

2019 Winning Essay by Margaret Schlicker

Last spring, I took a Christ College Material Culture workshop. The end result of this class was to be a fifteen to twenty-page research paper based off an object we chose from the Porter County Museum to write about. Our class took several trips to the museum, and were even allowed into back rooms of artifacts not on display to choose what we wanted to work with for the next six weeks. While I was excited by this large-scale project - the first of my academic career - it was a rather daunting prospect to base a research project on what appeared to be a medium-sized wooden box. My object was not actually a box, but a set of self-enclosed pharmacist's scales. When I started my research on these scales, I did not know how they worked, when they were from, or what other factors related to my scale I might want to research and write about besides the very broad topic of "pharmacy." My first step was to check out several books on the history of pharmacy, hoping I could learn some background knowledge.

While background information was helpful, I needed specific information about my scales. I decided to search for information on the company name that my scales bore embossed on a plaque – Henry Troemner. From this, I learned the company is still in business making scientific scales today. By looking for documents that mentioned Troemner scales by name, I found a trade catalog in an online database that showed scales just like mine from 1903 (at the time, they cost about seventeen dollars). I finally had a time period for when my scales were used. I looked at the founder of the Troemner company, and even contacted someone who worked at their company's archives, and got permission to use some pictures of the original shop front that Henry Troemner opened in Pennsylvania in the mid-1800's. I also kept looking for information about pharmaceutical history, this time focusing on the turn of the 20th century.

At this point, I had information about the manufacturer of the scales and I had read quite a bit of background information on pharmacy. This information was ranging from journals of American doctors in the 1800's, pamphlets recommending dubious herbal remedies and cures, and descriptions of American pharmaceutical laws and education processes at the time. A lot of this material was found through the Christopher Center, available as digital scans of old books and journals, and a few were articles retrieved through interlibrary loan. However, I did not have much direction to my paper. I decided to talk to a librarian about my paper. I made an appointment with Professor Muszkiewicz to discuss my project. Though we spent a good portion

of our meeting talking about a really cool medical museum in Pennsylvania (the Mutter Museum), she listened to me talk about my research done thus far. After hearing that I needed more information about the setting scales like these were used, she suggested looking into the corner drug stores that were prevalent in small town America at the time and helped me find some additional articles.

After looking at the rather eclectic research I had gathered thus far, I realized I could nearly trace the development of the field of pharmacy in America from its birth in the Revolutionary War until the introduction of scales like mine in drug stores in the early 19th century. With this in mind, I finally had a thesis: Medicine in America changed drastically over the course of the nineteenth century, from apothecaries and druggists to standardized pharmaceutical practice and education, as demonstrated by mass-produced laboratory scales.

I took frequent trips to the Porter County Museum throughout this process to look at my scales and talk to the knowledgeable museum employees. It was here that I learned that the name of the pharmacist who had owned and used these scales was known - William Picard. Picard had lived and practiced pharmacy here in Valparaiso, and here came the final component of my paper: pharmacy in Valparaiso itself. I found out that William Picard attended Valparaiso University (we used to have a small pharmacy school added in the 1880's). I was able to look at old yearbooks and class directories, and found pictures and names of the various drug stores that were in Valparaiso at the turn of the 20th century. Without the Christopher Center and its staff, I would not have had nearly the depth of resources I did, especially first-hand photos, journals and articles from the 19th century.