current, circa 1940, fixtures done in a sort of blond, fake, birch-bark finish. He then took the antique display bottles, of which the original pharmacy literally contained hundreds, out behind the store and smashed them with a sledge hammer. Only about a

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dozen were left when he discovered that they were probably worth a great deal of money to antique dealers. He had no interest in using the few survivors to decorate the store, but was squirreling them away on the theory that, the longer he kept them, the more they would be worth when he finally decided to sell them. To say the least, I was totally appalled by this story, though Schulz seemed to take pride in it as yet another example of his extreme business acumen.

The few occasions when Schulz stood in for one of the other pharmacists produced additional stress. When either the nephew or the elderly pharmacist were on duty, they generally remained in the back room, unless specifically called upon to consult with a customer. There they would busy themselves making up prescriptions, reading the newspaper, or dozing, and I was left to my own devices while I performed my appointed duties. When Schulz was in the store it was an entirely different story. He seemed obsessed with the idea that he wasn't getting his money's worth from his employees and was always noting how much time it took me or one of the other pharmacists to perform this or that task, and would admonish us if he thought we were taking too long to complete it. This was particularly the case when I was sent to the basement to retrieve items for restocking the shelves. If he thought I was down there too long, he would shout down the stairs or even come down himself, apparently in the hope of catching me red handed in the act of either napping or drinking up our surplus stocks of wine.

He was also not above interfering when one was in the act of waiting on a customer. Friday evenings were particularly busy as many of the workers at the nearby Curtis and Yale plant would come into the store to cash their pay checks and to purchase cigarettes and liquor. One such Friday, when the store was particularly packed, one of the plant workers asked me for a package of Trojan brand prophylactics. I had sold these before when working with the other two pharmacists and knew that they were kept in the back room in an old, white, metal, ice-cream cooler that no longer worked, and so I went back and pulled out a box. Schulz was sitting at the desk in the center of the room watching me and, as I walked past him with the item in question, he suddenly shouted at me, "What the hell do you think you're doing?" I explained that the item had been requested by a customer, whereupon he grabbed the box from me and stormed out to the cash register, where he began haranguing the man by shouting "What the God-damn hell do you mean asking a kid for something like that?" while the poor man shriveled up from embarrassment and the rest of the customers stared in disbelief.

At age 14, I was not even sure "what a thing like

that" was used for, though I later formulated a theory on the matter, only to be thoroughly confused once more when I discovered, while dusting, that we carried an entire line of prophylactic hair brushes. In light of my tentative theory, I could not even begin to imagine what these might be used for. Little did I know at the time that the word "prophylactic" simply meant "sanitary" and, being a typical teenager, it never entered my mind to look the word up in a dictionary. One might think that an attentive teenager would have learned more about the facts of sex working in a drug store than I did, but in actuality the opportunities were rather limited and often created more mysteries than they solved. Why, for example, did we keep the money from the sale of prophylactics and cigarettes in a separate drawer next to the cash register? This was never explained to me, though I was admonished, on pain of death, never to mix the two sources of income. It may be that it was illegal for the drug store, let alone an underage boy, to sell the prophylactics and that Schulz was merely protecting himself – though yet again none of this was ever explained to me.

The only other source of information – and a highly unreliable one at that – was the magazine rack to the right of the front door. This featured several disreputable publications having front covers showing women in skimpy garb being tortured by middle-aged men in Nazi uniforms. Though I was in charge of renewing the magazines on the rack as new monthly issues came in, the unsold older issues were carefully counted and returned to the distributor and I did not dare look inside. However, on one occasion I did discover some older copies in the basement and, since this allowed for greater privacy, I did peek, only to find that the contents did not live up to the promise of the covers.

