

...and Extras

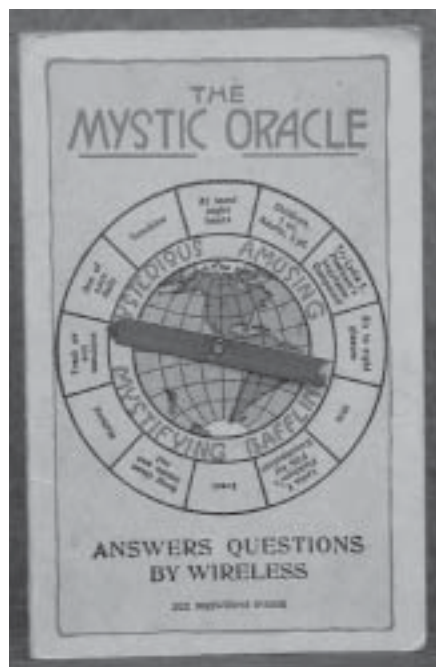
## Lydia Pinkham's Early Use of Wireless Technology

by Cecil Munsey

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The only thing worse than a hangover is that throbbing in your head after studying all the various plans and equipment options from today's wireless carriers. From time to time, friends ask me what wireless service they should choose. As one, who has a cell phone and lives in a community where 30,000 people are employed in the wireless sector, I feel obliged to reply, but always wind up feeling not up to the task. More than once I have been tempted, with a sarcastic tongue in my cheek to suggest they consult "The Mystic Oracle" – a "wireless" device used in 1924 by the famous Lydia Pinkham Medicine Company.

Indeed, it's true! Lydia Pinkham was an early user of "wireless" technology. Well actually Lydia herself was 41-years-dead in 1924 when "The Mystic Oracle" was used to promote Lydia's medicines. It was the succeeding company that employed the recently re-discovered "wireless" promotional piece that is the feature of this article. The item proclaims to offer "ANSWERS [to] QUESTIONS BY WIRELESS." (Interestingly and coincidentally the "Oracle" was patented and copyrighted, by J. B. Carroll Co., Carroll & Albany Avenues, Chicago, on the very same day in 1924 that Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin died.)



### Wireless Communications History

At this point in the discussion, it seems that some history and clarification might be helpful. Communication without wires and electricity is probably as old as Man himself – wireless communications in other words.

Early communications development included a variety of semaphore [an apparatus for visual signaling] where spotters used visual signals to relay messages from one elevated location to the next. By the early 1800s, these mechanically operated visual telegraph lines were fairly common in Europe; less common in the United States except for smoke signals utilized by the native Americans. Visual telegraph methods were slow, covered limited distances and were only usable during good visibility.

During the early 1800s numerous inventors worked on ways to send signals by electrical currents along wires. Samuel B. Morse of the United States developed a system that imprinted dots and dashes on a paper tape. The dots and dashes on paper were replaced with the skill of listening to the same dots and dashes coming through the clicking receiver. Eventually Morse's dot-and-dash approach became the worldwide standard.

Radio – signaling and audio communication using electromagnetic radiation – was first employed as a "wireless telegraph," for point-to-point links where regular telegraph lines were unreliable or impractical.

What is the difference between wireless and radio? "There ain't none – both refer to the exact same thing" – explained Edward C. Hubert in "Radio vs. Wireless," from January 1925 issue of Radio News.

Today, of course, "wireless" mostly refers to cellular telephones that bounce a variety of signals to and from satellites. In 1924 the Lydia Pinkham Medicine Company's use of the word "wireless" was to be taken literally. It really just meant a method of communicating (answering questions) without wires.

### The Mystic Oracle Theme:

Before an examination of how the Mystic Oracle game works mechanically, it is not only interesting to study the reason (theme) for its use as a promotional tool, but why it was selected to promote Lydia Pinkham medicines. The theme is clearly highlighted in the opening question [–on the second page of folder], "Are You On The Sunlit Road to Better Health?"

"Every road leads somewhere. We can reach any destination we choose—if we find the right road. Some folks never do. Yet

before them over the green hills, stretches straight and true the 'Sunlit Road to Better Health.' Along that broad highway marches a joyous company. These are the folks who get things done.

"Which road are you traveling? Why do you loiter in the shadows when you crave the sunshine? Have you strayed into little bypaths of worry and illness? Turn around. March on with the crowd, head up and shoulders back.

