

Upjohn History Presentation 2023

- **My Time at the Portage Site** - I started at the Upjohn Portage site in 1980 as an analytical chemist. I retired from there 37 years later as a Quality Manager. I still remember my first boss saying to me “Jeremy, if you do a good job, you’re got a job for life at The Upjohn Company”. He could say that because there had never been a layoff in the 94-year history of the company. Of course, that changed in the late 1980’s.
- **Upjohn Website** – In 2013 I created a history website for The Upjohn Company. The address is www.upjohn.net. It’s grown to 800 web pages, over 15,000 images and 19 old movies. Anyone in the world who can access the internet can see it and I keep adding information to it. Everything I’m going to talk about tonight is on this website.
- **Company Names** – Here are the names the local operations have had since 1886. Pfizer is the current owner of the Portage manufacturing site.
- **W.E. Upjohn** – The Upjohn family was originally from England. In 1830 they boarded a boat in Liverpool, England for America. After a voyage of 6 weeks, they arrived in New York harbor. For a while they lived in New York State. Uriah Upjohn trained as a medical doctor in New York then made his way west to Michigan Territory and settled in Richland. Uriah and his wife Maria had 12 children. One of these children was William Erastus Upjohn, the man we know as W.E.Upjohn.

In 1875 W.E.Upjohn received a medical degree at the University of Michigan. He began practicing as a country doctor in the Hastings area. Back then a country doctor went to see all his patients on horse-back. He moved to Kalamazoo in 1887 and he operated the first automobile in Kalamazoo County. It was an 1899 Locomobile that was built in Newton, Massachusetts. Back in 1900 there were only 8,000 automobiles in the whole country but there were 17 million horses.

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- **The Friable Pill** – In the 1800s, pills were so hard they travelled right through the patient without dissolving. This is because they were made with clay as the binder. Clay starts out hard and then gets harder over time. You could take a hammer and literally pound these pills into a plank of pine wood without them breaking. This became part of Upjohn advertising, shown here. Obviously, the efficacy of these hard pills for the patient was zero. Why was that tolerated? There was no FDA back then so there were no standards at all. None.

This situation really bothered W.E.Upjohn and he started experimenting with ways to create a pill that would dissolve within the body. He became quite obsessed with this and one day he succeeded. The friable pill is what launched The Upjohn Company. We think of W.E.Upjohn as the founder but it was actually a partnership between W.E. and three of his brothers – Henry, Frederick and James.

- **Not Just a Businessman** – This was an era when business leaders were also community leaders. In 1918, WE Upjohn wrote the charter for the new city government and he served as mayor. He was a very generous man, funding the Civic Auditorium, parks and exercise fields around the city. He was a fanatic about a flower called the peony. He cultivated hundreds of peony varieties, wrote a book on them and funded a peony garden at UOM that you can walk through today. He built one of the world's first electric clocks. He was one of the first business leaders to offer medical insurance to his employees. Obviously, he was a man with tremendous drive and energy.
- **Good Article on the Early Days** – If you want to read more about the earliest years of The Upjohn Company, I would recommend you read this article written by Richard Broholm in 1950. It's on the website and the link to it is shown here. It's really well done.

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- **Downtown Kalamazoo Facilities** – The first Upjohn Company building was a basement on Burdick St. The company kept growing and growing, requiring more and more buildings. All the commercial buildings shown in this 1930s photo are Upjohn buildings. The one on the right with the tall brick chimney is a company-owned power plant.
- **Late 1930s Production** - You can see from this late 1930s photo, production facilities were cramped, especially as processes back then were very manual and needed a lot of people. The demands of pharmaceutical manufacturing during World War II showed clearly that the company needed a major building expansion. Upjohn leadership considered building upwards in Downtown Kalamazoo but decided to buy a spacious site in the country.
- **Building of the Portage Site (7 slides)** – In 1946, 1,500 acres of land were bought on Portage Road. This is the location of the current manufacturing site. At that time, the city of Kalamazoo stopped at Cork St and there was no city of Portage, just Portage Township. On postcards from that era, the new site is described as being near Vicksburg – no mention at all of Portage.
- **Upjohn Buses** - every employee at the new Portage plant lived in the City of Kalamazoo and not every family had an automobile in the early 1950s. Thus, the company bought buses to shuttle people from Kalamazoo to work at the new plant. The fleet of Upjohn buses eventually grew to 15.
- **Barbers Shop** – Because the Portage Site was so far from the city, a barbers shop, a pharmacy and a check cashing service were provided on site. All of these lasted into the 1980s and I can remember using them all. I used to get my hair cut in the basement of Upjohn Building 41 in this shop. The company had barbers shops in other buildings too.