The Unintended Fruits of Modernization

Being located in a typical late 19th - early 20th century store front, the space which the pharmacy occupied was narrow and deep. It was divided into just two rooms, with the front two-thirds serving as the store proper and the back third as the dispensing area for the pharmacists. The wall separating the two rooms had two openings, one on each side of the front service counter, and each aligned with the outer most aisles of the store. The side walls of the back room were lined with home-made shelving and held large gallon-sized, brown-glass bottles of various commercial elixirs, mostly from the Parke-Davis Company. These bottles were not unattractive and the pharmacists later gave me some that had been emptied for use in my home laboratory, though I doubt that I ever owned a gallon of any chemical other than water.

The notorious ice cream cooler occupied the back wall of the dispensing room and was located in front of two windows that looked out on the parking lot behind the store, and I believe there was also an aging refrigerator for the storage of insulin and other perishables. In the rear left-hand corner of the room was the door to the basement and in the right-hand corner a matching door that opened onto the foyer for the back door to the building and the stairs to the apartments located above the pharmacy and hobby shop. On Sunday morning we would use this back door to sell liquor to various local ministers. I was once taken upstairs to the unoccupied apartment above the pharmacy, which contained only the crates of liquor that Schulz was storing in the various empty rooms. The apartment above the hobby store, on the other hand, was still occupied by the elderly woman who owned the building, though I cannot recall whether this was the widow Pradel herself.

In the center of the dispensing room was a desk and several chairs for the pharmacists and, along the wall separating the two rooms and filling the entire space between the two openings, was the only surviving section of the pharmacy's original oak cabinetry, though Schulz had painted it, as well as the shelving on the side walls, a sickly, yellowish cream color. The upper shelves of this imposing fixture contained the bulk stock bottles of various commercial pills and capsules, while the lower drawers were filled with a variety of empty bottles for use in preparing prescriptions. On the counter itself was a scotch-tape dispenser, a typewriter for printing the labels for the prescription bottles, and a series of plastic pill-sorting trays provided gratis by either Parke-Davis or Upjohn. These



Figure 6. The interior of the Palace Drug Store in downtown Wausau, circa 1900, illustrating the arrangement of counters and shelving typical of 19th century businesses. Pradel may have clerked in this store before starting his own. Both the store and the building were long gone by my day.

consisted of a plastic square divided into smaller areas to facilitate counting. The pharmacist would select the proper bulk bottle of pills, dump some onto the tray, and use a spatula to count out the required number. These he would flick into a plastic gutter that ran along one side of the tray and which he would then close with a plastic cover that created a cylinder that terminated in a funnel-like opening at one end. Removing the unwanted excess pills from the sorting area, the pharmacist would then tip the cylinder opening over the mouth of an empty prescription bottle and dump the counted pills into it.

I cannot recall whether there was also a small glass-enclosed torsion balance. However, there was a collection of two or three glass measures and a glass funnel for dispensing liquid prescriptions from the large bottles along the side walls – but that was all. I never saw the pharmacists actually make anything themselves. Their lives seemed to consist entirely of moving commercially prepared pills and liquids from large stock bottles to smaller prescription bottles and typing out labels. Many years later, when I became a Professor of Chemistry at the University of Cincinnati, I prepared a display for the local section of the American Chemical Society in connection with the Bicentennial of Cincinnati dealing with the history of chemistry in the city. Many of the early members of its various local chemical societies had been pharmacists who owned actual manufacturing pharmacies. In one of the captions to the display, I observed that the design and preparation of new drugs had long since passed from the hands of the commercial pharmacist to the hands of university-trained research chemists. The Dean of the University's School of Pharmacy took great umbrage at my comment and I received a note from him inviting me to visit the School of Pharmacy and learn just what a modern pharmacist really did. I sent him a reply, observing that, as a teenager, I had actually worked in a pharmacy and knew exactly what they did, or rather what they did not do.

