

## Quality in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

- **First Automobile** – This is probably the best-known historical photo of W.E. Upjohn on his steam-powered 1899 Locomobile. It was taken in June 1900 on the way to Vicksburg. A Kalamazoo man named George Taylor actually bought this vehicle. It arrived on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1900, but keeping it running proved to be too much for George. Five months later he sold it to W.E. Upjohn. W.E.'s secret to motoring success was he already had a mechanic on his Upjohn Company payroll, so keeping the car in running order was pretty easy. W.E. drove it at 25mph around the Kalamazoo area to deliver his friable pills. He even took it on a successful trip to Buffalo.
- **Bob Boudeman's Roamer** – (pronounced BOOD-man) I found this photo in a 1950's era Upjohn employee magazine. You can tell from this photo that Bob was a character. He was leader of The Upjohn Company in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thanks to Bob, Upjohn expanded a lot internationally. It also got into plastics, industrial chemicals and seeds. In other words. He was all about diversification. Unfortunately he died young at age 56.

Roamer automobiles were produced in Kalamazoo between 1916 to 1929. They were described as being cars of a very high quality, sporty in style, with low body lines, rakish windshields, thin fenders, and wire wheels. They had various engine options, including a 75-100 HP Duesenberg "Walking Beam." Roamers were expensive for their time, typically around \$5,000.

- **Quinine** – The first product sold by The Upjohn Pill and Granule Company was Quinine pills. Quinine was essential for treating malaria, which is a bad fever caused by the bite of a mosquito that has that disease. Quinine pills were huge sellers because in the 1800s, almost everyone in Michigan had malaria. That was because the state was one giant wetland back then. Lots of standing water. It was not until most of the wetlands were drained for farming that malaria was no longer seen in Michigan. At one time, Quinine pills were 40% of company revenue. Upjohn was being called the Quinine

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company.

**Questionable Ingredients** – Since there was no FDA to regulate products in the 1800s, companies could and did sell anything they wanted. It didn't matter if a product worked or not, or what the side effects were. No clinical testing was ever done. There were no rules at all. No testing of any kind was performed. Oh, and there were no batch numbers on product labels.

On the list of ingredients in this Hepatic tonic are arsenic, mercury and strychnine, which are two toxic metals and a deadly poison. We know now that this product was a terrible idea. Why would anybody take these pills? A homeopathic principle back then was that a very small quantity of poison will really stimulate your immune system. Fortunately for us, that principle has long been debunked. This particular Upjohn product was made from 1920 to 1929.

- **Worst Product** – Mercury has fascinated humans for over two thousand years. Inevitably, people found medical uses for it, even though it was very toxic. Sailors used it to alleviate chronic constipation, caused by being on a ship for months with no fresh fruit or vegetables. At one time Upjohn had over 40 products that contained mercury. They were all toxic. Fortunately, by the mid-1960's there were no Upjohn mercury products.
- **Pneumatic Tube System** – There were many processes in Building 41 that used paper that a pneumatic tube system was needed. This is the same as you would use at the drive-through at your bank. The difference is that that there were 3 miles of pneumatic tubing here. This photo shows the central transfer station that used to be on the Building 41 mezzanine. There were 42 tubes coming into this station. The carriers were made of plastic and leather. They traveled at 20mph.
- **Development of the Steroids** – Perhaps the biggest success for The Upjohn Company was developing the class of drugs called steroids. As early as the

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1930s, it was known by researchers that steroids like Cortisone had a powerful and beneficial effect on human health. The trouble was that steroids were only available in tiny amounts from animal sources, so they were far too expensive to make in quantities to benefit people.

- Upjohn's chemical and microbiologist genius was to figure out a way to synthesize cortisone from soybeans, and from cortisone, create many other steroids. The Portage Upjohn site was literally the world-leader in steroid synthesis during the 1950s and 60s. Of course, this was very profitable to the company and the money from steroids allowed Upjohn to diversify into plastics, chemicals, homecare, clinical testing and agricultural seeds.
- **New Headquarters Building** - A new corporate headquarters building was opened in 1961 at the corner of Portage Road and Bishop Road. It contained 286,000 square feet of space. It was called the Taj Mahal by employees as it was so luxurious. I remember using one of the bathrooms in it and finding that the entire bathroom was trimmed in marble. Alas, the insulation in it was blown asbestos, the most dangerous kind. When Pfizer had no further use for the building, it could not be sold as it would have cost over a million dollars to remove all that blown asbestos. It had to be demolished.

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