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- **Cannabis** - now known widely as marijuana, was a very popular medication in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and every pharmaceutical company sold it. Ironically, with the many dispensaries now in town, it's even more popular today. This Upjohn cannabis product was made from 1900 to 1931. From the batch number of 47092 I would date this bottle to the early 1920s. It was originally in the collection of a doctor and when he died 8 years ago, his family auctioned it on eBay. I really wanted it for my own Upjohn bottle collection. I bid \$100 for it but it sold for \$450.

So, would the cannabis in those pills still be enjoyable? It would be far too risky to take any. A hundred years has likely produced some toxic impurities inside these pills.

- **Nausea Tablets** – This empty bottle of Nausea Tablets was recently for sale on eBay. There were 22 bids and it sold for \$123. I would date it to between 1902 and 1910. You can see one of the ingredients is cocaine. You'd forget all about being sick, right? So why was such an addictive drug being used for people who felt sick? There were no rules back then. Companies could sell anything they wanted. FDA was not around to enforce any rules and standards until 1920. The Upjohn Company sold a lot of morphine, cocaine, opium and cannabis from 1890 to 1920.
- **Chlorodyne** – Chlorodyne may have been Upjohn's most addictive product since it contained both morphine and cannabis. They made it from 1900 to 1937. Deaths from overdoses of Chlorodyne, either accidental or deliberate, were a frequent occurrence and caused a public outcry. Due to this, the cannabis was eventually removed from the formulation and the amount of morphine was progressively reduced.
- **Aphrodisiac** - Now let's talk about love. Upjohn sold these Aphrodisiac pills from 1886 to 1933. The batch number of 28307 on the lower right of the bottle label dates this one to 1916. The better-known name for Cantharides is Spanish Fly. Spanish Fly has been in use as far back as the Romans

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2,000 years ago. It is made from crushed blister beetles and this substance does cause an inflammation of the genital organs. It works but the inflammation can be painful and the dose needed to cause it is close to being fatal. Used over time it can cause liver and kidney damage. Yes indeed, the price of love can be very high.

- **Caverject** - Interestingly, at the very end of The Upjohn Company, a product called Caverject was approved by FDA in July 1995 for erectile dysfunction. It's a prostaglandin. It does require an injection into the penis with a small needle but it does work. Even in the era of Viagra and Cialis tablets, Pfizer still sells this former Upjohn product today and it's still made in Portage. Think of it as a modern version of Cupid's arrow.
- **Quinine Pills** **(QUY-NINE)**

Quinine used to be the first choice for treating malaria, which is a bad fever caused by the bite of a mosquito that has the disease. Quinine pills were huge sellers for the Upjohn Company and many other companies. At one time, quinine pills were 40% of total Upjohn sales. They sold so much that Upjohn was known as the quinine company for a while.

Malaria was a world-wide problem at that time, making quinine pills a global seller. Every explorer heading out to Africa, Asia or South America was sure to take a good supply of these pills. The small metal cases you see here helped to securely transport the pills across rough country.

Few people know that In the 1800s, almost everyone in Michigan had malaria because of all the wetlands in the state. It was said on the East Coast "Don't go to Michigan, that land of ills, the word Michigan means aches, fever and chills." It was not until most of the wetlands were drained that malaria was no longer seen in Michigan.

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- **Eczema lotion**

Eczema, also known as dermatitis, is a group of diseases that causes inflammation of the skin. Symptoms that people get include itchiness, redness or rash. I know when my skin is irritated, I really appreciate a soothing lotion to rub on it. Alas, this 1925 Upjohn Eczema lotion is not soothing. It contains hydrocyanic acid, which is the liquid form of hydrogen cyanide, a deadly gas. It contains nitric acid, which is a powerful acid. Then there's mercury in it. Thank goodness for the glycerin. At least that would be a bit soothing. Patients had to be tough back then.