In addition to the service counter in front of the dividing wall, the original store area had also been lined along both walls with counters behind which resided most of the store's stock, arrayed either on shelves that reached to the ceiling or in the drawers that composed the lower part of the cabinetry. This left only a narrow area in the center for the customer, who did not serve himself, but rather asked the clerk for each item (figure 6). The original Albers Drug Store next to Palace Clothiers was still organized in this fashion, though in my day it was called Young's Drug Store. I use to buy chemicals for my home laboratory from the elderly pharmacist who owned it and recall being fascinated by a large cardboard poster of a fa-

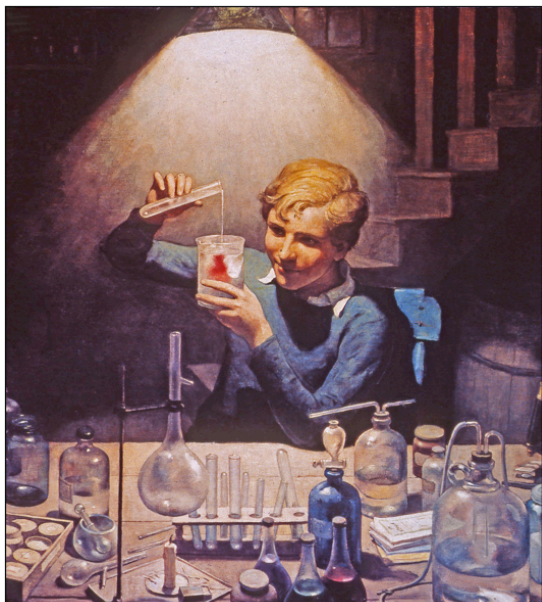


Figure 7. The famous N. C. Wyeth painting of a boy in his basement laboratory, a poster of which hung in Young’s Pharmacy and which so fascinated me as a boy.

amous N. C. Wyeth painting depicting a young boy in his basement laboratory (figure 7) that resided on top of one of the store’s cabinets. The same was true of the Ploss Drug Store on Main Street (using this term generically, as it was actually labelled 3rd Street) and the Hoffman Drug store in the small town of Gresham, Wisconsin, near where my aunt Kathy lived, both of which retained their original layout and ambience well into my college years. Nor was this layout particular to 19th-century drug stores. The original Janke Book and Stationary Store on Main near Ploss Drug was laid out in the same manner (figure 8), as were many of the local neighborhood corner grocery stores that were rapidly disappearing during these years under the onslaught of the large commercial supermarket chains.

When Schulz modernized the store, he replaced the side counters with small, shoulder-high, shelves for customer self-service, and he did the same with the original wall cabinets, thus creating three aisles for the store. Since the wall shelving also had to be customer friendly, and so could not be as high as the original cabinets had been, space had to be optimized. As a result, the new wall shelves ran the entire length of the store and covered the door to the rest room, which was located on the right-hand wall near the center of the pharmacy under the stairs to the overhead apartments. This door had originally been behind one of the side counters, but to provide access under the new arrangement, Schulz had to contrive that the shelving section in front of the door was mounted on casters and

could be pulled out to access the rest room when necessary. To keep this shelving section as light as possible, it held hair care products, including my old nemesis, the prophylactic hair brushes. It was drilled into me that we were never, under any circumstances, to reveal the existence of this contrivance to the customers. Hence, when one of the employees went to the rest room, the other rolled the section back into place. When finished, the rest room occupant would knock loudly on the door, and, if the coast was clear, his fellow employee would once again roll the section away from the door and release him

One evening when I was working the store with the younger pharmacist, we experienced a long lull and so he decided to use the rest room. I had no sooner rolled the false shelving section back into place then the store began to fill with customers – there must have been four or five. Half way through checking the first one out, I heard the pharmacist knock. Of course all the customers also heard the mysterious knocking coming from the hair products section and I cannot recall what bogus story I invented to explain it. I think it took me a full 15 minutes to check out all of the customers by which time the knocking had become a furious pounding with the fists. When I finally succeeded in freeing him, the pharmacist was livid with rage and I had to remind him that I was merely following company policy. Such are the unintended fruits of modernization.

