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Paterson Museum to Exhibit Forty Pharmacy Window Displays

Paterson, NJ – September 10, 2008 – Those of us who weren't around in the 40s or 50s missed out on one of America's unique establishments. Today, they're called pharmacies, but back then they were "Drug Stores." There were usually two or three to a neighborhood, because many families did not have cars, and people went shopping locally on foot or perhaps a bus to downtown.

The stores usually had two display windows advertising Ex-Lax, other medicines or sick room supplies. Sometimes a display was called "ethical," because it featured equipment used in compounding prescriptions as well as health information.

Forty of these vintage posters will be on view at the Paterson Museum from December 6, 2008 through January 25, 2009. The posters were used by more than 1000 pharmacies in the United States over 50 years ago and are a real "find" according to Giacomo DeStefano, Director of the museum.

The idea for the exhibition popped up when pharmacist Frank Pinchak brought one in last year to augment his exhibit of 700 patent medicines of the 1920's that has been featured there for the past 12 years. The poster dealt with the problem of children's accidental deaths caused by improper storage of medicines and household products in the home.

(more)

In 1954, Pinchak faced up to the problem that the American public was not getting enough public health information from the more than 50,000 pharmacies in the country. Making an “ethical” pharmacy window would be too costly for any pharmacy unless a cooperative could be formed and a type of mass-production was introduced. Heavy mailings yielded enough members to get the idea going and it grew larger month by month.

DeStefano feels the themes used were on people’s minds. For example, polio had not yet been conquered and the horrible fears of parents were assuaged when many pharmacies around the country ran three-piece posters in 1954 explaining the test being conducted for the Salk Polio vaccine. Another update display was used two years later and a final wrap-up success poster in 1960.

Other topics covered were the Asiatic Flu, Increase in Life Expectancy, Fluoridation of Water, Senior Citizen Medicines, Mental Illness and 35 others.

An opening reception is scheduled for Saturday, December 6, 2008, from 1:00 to 4:00. The Paterson Museum is located at 2 Market Street in the heart of Paterson’s Great Falls Historic District. The Museum is open to the public: Tuesday – Friday from 10:00 to 4:00 and Saturday – Sunday from 12:30 to 4:30. Visitors can call 973.321.1260 for further information.

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