I found the exact date that this bottle was filled. There are half-a-dozen Upjohn production log books that survived from the 1920s and 1930s. From the batch number on the label of the bottle, I could track it to a manufacturing date of January 3rd, 1925.

- **Hematic tonic** – the word hematic refers to blood. So this is a tonic for your blood. A tonic is supposed to perk you up, right? On the list of ingredients here are arsenic, mercury and strychnine, which are two toxic metals and a deadly poison. This particular Upjohn product was made from 1920 to 1929.

Why would anybody take these pills? A homeopathic principle back then was that a small quantity of poison will really stimulate your immune system. Fortunately for all of us, that principle has long been debunked.

Since there used to be no clinical testing and no FDA to regulate products, companies could sell anything they wanted. It didn't matter if a product worked or not, or what the side effects were. There were no rules at all until 1906 when the Pure Food and Drugs Act was enacted. However, FDA in its current form did not exist until 1920. Only then was there a start to eliminate all the harmful products and those that had no therapeutic effect. It took until the 1980s to complete this.

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- **Chocolate Coated Tablets** – Upjohn chocolate-coated a number of its products, such as these creosote and iodine tablets. This particular one was made from 1905 to 1946. The ingredients were bitter tasting and the chocolate coating was intended to get children to swallow the tablets. It amazes me how well the chocolate coating has lasted. This bottle is at least 75 years old but the chocolate looks to be in perfect condition. Of course, chocolate-coated tablets are now banned. They are far too risky in a home with children.
- **Pantomime Candies**
In the late 1920s Upjohn tried to make candies under the brand name Pantomime. The box was colored a rich brown and showed a group of partiers. Alas, only one batch of Pantomime Candies was ever made in the Upjohn factory. The chocolates were said to be tasty but had a hint of “pharmaceutical odor”. The project was promptly cancelled and the 800 pounds of chocolates made never made it to store shelves. They were instead given to employees on May 6th 1921 to celebrate the birth of a daughter to company treasurer John S. McColl.
- **Vanilla** – Vanilla is a unique Upjohn product. It was only for sale to company employees. The story I was told was that Martha Parfet, wife of 1970s Upjohn chief executive Ted Parfet, used a lot of vanilla in her cooking but could never find a good quality source of it in town. You know that saying “Happy wife, happy life”? Ted needed to do something and since The Upjohn Company was already using large quantities of vanilla flavoring in products, the materials were already in-house. It didn’t take much money and effort to formulate and bottle it in Building 41. This Vanilla product was made available to all Upjohn employees across the world. It really was popular because batches were made throughout the 1970s and 80s. Alas, it was discontinued in 1990.

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- **The Upjohn Airforce** - in 1956 Upjohn bought their first plane and build a company hanger at the Kalamazoo Airport. The goal was to fly executives and high-level employees around the country as needed. In 1959 a Grumman Gulfstream that held 16 passengers was added. By the mid-1980s there were 4 planes and 7 pilots. 1100 employees per month used the planes. Everyone called it the “Upjohn Airforce”. You can still see the Upjohn hanger today as you drive past the airport.
- **Public Tours** - From 1960 to 1989 there were organized tours of Building 41 that the public could take. Tour participants started in a museum at the west end of the basement, climbed to the first floor and walked to the East end through manufacturing. Then they returned to the museum via the basement. They viewed sterile filling, tablet compressing, fluid production, packaging, sterile inspection and all the supporting workshops, which included ones for wood, metal, piping and sheet metal. Participants ended up in the Building 41 cafeteria for refreshments. These tours were very popular. Busloads of people arrived daily to take a tour. Part of orientation for new employees was taking this tour. The top photo is of the tour guides in the mid-1960s. The bottom two photos are of the museum, which is long closed.
- **Upjohn in Disneyland** – Walt Disney was a neighbor and close friend of Donald Gilmore, the CEO of Upjohn during the 1940s and early 1950s. It was natural when Walt was planning the construction of Disneyland in California, he would include an old-time pharmacy run by Upjohn. This was not a real pharmacy. It featured a lot of historic items. Disneyland opened in July 1955 and the Upjohn pharmacy was a popular exhibit. The pharmacy closed in 1972 when the company felt it had served its purpose.

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