

# THE PHARMACIST KNEW BEST

**Torn over toys**  
What to buy, newfangled gizmos or old-time favorites? **D2**

**Weekly planner**  
Arts and entertainment guide. **D3**

## Vintage informational posters on display at the Paterson Museum

By JOHN ZEAMAN  
SPECIAL TO HERALD NEWS

### REVIEW

#### THE WELL-BEING NOTICE: 40 VINTAGE PHARMACY WINDOW DISPLAYS

Paterson Museum, 2 Market St., Paterson; 973-881-3874. Through Jan. 25. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.  
Admission \$2, children free.

ing the '50s, '60s and early '70s. They weren't fancy, and they certainly weren't art. But they used friendly graphics and punchy text to inform people about timely health issues, such as the coming polio vaccine, water fluoridation, advances in life expectancy, the paths of influenza epidemics and the new drugs called "tranquilizers." They were called "ethical window displays," and the man who developed and popularized them was a Paterson pharmacist

Please see PHARMACISTS, D10

**OPIUM**

The **POPPY FLOWER**  
• supplier of crude **OPIUM**

in the **RIGHT HAND**  
one of the greatest contributions to medicine!

in the **WRONG HAND**  
the beginning of the end!

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# Pharmacists: A window into 20th-century culture

Continued from D1

named Frank Pinchak. His three-panel posters (a big one flanked by two smaller ones) are part of pharmacy history, now. At the height of circulation, Pinchak's posters were going to about 1,000 pharmacies in 33 states.

Pinchak's father, Morris, opened Pinchak's Pharmacy in 1919, at Main Street and Knickerbocker Avenue near the Clifton border. Pinchak, born on a table in the back room, joined his father in the store in 1943. Soon he had carved out his own professional niche as a public relations man for the profession, which took him from behind the counter to the front window.

"That was all the pharmacist had [as a public relations platform]," said Pinchak, now 86

and retired from his dual career. His display of 700 patent medicines and other early- to mid-20th-century pharmacy memorabilia is part of the museum's permanent collection and is a must-see for visitors to this exhibit.

Most drugstores in those days were designed with the traditional vitrine-style facades in which a recessed front door turned the two front windows into two-sided display cases.

Here pharmacists put ads for products like Ex-Lax and Unguentine ointments, along with symbols of the pharmacy profession: mortar and pestle, balance scale and the teardrop-shaped "show globes" that evoked old-fashioned chemical "percolators."

## Folksy quality

Occasionally a pharmacist



DON SMITH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Frank Pinchak was a long-time Paterson pharmacist who developed and popularized three-panel displays for pharmacies.

would add a public service display, but few had the time or the money to do a professional

job, Pinchak said. So Pinchak created a professional cooperative, of sorts. For \$5, including

postage, a pharmacist could receive a ready-made display on a topical subject, with text written by Pinchak and artwork by a professional designer. Pains were taken to make sure the results didn't look too slick or professional.

"It was supposed to look like something the local pharmacist had produced," said Pinchak.

And, in fact, the posters do have a folksy quality, close in style — though not in tone — to the "Ripley's Believe-It-or-Not" features of newspaper comic pages.

As social history, they are snapshots of the worries and

concerns of midcentury Americans, as well as the growing confidence in medical science.

The first of three poster-sets on polio, in particular, captures the fear of this crippling disease that gripped parents in the early '50s. It brings news on the successful trials of the not-yet-released Salk vaccine that conquered polio. Cold War anxieties are reflected on a poster about nuclear weapons and radioactive fallout. A side poster shows a family inside their backyard underground shelter.

When it came to the posters showing the origins of modern remedies in older cultures, the artists tended to pull out all the stops. The cartoonish portrayals of ancient Egyptians, biblical characters or exotic "oriental" settings wouldn't pass muster to-day. The artists went in the opposite direction in their renderings of pharmacists, who never look anything less than noble, benevolent and enlightened.

But, hey, it was their window.

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