Boredom, Cough Drops, and Patent Medicines

Earlier I stated that the part of the job I hated most was cleaning the front windows on Saturday mornings, but this is not completely true. What I really hated most



Figure 8. The interior of the Janke Book and Stationary Store in downtown Wausau, circa 1925, illustrating the persistence of the 19th-century arrangement of counters and stock shelves.



Figure 9. A period ad for *Pine Brothers Glycerin Cough Drops*.

were the bouts of sheer boredom. Even when not admonished by Schulz to do your job at twice the normal speed, the fact remained that there were often long periods of down time after you had finished your prescribed tasks and during which no customers appeared. Unfortunately it was absolutely verboten to acknowledge this fact. God forbid that you read a magazine or a book, or do home work, while waiting for a customer or for the day's closing routine to begin. You had at all times to look as if you were doing something to earn your precious \$15.00 wage. As a result I took to pacing the store with a feather duster and to chewing on cough drops.

Thank God the store had no soda fountain, nor did we sell candy as such, or else I would have ballooned to my present weight 40 years earlier. However, a small case between the greeting cards and the front counter held a selection of cough drops, breath fresheners, and antacids and I took to purchasing these and chewing on them during my pacing. *Ludens* and *Smith Brothers* cough drops were in reality little more than candy in disguise, with an occasional added dose of



Figure 10. A period box of *Sen-Sen* licorice squares.

menthol, but ultimately I seized upon a brand called *Pine Bros.* which was sweetened with glycerin instead (figure 9). These had a chewy texture, not unlike gummy bears, and were much longer lasting than the candy drops, so I got more pacing for my quarter. However, my cough drop habit did lead to at least one strange adventure. One ungodly, long, boring Saturday afternoon, we seemed to hit the Bermuda Triangle of all customer lulls. A salesman had dropped off a large box of free samples of a brand of throat lozenge called *Cepacol* which, unlike the candy cough drops, contained a topical anesthetic for the treatment of sore throats known as benzocaine. They looked close enough to normal cough drops to suit me and they were free, so by the end of the day I had probably consumed 25 samples, could no longer feel my tongue, and was stumbling around in what can only be politely



Figure 11. Period ad for *Carter's Little Liver Pills*.

described as a total mental fog. It took me two hours to walk home instead of the usual half hour. Even to this day I have no idea what I did along the way to consume all that time.

Among the breath fresheners were rolls of peppermint *Lifesavers*, *Dentine Gum*, etc. and two antique looking products – small red boxes labelled *Sen-Sen* (figure 10) and brown paper rolls labelled *Carter's Little Liver Pills* (figure 11), both of which I had heard my mother mention. For the historical experience I bought and tried a box of *Sen-Sen* but found the intense bitter licorice taste repulsive and, after reading the list of ingredients on the roll of the liver pills, I decided that my own liver didn't need any improving. What this product was doing among the breath fresheners and cough drops is still a mystery to me. Possibly its claim to also cure acid stomach had earned it a place next to the *Roloids*.

Any real drugs and pharmaceuticals were kept in

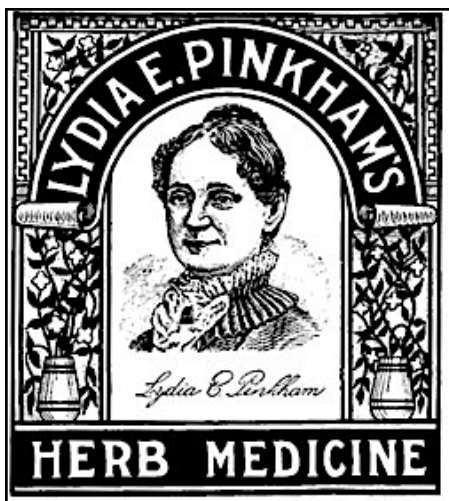


Figure 12. A period label for *Lydia Pinham's Lady's Tonic*.

the back room, though we did allow various patent medicines in the outer store – apparently under the theory that they were both ineffective and harmless. Many of these I found charming because of their an-



Figure 13. A period ad for Alpenkrauter tonic – though one not so Germanic as the box it came in.

