



Dr. F. K. Hubbard The Hunt for a Mystery Man

In this issue, I will tell you a story of perseverance. This is my search over the years for the man of mystery, Dr. F. K. Hubbard, veterinary patent medicine man.

About twelve years ago I was rummaging around in a flea market in Atlanta. Veterinary items seldom showed up here, but a few dealers in antique advertising would set up on their way back and forth from the northeast to Florida. One such dealer usually sold stuff that I'd classify as just a shade above junk, but did from time to time come up with interesting items related to veterinary medicine. As I went into his booth, he recognized me and broke out in a big smile. He had something for me that he knew I would want (and pay for). He led me over to a glass front display cabinet. The cabinet had the wording F. K. HUBBARD / VETERINARY MEDICINES carved into the top and bottom of the door front. I had never heard of this patent medicine producer at that time and that situation was not to change for several years.

As I examined the cabinet, I could tell that it had at one time been painted white as residual paint was left in the carved name to highlight it against the wood. Then, as now, I am always suspicious of advertising items that I have never seen before. Fantasy and outright fake cabinets exist out in the collecting world and collectors should always be cautious of items with which you have little experience. I have seen glass front cabinets by Dr. Lesure, Dr. Claris and Dr. LeGear that do not match any known examples of their cabinets. Cabinet size and construction techniques are usually the give aways with these pieces. Sometimes they just don't look right, which is a lot more subjective. Everyone would like to find a one of a kind item or something rare at a great price, but buyer beware. Back to the subject at hand, the cabinet had a newer

lock mounted on the outside of the cabinet, but had an old non-working lock on the inside of the door. Construction looked old and there were signs of wear so a price was agreed upon and, with only minimal misgivings, the new purchase headed home.

Now you have to remember that this was a pre-Internet time when searching for information was not as simple as loading up Google or eBay. I looked through all the bottle books I had with no luck on any Dr. Hubbard. I called several bottle dealers and collectors for information. One lead surfaced. A bottle embossed with Dr. Hubbard insecticide and disinfectant existed. Further research led to the conclusion that this was not "my" Dr. Hubbard, but a maker of human patent

medicines. It was there that the story lay dormant for many years. No information on Dr. Hubbard was forthcoming as I continued to collect veterinary medicines over the years. It seems that no collector or dealer with whom I talked had ever seen or heard of a Dr. Hubbard medicine or another cabinet like mine. Was it one of a kind or a fake, I wondered.

Seven or eight years passed by and Dr. Hubbard just hung on the wall, filled with other companies' products. Truth be told, I had given up the search and had not thought about him for a long time. Then our daughter, Jessica, decided to go to college in Boston. Suddenly I was making trips to New England and visiting with collectors and dealers that I had only previously talked with on the phone. On one such visit with a dealer, he informed me that he was making a house call to an old time bottle collector the next day and I was welcome to come along. It seemed that the old guy might have some veterinary bottles. Up and off due North early the next morning, I found myself closer to Canada than to Boston. When we arrived, the home was probably c.1870 with later additions here and there. It turned out that, like a lot of New England families, several



Figure 1 (Right): Original Dr. Hubbard example found which had the printer error of F. H. initials. **Figure 2 (Center):** New Life Nerve and Tonic Drops, 7" label only. "Invigorates the Whole System." **Figure 3 (Left):** Nosore Gall Remedy. Embossed: NOSORE//GALL REMEDY // F.K. HUBBARD / ROSLINDALE / BOSTON, MASS. 7 1/2". This is the only embossed Dr. Hubbard medicine known at this time.

generations had lived in this house and no one ever threw anything away. We shot the bull with the old guy for about an hour as he did chores around the house and checked us out. Finally we made it into the house which was several stories filled with boxes and boxes and piles and piles of stuff. Even the staircases were lined with boxes.

We all went into the bottle room which had been the main living room in another lifetime but now was filled with shelf after shelf of bottles. Country store glass front counters were haphazardly filled with bottles. Opened and unopened boxes of bottles were everywhere, making it a problem for three people to walk around. You get the picture. As my dealer friend and the collector discussed the finer points of Stoddard glass and pontiled colored medicines, I looked around. I didn't ask about veterinary medicines at that time, I just wandered around to see what was what. Peering into the front of a waist level glass counter, I was looking at about ten rows of bottles lined up front to back. Maybe a couple of hundred bottles total were in the twelve foot cabinet. Lighting was sort of dim, so I was down on a knee looking in when I thought I saw the name Hubbard on a label about eight rows back. Is it OK to get something out of this cabinet, I asked? "Sure, help yourself."

