

CHATTANOOGA MEDICINE CO.

By Charles David Head

Before the Civil War uprooted hundreds of thousands of this country's young men, and duty and honor sent them to far-flung places they'd never heard of, most had never traveled more than 10 or 15 miles from their homes.

Once war began, their lives changed forever as they found themselves far away from home and hearth. The Civil War was fought mostly in the South and much to their astonishment, young men dressed in blue from Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Connecticut and other Northern states found themselves marching through the beautiful Shenandoah, Sequatchie and Tennessee valleys and hundreds of other fertile regions.

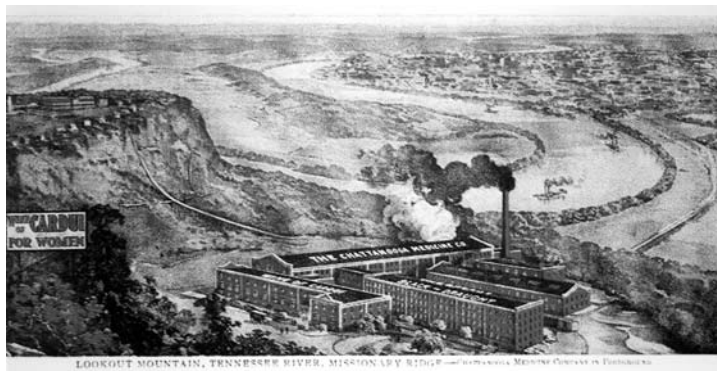
It was in direct contrast to what they had been told about quicksand, swamps, alligators and the mosquito- and malaria-ridden country in the Deep South.

After the war ended, many of the Northern soldiers decided to return South for a variety of reasons. Some had met a Southern belle and had fallen in love. Others had seen business opportunities and liked the region and its people, so the Yankees moved South with the hopes of earning a good living.

Zeboim Cartter Patten was one of those who liked the Chattanooga, Tenn., area and, upon returning, became an entrepreneur. Born in Wilna, N.Y., in 1840, Patten first saw Chattanooga while convalescing from wounds received in the Battle of Chickamauga. Serving in the 115th Illinois Infantry during the war, he also served in the 149th New York Infantry and attained the rank of captain.

He and another veteran, Thomas H. Payne, came to Chattanooga and opened a book and stationery store called Patten & Payne. A few years later, he sold his interest and purchased the Chattanooga Times. He later was joined by prominent businessmen from the area in forming the Chattanooga Medicine Company.

The firm started with \$25,000 in



Chattanooga Medicine Co complex sprawls beneath Lookout Mountain with Tennessee River in the background. Courtesy of Steve Ketcham

capital from 25 shares of stock costing \$1,000 each. The business was housed in a plain two-story brick building on muddy Market Street in the heart of the city. Its first president was Fred F. Wiehl, followed by Adolph S. Ochs and Col. A.M. Johnson. Patten became president of the company in 1891. By then, the company had moved onto one of the large commercial lots in the St. Elmo community founded in 1886 by Col. Johnson. Patten's nephews, John A. and Zeboim Charles, who had joined the company in 1884, by 1895 had acquired most of the company shares. What they didn't own, their uncle did.

The latter bought the formula rights to Black Draught, a senna-based laxative, from the grandson of originator Dr. Q.A. Simmons, of Snow Hill, Ga. Simmons had developed it in 1840. It eventually became the Chattanooga company's first successful product, but not its last.

In 1882, he bought the rights to Dr. McElree's Wine of Cardui, a tonic for women based on the sedative and antispasmodic properties of cricus benedictus. According to legend, its healing properties were brought to the attention of Mr. Frances Smith in Fayetteville, Tenn., by a Cherokee passing through the town. She saw a young girl suffering from dysmenorrhea get relief from a compound of dried leaves of cricus benedictus given to her by the Indian. The Indian also gave Mrs. Smith's husband a supply of the plant's leaves and seeds. Mrs. Smith gave her granddaughter, Mrs.

McElree, some of the seeds and the latter's husband planted and raised some of the plants. It was he who marketed the Wine of Cardui before selling it to Patten.

Zeboim Patten not only was successful at finding new products to sell, but used creative promotional techniques to market them. He was one of the first to put into practice mass-market advertising. To overcome limitations of the transportation system of his day, the Chattanooga Medicine Company employed a huge force of traveling salesmen, also called drummers, to traverse rural America on foot, horseback, horse-and-buggy and, much later, in the

new contraption called the automobile.