tique looking labels. Thus I can recall selling bottles of *Lydia Pinkham's Extract for Change of Life* (figure 12), a product my mother recalled her grandmother and aunts using and whose efficacy, or so she always claimed, was due mostly to the large amount of alcohol that it contained. We also carried such well-known products as *Geritol* for “tired blood,” but perhaps the most exotic patent medicine on our shelves was a tonic called *Alpenkrauter* (figure 13), which roughly translates as “Alpine Herbs.” This came in a green box with half the box labelled in English and the other half in German. It was still a favorite among some of the elderly German-Americans in town and I was taught to count their change out in German when they bought a bottle. My school councilors had told me I would have to learn German if I wanted to be a chemist and I was scheduled to take my first course when I entered high school the next year. As a consequence I was quite proud of having gotten what I unrealistically imagined to be a significant head start. On checking the internet, I am quite surprised at how many of these questionable products are still available.

Departure and Demise

By the end of the 9th grade I was thoroughly bored with the job and wanted out. It consumed all of my spare time, leaving me with none for work in my home laboratory or for reading, and I was thoroughly disillusioned with the realities of drug store life – disillusioned because, as I now realize, I had brought so many unrealistic expectations to the job in the first place. Though I had gotten straight A's in the 9th grade, I was going to enter high school in the fall where I knew that the competition was much stiffer and the grades more important relative to college. I was friends with a fellow amateur chemist named Raymond Fraedrich (figure 14), whom I knew through the Mormon Church. He was a year older than me, had just completed his sophomore year in high school and, despite his intense interest in the subject, experienced a difficult time in the high school chemistry course. Never one to be diplomatic, he rather unkindly predicted that I too would soon meet my chemical Waterloo.

So rationalizing that I needed to concentrate on my school work, I turned in my resignation. I felt guilty doing this because, when I was hired, I had sort of promised that I would stick it out until the end of high school. However, in order to soften the blow, I had the inspired idea of recommending Raymond as my successor. In the end we were both happy. I got my A in high school chemistry and Raymond got my job, where he was trained, as I had been, by Chuck Giese. While I had detested Schulz and his business ethics,

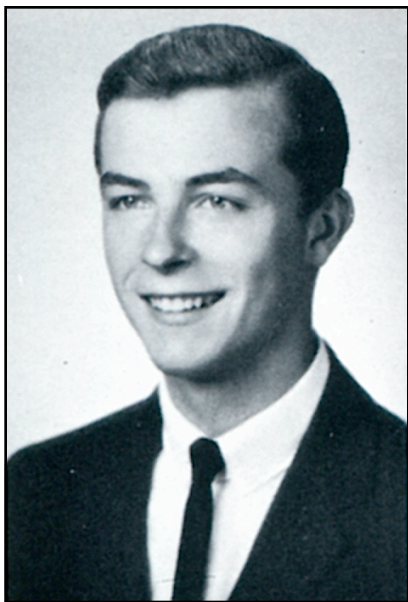


Figure 14. My successor, Raymond Fraedrich, at age 17.

Raymond flourished under his tutelage, stayed with the store until the end of high school, and then went on to pharmacy school (whether with Schulz's financial assistance, I do not know). He even married the daughter of a pharmacist and today operates a chain of drug stores in Utah. Though I have not seen him for more than 40 years, the few tales that have come my way suggest that he has also faithfully emulated Schulz's business ethics.

On a sadder note, the Pradel Drug Store is no more. By the late 1960s Curtis and Yale had gone out of business and the plant was torn down and replaced by a shopping mall. In addition, the city, feeling that it needed a major feeder road from the new westside belt line into downtown, widened Steward Avenue and diverted its lower end to the bridges, thereby wiping out all of the businesses across from the Curtis and Yale site and opposite the drug store. Some of the surviving area businesses moved into the new mall, leaving their original buildings deserted, others moved to the suburbs, and Clarke Street became a *cul de sac* just a few feet beyond the hobby store. All of this began to progressively kill the drug store's business, so a few years later it moved into much smaller premises in a tiny strip mall down the street. However, the fate that had overtaken the small neighborhood grocery store was rapidly overtaking the local neighborhood pharmacy as well, and within a few more years the newer national pharmacy chains had put even this pitiful remnant out of business.