I went around back and moved a few boxes of bottles and stuck my hand in the cabinet. Out came Dr. F. H. Hubbard's Spavin, Ringbone and Curb Remedy bottle. Wow, it existed, it was real. It had been so long and Dr. Hubbard had receded far into my memory, but was something odd about the name? Don't worry now, just buy this bottle. No other veterinary medicines showed up and after the dealer had concluded his purchases I asked the owner about my bottle. "Son" he said, "that bottle has a crack in the bottom, you don't want that, it's damaged." I assured him I would take it "as is" and a deal was struck. All the way back to Boston I fondled my bottle, but something was nagging me about that name.

A few days later, I was home and headed to the Dr. Hubbard cabinet, ready to place my prize in it's proper place. Then it hit me, my nagging doubt returned. My cabinet was carved F. K. Hubbard and my bottle was printed F. H. Hubbard. Expletive deleted!! What was the deal? There was no doubt, carved into the cabinet was an intial "K". Was it a fake after all? Could some cabinet maker not spell? It drove me crazy, but I had a new clue. The Dr. Hubbard on my bottle was from Roslindale, Mass., a suburb of Boston. By this time, the Internet existed and I searched for

Roslindale. Jackpot! Roslindale had an historical society. Surely they would have information on my mystery man. Several e-mails back and forth with the head of the historical society gave me the bad news. No one ever wrote a town history of Roslindale and no Dr. Hubbard, F. K. or F. H. was listed in any information in their collection. Dead end, again.

Another year passes, no news, but eBay exists and I diligently search for Dr. Hubbard each week. Then one day up pops Dr. F. K. Hubbard's X-Ray Veterinary Worm Killer bottle with a box. It had never dawned on me that the printer of the label on my Spavin Remedy might have screwed up Dr. Hubbard's initials. The bottle was purchased on eBay and now I was the proud owner of two Dr. Hubbard bottles and one was a RARE MISPRINTED variation. Now I'm liking my cabinet a lot more and all thought of fakery or deception are gone.

Now we fast forward to 2003, nothing new on the Dr. Hubbard front until a letter from a collector in Pennsylvania lands on my desk. Enclosed is a photo of a Dr. Hubbard cabinet identical to mine and a request for information. I called him immediately with the news that the cabinet is real and that at least one other exists, along with two bottles of medicines. No paper ephemera, booklets, letterhead, or flyers from Dr. Hubbard exist to my knowledge.

The next chapter in this story occurred just last year as I got a call from an antique dealer in Rhode Island who had purchased a large volume of bottles. He had gotten my name off the Internet as a contact for veterinary patent medicines. He had four bottles for sale if I was interested, all from the same company. You guessed it, but how was it possible, all four bottles were from the Dr. F. K. Hubbard Company of Roslindale.

The final chapter of my story was written just a few months ago. As I was writing this story, I was contacted by a friend who happened to be an expert in genealogical research. Given Dr. Hubbard's



Figure 4: Earlier Worm Killer. 5" label only. It seems that all of Dr. Hubbard's early remedies contained X-Rays as the box lists X-Ray Colic Cure, X-Ray Liniment etc.