### ALONG THE SUNLIT ROAD ARE SEVEN GUIDEPOSTS:

1. Fresh Air and Sunshine.
2. Pure Water.
3. Balanced Meals.
4. Be Clean Inside and Out.
5. Work Hard and Play Hard.
6. Rest.
7. Be Cheerful

"Thousands of women tell us that each bottle of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound they took was a milestone on the Sunlit Road to Better Health."

The reasons the Mystic Oracle was selected to promote Lydia's medicine are obvious. Besides the popular theme of good health [popular then and still popular today] the device is cleverly done, fun to manipulate and it dispenses very sound advice.

### How it works:

According to the directions, "turn the disc [on the third page of folder] until the question you want answered is directly under the pointer (printed arrow). Then close the folder and the hand will find the answer" [–on the front page of folder]. The game works with the aid of a magnet



affixed in a permanent position to the back of the disc on the third page of the folder. When the question to be answered is rotated until it "is directly under the pointer" the hand (metal arrow) on the front page of the folder follows the internal magnet and always points to the correct answer.

### The questions:

There are twelve questions that are asked and answered by The Mystic Oracle. The game is touted [—on the front page of folder] as being "MYSTERIOUS; AMUSING; MYSTIFYING; BAFFLING." And the game, "answers questions by wireless."

### Lydia E. Pinkham's Four Medicines:

On the fourth page of the folder, along with the traditional picture of Lydia E. Pinkham, is a listing and explanation of the four medicines being marketed by the Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Company in 1924.

Vegetable Compound – "A popular medicine in use for over fifty years."

Herb Medicine – "Formerly called Lydia E. Pinkham's Blood medicine. A Spring tonic for run down condition."

Pills for Constipation – "An improved, coated laxative pill equally good for men and women, boys and girls. Keep them in your medicine chest."

Sanative Wash – Put up in two forms. Liquid—ready to use. Dry—to steep."

### Finale

Which wireless service should you choose? Please don't ask me. With 134.6 million wireless subscribers who have selected services, it's probably a moot question. The wireless industry is a \$71.2 billion industry that employs 186,956 people. The average monthly cell phone bill is \$50. That is about one-fifth of the price I paid to own the only-known example of "The Mystic Oracle" that has been the real focus of this article.

The elderly game collector from

Denver, who relinquished, by way of an eBay auction, the 1924 Lydia Pinkham relic to my care had enjoyed it for forty years. She was happy to learn that the "Oracle" would receive a good home and become a part of a select collection of historic Pinkham items. We both found it interesting that such an item found its way from a collection of games to a collection of Lydia Pinkham artifacts. And we are both self-satisfied to know that at an appropriate time the "Oracle" will be passed on to another appreciative collector – of games, or bottles or....

**Authors' Note:** January 18, 2003 (Associated Press) – "One hundred years ago today, Guglielmo Marconi stood on a sandy bluff on Cape Cod and sent a 54-word greeting from President Theodore Roosevelt across the ocean to England's King Edward VII. A few hours later, the king responded, completing a dialogue that at the time seemed like pure magic. Marconi had launched the era of global wireless communications. The events of 100 years ago paved the way for today's other wireless tools, including cell phones and pagers."

**Coming soon:** The author of this article has recently completed and submitted another article based on previously undisclosed facts about the famous Lydia Pinkham medicines "...then and now." That effort will appear in a future issue. It will discuss the family feud over control of the famous proprietary medicine company and what happened to the historic vegetable compound itself.

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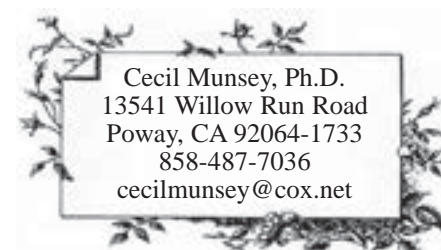
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### QUESTIONS

1. How long should I sleep at night?
2. What is called the Foe of Germs?
3. How much fruit and green vegetables should I eat?
4. What is the first law of health?
5. What is the cheapest exercise?
6. How may we help to prevent disease?
7. How should I stand, sit and walk?
8. How may constipation be relieved?
9. What is the most nearly perfect food?
10. How much water should I drink daily?
11. How may I improve my health?
12. How much milk should I use each day?



### ANSWERS

1. At least eight hours
2. Sunshine
3. One each daily
4. Fresh air and sunshine
5. Walking
6. Keep clean inside and out
7. Erect
8. Lydia E. Pinkham's Pills for Constipation
9. Milk
10. Six to eight glasses
11. Try Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound
12. Children 1 qt.; adults 1 pt.