The company was one of the first to recognize the value of outdoor advertising and many of its salesmen also were painters. Numerous signs soon appeared on storefronts, the sides and roofs of barns near well-traveled roads and crossroads. Quite often, the company made deals with farmers to put a new roof on a barn or shed in exchange for space on the sides of the building on which would be painted BLACK DRAUGHT or WINE OF CARDUI. A major tourist attraction near Chattanooga copy-catted the medicine



Front of a fan advertising Cardui used by the Chattanooga Medicine Company. Courtesy of Steve Ketcham



Advertising on the back of the fan issued by the Chattanooga Medicine Co. Courtesy of Steve Ketcham.

company by starting in 1935 to paint SEE ROCK CITY atop and on the sides of barns. Many of those signs can be seen to this day.

Another project that confirmed Zeboim Patten as truly one of the marketing geniuses of his day was the development and distribution of the "Wine of Cardui" calendar and "Ladies' Birthday Almanac." The latter was published as early as 1891 and contained weather information, important dates in history and advertisements touting the effectiveness of all of the company's medicines. Both calendars and almanacs were available from merchants who sold the company products, while millions more were distributed annually through the mail.

In 1902 alone, the company reported having sent out some 15 million almanacs and 12 million other books and pamphlets. So great was the volume of mail that the firm soon found itself as the largest generator of mail in the entire Chattanooga area. So much mail was being sent and received, in fact, that the U.S. Post Office Department was forced to build a post office on the company premises.

Although most rural Americans were deeply religious and believed in the healing powers of the Almighty, they also understood that he would not mind if they handled the minor day-to-day

discomforts of life with strong doses of Black Draught and Wine of Cardui, which were regularly advertised on the backs of church fans distributed without charge by the company.

Any successful enterprise is, of course, overseen by intelligent and competent management personnel and Zeboim hired some of the best young minds in the field. They included John Thomas Lupton, a young and capable attorney. Born in 1862, Lupton served as legal counsel for the Chattanooga Medicine Company, eventually becoming vice president and treasurer from 1891-1906. He married Zeboim's only daughter, Elizabeth Olive Patten, in a ceremony that became the major social event of 1889.

With business savvy akin to that of his father-in-law, in 1899 Lupton joined Benjamin F. Thomas and Joseph B. Whitehead in a partnership to bottle Coca-Cola in most of the United States. In 1900, the partners split the bottling territory, with Lupton and Whitehead receiving most of the western United States and the South. In addition to the soft drink business, Lupton was active in other business endeavors, including several with his father-in-law.

In 1906, Zeboim Patten and Lupton sold their controlling interests in the Chattanooga Medicine Company to Patten's nephew and capable assistant, John Patten. It was the latter who foresaw the vast and unexplored opportunities for product sales in Central and South America. By 1911, he had established a flourishing business in both areas. It was John who created the legendary salesmen force that included future Louisiana Gov. Huey P. Long in 1914. And it was John who enrolled the company as a charter member of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Succeeding his brother, John, as president of the medicine company in 1916, Zeboim Charles Patten steered the company through turbulent times, including those of the Great Depression. During that period, the company never failed to pay a dividend and in 1934 created the nation's first pension and life insurance programs.

In 1935, a new product was introduced. Menthacol, an analgesic balm created by Dr. Irvine W. Grote, met with only limited

success until its name was changed in 1946 to Soltice. In 1939, Zeboim Charles Patten retired and his nephew, Lupton Patten (a son of John A. Patten), took over as president. He established a nationally recognized research program and introduced diversification by entering into the fine chemical and prescription drug businesses. Lupton Patten also modernized the plant.

At the onset of World War II, the Chattanooga Medicine Company put its expertise to work and during the course of the war produced more than 34 million K-Rations of three meals each. The company also manufactured enough aromatic spirits of ammonia (first aid for shock victims) to float a battleship.

With their own sons and daughters on the front lines in numerous combat zones, as well as sons and daughters of a host of the company's employees, the Patten family worked diligently to ensure all those young heroes would receive the very best in medicines and food the company could produce on 24-hour, seven-day shifts. The company earned the prestigious "E Award," named in honor of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of allied forces in Europe, no fewer than five times.

By the end of the war, the Chattanooga Medicine Company continued to prosper and added additional successful products including "Icy Hot" and "Blis-To-Sol." In September 1978, the company changed its name to Chattem Inc., and it's still known by that name today.

The company has been in business for more than 130 years and its sales and earnings continue to grow, a fact that founder Zeboim Patten would be proud of had he been alive today.

SOURCES: Bill Baab, Augusta, Georgia; Ron Fowler, Seattle, Washington; Ned L. Irwin, East Tennessee University. Books: Huey Long, by T. Harry Williams. Websites: www.chattem.com.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to hear from anyone who collects Chattanooga Medicine Company Memorabilia. Write to Charles D. Head, 23549-001, P.O. Box 150160, Atlanta, GA 30315. I can also be contacted through KocaNolabook@yahoo.com.