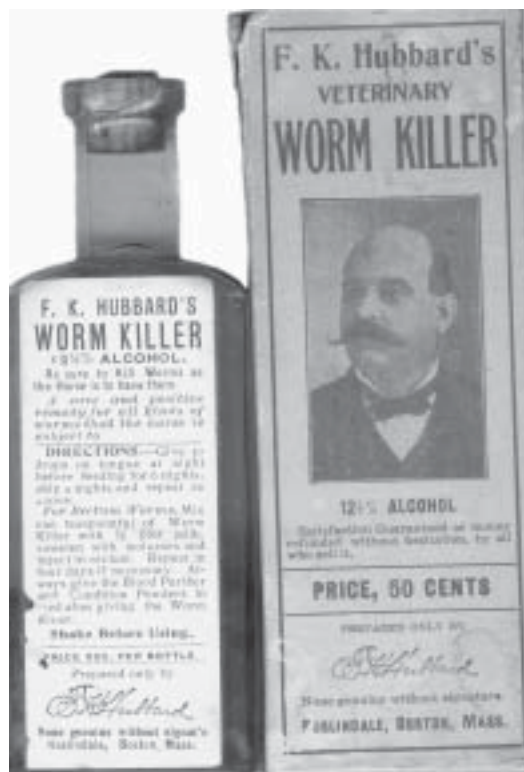


Figure 5: Later variation without the X-Rays and the addition of his image on the box. 5" label only.

name and city of residence, he produced the following historical information on the doctor in less than 20 minutes of computer time. I guess genealogical web sites will be my new best friends.

Frank Kidder Hubbard was born on September 25, 1861 in Marlboro, New Hampshire to Albert and Hannah Livermore Hubbard. In 1870 the family was living in Alstead, N.H. When Frank was 18 years old, he was working in a woolen mill in Gilsum, N.H.

The census of 1900 lists Frank as 38 years old, married to Julie E. Hubbard and living in Boston. The couple have three children, Chester A. S., Harold I. G., and Roswell I. C. Frank's occupation is listed as patent medicine manufacturer. Chester was born January 1, 1890 in Watertown, Mass. Harold was born February 1, 1893, also in Watertown and Roswell was born July 23, 1895 in Natick, Mass. On February 25, 1901 their fourth child, Julian, was born.

In 1920, Frank was 58 years old. His first wife Hannah is deceased and Frank has remarried Bertha M. Kinney who is 34

years old. They have one child listed in the census, Gladys, who was born in 1919. Martha Kinney, his mother in law, is living with the Hubbard family also. Frank now lists his occupation as veterinary medicine.

1930 Census: Frank is not listed nor is Bertha. The boys are all listed and living in separate locations in the Boston area. What I find interesting is that Roswell is married to Ruth and his children are listed as being: Gladys (age 11) and Frank (age 8). Martha Kinney is now living with Roswell's family. So, did Frank and Bertha die between 1920 and 1930? Did Roswell adopt their daughter Gladys who would be 11 in 1930? He apparently also took in Martha Kinney who would have been his step-grandmother.

Roswell died November 1971 in Belmont, Mass. Julian died in Windham, Maine in July, 1978. Based on all this information, I would guess that the senior Frank started his veterinary patent medicine business about 1890 and it closed between 1920 and 1930. It's possible Frank's daughter Gladys, who would now be 87, is still alive. It would be something

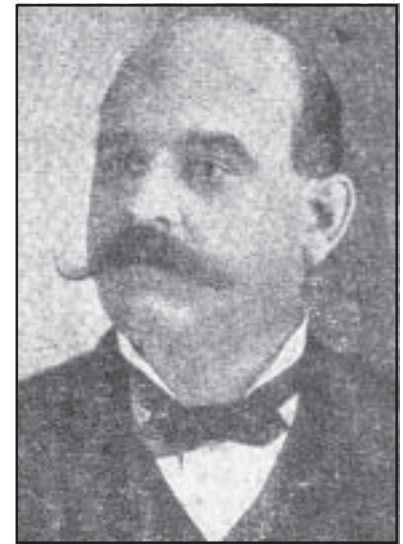


Figure 8: Dr. Hubbard.

to interview her.

If any collector has any information, paper ephemera, advertising or medicines dealing with Dr. Hubbard, please contact me at 770-482-5100 or petvet@mindspring.com.



Figure 6: Wooden display cabinet that started the whole Dr. Hubbard story. It is difficult to read the carving in the top of the door from this image, but it reads, F. K. Hubbard's. Glass knob and lock are later additions.



Figure 7: This example of the Spavin, Ringbone and Curb Remedy has the correct initials on the bottle label. The box calls this a "Cure" while the label states "Remedy." None of the Dr. Hubbard medicines, that I have seen, have any reference to the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act. Therefore, I'd date all his medicines to pre-1906.

Editor's Note: Many thanks to Trenton Boyd for his research contribution.