As for myself, I did not quite learn my lesson when it came to my illusions concerning the chemical

relevance of commercial pharmacy. Throughout high school I continued to acquire pharmacy books, such as the *National Formulary* and various editions of the *United States Pharmacopoeia*, all of which I found to be dull collections of recipes. Less disappointing was an 1889 edition of Remington's *Practice of Pharmacy*, which I discovered in a secondhand store located behind the old Sears and Roebuck building on Washington Street (6). This was resplendent with woodcuts of chemical equipment and operations and was the very antithesis of what I had seen at the Pradel Drug Store. I even acquired a substantial collection of those glass-stoppered, pharmacy display bottles that Schulz had so ungraciously refused to sell, thanks to the generosity of a pharmacist in the local Mormon Church named Beth Soukup.

When I transferred to Madison my junior year of college and finally had access to the various history of science courses offered there, I took Glenn Sonnedecker's course on the history of pharmacy (7). Because it was required for all pharmacy majors, the class was actually quite large and met in the main lecture theater of the old chemistry building. But once again both the lectures and textbook proved disappointing. There was little or nothing on the various famous pharmacists who had made substantial chemical discoveries or on the rise of pharmacology and modern theories of drug design and action. Mostly the course consisted of a drab recital of the various legal battles between grocers, medical doctors, and pharmacists over who had the monopoly to sell this or that item, the drive for standardization of pharmaceutical recipes and education, and the rise of national pharmacopoeias. One came away with the impression that much of this had more to do with restricting commercial competition than with legitimate concerns of professional competence.

Though I did not know it at the time, much of this missing scientific history was being written by a young historian associated with Sonnedecker and the American Institute for the History of Pharmacy in Madison by the name of John Parascandola, but I would not discover his work until many years later (8). After becoming a professor at Cincinnati, my interactions with the history of pharmacy continued. I made the acquaintance of a retired, and very disillusioned, historian of pharmacy by the name of Alex Birman, who had specialized in the history of 19th-century French and Swiss pharmacy. As a result of several lengthy conversations with him, I was able to greatly clarify my thoughts on the role of pharmacy in the rise of chemistry as a distinct profession. And, over the years, I have also had several fruitful contacts with various historians of pharmacy connected with the Lloyd Library in downtown Cincinnati.

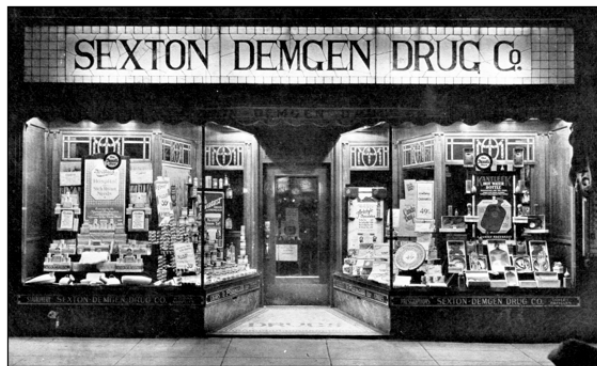


Figure 15. Exterior of the Sexton Drug Store in Marshfield, Wisconsin, as it appeared in the 1930s before its final remodeling in the late 1940s.

Comparing Notes

I mentioned earlier that my uncle Clyde had also worked in a drug store as a teenager and, as might be expected, we have often compared notes over the years on our respective experiences. Certain aspects are remarkably similar. Clyde worked in a drug store in Marshfield, Wisconsin, about 45 miles west of Wausau, that dated from the late 19th century and had been founded by a pharmacist named W. A. Sexton (figure 15). It was located on Central Avenue in what was called “the doctor’s block” because of the large number of doctor’s offices located in the apartments above the stores.

