For the past thirty years I have been collecting urologically related bottles and ephemera. Yes, I am a urologist. My collection includes medicines for kidney and bladder disease, lithontriptics (stone dissolvers), aphrodisiacs and venereal disease nostrums.

A specific area of interest has been urological medicines that existed during the pontiled bottle era, i.e. around 1850 and before. Vaughn’s Vegetable Lithontriptic Mixture - Buffalo and Cowan’s Lithontriptic are the two known pontiled stone dissolvers that did exist. Dr. Magnin’s Lucina Cordial or The Elixir of Love-Paris is the known pontiled aphrodisiac and a bottle that is labeled only, 4-11-44, is the pontiled nostrum for venereal disease. Although these bottles are scarce, there are several varieties of each.

However, when it comes to the kidney-bladder disease, there is only a single pontiled medicine that is known. It is a cure, Dr. J.R. Flander’s Specific For Cure Of Disease Of The Kidneys and Stone In Bladder – New York (Figure 1-2). Today, only two such bottles are known to exist. But, why only one known pontiled kidney-bladder nostrum? Although kidney disease was not infrequent, bladder and voiding complaints should have been a common problem. Prior to 1850 for comparison, there were approximately 100 different pontiled cures and over 1000 pontiled medicines for a wide variety of human complaints and illnesses. Also, significant is the fact, that after 1850 there were several hundred different smooth based medicines for kidney-bladder disease. So why is there one, and only one, pontiled nostrum for this problem?

A basic and primary cause for urologic complaint is partial urinary obstruction. Also, it is important to remember that such a disease problem usually worsens with age. The classic example is prostate enlargement, either benign or malignant. An additional consideration is the frequent presence of prostatic cancer, being the most common cancer in man. Again, such problems only worsen with aging of the patient, so that longevity of life becomes significant.

Today life expectancy is carefully followed among the nations of the world, and data have been collected for many years (Figure 3). If a man was born in the United States in 2001, he has a life expectancy of approximately 75.2 years. In 1950 the life expectancy averaged 66 years and, in 1900, it averaged 48 years. It is significant that in 1850 the life expectancy was only 38.3 years for males (Caucasian). In summing up, there was a marked decrease in the length of man’s life (Figure 4-5).

Prior to 1850, man’s very short life span was certainly a major contributing factor for the low incidence of kidney-bladder disease. The result was that urological pontiled medicines were rarely needed.

Of course some people were long lived, but, in general, life was physically strenuous, hazardous and relatively brief. The bad news was that life was brief, but the good news was you missed most of the urological problems.
The expectation of life at a specified age is the average number of years that member of a hypothetical group of people of the same age would continue to live if they were subject throughout the remainder of their lives to the same mortality rate.