



## BOOK REVIEW

### “*MERCHANTS OF MEDICINE*

#### *Nostrum Peddlers – Yesterday & Today*”

by Dewey R. Heetderks, MD • Drucker Press, 4907 N. Quail Crest, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546 • Library of Congress Number 20020095378 • ISBN 0-9726650-0-5 • hardbound • 8" x 8" • Over 300 color photographs • 120 pages • Index • References by chapter (bibliography) • Post Paid \$35.00 U.S. or \$40.00 non-U.S. • Order from: 4907 N. Quail Crest, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546 • Dewey Heetderks' – phone: 616-949-0713; email address: dheetderks@aol.com.

The author of this book suggests that this is “...a great coffee table book.” He is being modest with that boast. This book is one of the most beautifully designed (laid-out) volumes I have ever seen and the content is comprehensive, accurate and easy to read. The latter is thanks to the author’s facility with the language. He has the envious knack of making the somewhat complex, simple.

In the preface of the work, the author successfully explains his intentions and expectations. I feel strongly that he has more than met those expectations:

“In what follows I would like to do two things. First, I describe the patent medicine era – a colorful and romantic time. Glass manufacturing, America’s first industry resulted in the production of beautiful medicine bottles. But, the patent medicine era was also a deceitful era. Itinerant purveyors with robber baron ethics created the ‘snake oil syndrome’ by peddling medicines with the promised magic of exotic substances. To appreciate fully how America was sold its nostrums, the story must be told how human hopes and fears were exploited by marketing ploys such as trade cards, almanacs, and the Indian road show. The rise and fall of the patent medicine era were both interesting and dramatic. In 1906 the Food and Drug Administration and later the Federal Trade Commission outlawed certain substances and required proper labeling of contents.”

“Second, I’d like to alert the reader to an ever-growing industry that needs more policing than it is presently getting. With deliberate deceit medical quackery exists today as a multi-billion dollar business. Because of budget limitations and departmental differences the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission have an overwhelming task to safeguard the public from quackery. So, today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the old warning of ‘*caveat emptor*’—let the buyer beware—is still relevant.”

“We now live in an era involving alternative medicine. It is true that such therapy may have beneficial effects for some patients. However, this is medicine that has not been scientifically tested and proven, resulting unfortunately in two separate health delivery systems – a conventional form and an alternative form. Unusual and unconventional types of alternative medicine afford potions and practices rich in opportunities for quackery. Today, people need to be reminded that ‘he who forgets the past is doomed to repeat it.’”

Dr. Dewey R. Heetderks is a retired urologist from Grand Rapids, Michigan where he practiced for 33 years. He graduated from the University of Michigan, took his training in urology at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston and at the University Hospital in Ann Arbor. He became Clinical Professor of Urology at Michigan State University Medical School. He claims that “*the antique bottle collecting obsession did not require any training.*” I disagree with that statement. Proof that I am correct in maintaining Dewey has had training, I believe, can be found in the Forward to the book. Again in his own words, “*...after accumulating over five hundred medicine bottles, boxes, and tins, I realized that there were many more. My collection now goes from the common to the rare and even to one-of-a-kind specimens.*” That, to me, indicates on-the-job-training if not formal training.

With tongue-in-cheek, the author confesses, “*The items shown in this book are a portion of my own collection. Since no one else has sought just urological antique medicines and other artifacts, I can say with a smile that I have the world’s largest collection.*”

I don’t know just how the following confession by Dr. Heetderks fits into a review of his book but I couldn’t resist sharing it with you. He writes, “*The saga of antique bottle collecting has many*



*twists and turns. For me the enjoyable benefits of the adventure include making new friends and acquaintances, an appreciation of beautiful glass, the fascination with our medical heritage, and the inspiration to write this book.*”

Normally I wouldn’t mention the photographer and graphic designer involved in a book being reviewed but because of the wonderful photography and the great design of this work, I think both of these talented people should be recognized. Dr. Lee R. Pool, an industrial surgeon and Clinical Professor of General Surgery at Michigan State University Medical School, took the excellent color photographs that illustrate this book. He used a Contax medium format camera. Mr. Dennis M. Kucharczyk was the graphic designer of this book. He is from Dearborn, Michigan. He studied Art and Design at Siena Heights College and Grand Valley State University. He is a Retail Graphic Designer and works mostly in Marketing and Advertising where he has specialized in print media.

To conclude, I refer the reader back to the first paragraph of this review. I recorded my impressions of “*Merchants of Medicine – Nostrum Peddlers – Yesterday & Today*” in that paragraph. Of course, that leaves me without a formal ending to this review. Let it suffice for me to admit that I could not find faults worth mentioning in this review. I find this to be a book all bottle collectors should consider owning. This may turn out to be the best patent and proprietary medicine book of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – we’ll have to wait 97 years to see.

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#### Photos:

Above left: Dr. Dewey R. Heetderks  
Above right: Cover of Dr. Heetderks’ book.