Like the Pradel store, the Sexton store had been remodeled in the late 1940s, and like the Pradel store, it had been sold to a new owner, who continued to operate the store under its original name – in this case a man named Benjamin Wing, who also owned a competing pharmacy located further down the street. Like myself, Clyde was 14 when he began working there in 1953 (figure 16), but unlike me, he continued in the job for five years and thoroughly enjoyed his work experience, becoming close friends with some of his fellow employees. He was paid 50¢ per hour and worked part time during the school year and full time during the summers. Since this routine often violated state laws about the employment of minors, he was paid any overtime beyond the state-allowed maximum out of a separate cash drawer so that there would be no tax record.

Unlike the Pradel store, the Sexton store had a lunch counter, as well as several booths for its diners, and unlike the Pradel store, it employed, in addition to my uncle, a woman as a full-time cosmetologist and only one full-time pharmacist. Since we are dealing with the 1950s, or nearly a decade earlier than my own

experience, this pharmacist still compounded many of the prescriptions and, when overwhelmed with orders – mostly for various “powders” used by the elderly residents of the local old folks home – would allow my uncle to assist him. More of the original oak cabinetry had survived the remodeling at Sexton’s than was the case with the Pradel store, but like Schulz, the new owner had painted it a cream color. My uncle also recalls that more of the old fashion glass-stoppered display bottles had survived the remodeling, as well as several antique balances, and that these were used to decorate the prescription area.

Clyde has similar stories about selling hard liquor out the backdoor to the priest who lived in the rectory on the street behind the store, wrapping sanitary napkins in brown paper, steaming cigars, assorted adventures in the basement store room, the quaint bottles of patent medicines, the women who worked as operators at the nearby phone company coming in on Friday night to cash their weekly paychecks, and trying out the various free samples left by the ever-present salesmen. In his case, this did not involve getting tanked on *Cepacol* throat lozenges, but rather trying out various hair dye samples, which for a period left him with bright red hair rather than the blond color that had been advertised. He also has unpleasant memories of having to learn about the pros and cons of various breast pumps, enema attachments, trusses, and other highly personal paraphernalia that should never have darkened the mental horizons of a 14-year old. When he finished high school, the owner offered to help send my uncle to pharmacy school in Madison, but he de-



Figure 16. My uncle, Clyde Tracy, as he appeared in 1952 at age 13, the year before he began working at the Sexton Drug Store in Marshfield Wisconsin.

clined and became, much to his credit, a college English teacher instead.

Notes and References

1. R. Armour, *Drug Store Days: My Youth Among the Pills and Potions*, McGraw-Hill: New York, NY, 1959.

2. *Wausau City Directory for 1912. The Annual Report of the Wisconsin Board of Pharmacy* for 1903 lists Pradel as a licensed pharmacist working in Wausau, but the 1910 City Directory indicates that he was clerking in a drug store at 412 3rd Street. This may have been the Palace Drug Store belonging to Gustave Naffz. Early entries in various directories of pharmacists spelled Pradel as Praedel, suggesting that the

original German spelling was actually Prädel.

3. Online records list Pradel as being born in Wausau in 1880 and as dying there in 1934.

4. J. A. Martin, *Wausau in 1900*, Birch Lake Press, Wausau, WI, 1987, pp. 32, 117.

5. "Obituary of Gordon R. Graveen, 1931-2010," Glastonbury Funeral Home, Glastonbury, CT. Posted online.

6. J. P. Remington, *The Practice of Pharmacy*, 2nd ed., Lippincott: Philadelphia, PA, 1891.

7. G. Sonnedecker, Ed., *Kremers and Urdang's History of Pharmacy*, Lippincott: Philadelphia, 1963.

8. For the influence of Parascandola, see W. B. Jensen, "Survival of the Best Fit: A Brief History of Drug-Receptor Interactions," W. B. Jensen website.