

# Is Your Brain Fag Flagging?

*Then you may need a hit of Orangeine. A dose could put you in the pink of health, but what the heck is it?*

*By Mike Beardsley*

I've really been enjoying John Panella's and Joe Widman's articles written for "In the Medicine Chest." I especially get a hoot out of the stories concerning the many quack medicines that plagued the country at the turn of the last century. And the many colorful and skillfully misleading trade cards, labels, etc. are simply fascinating.

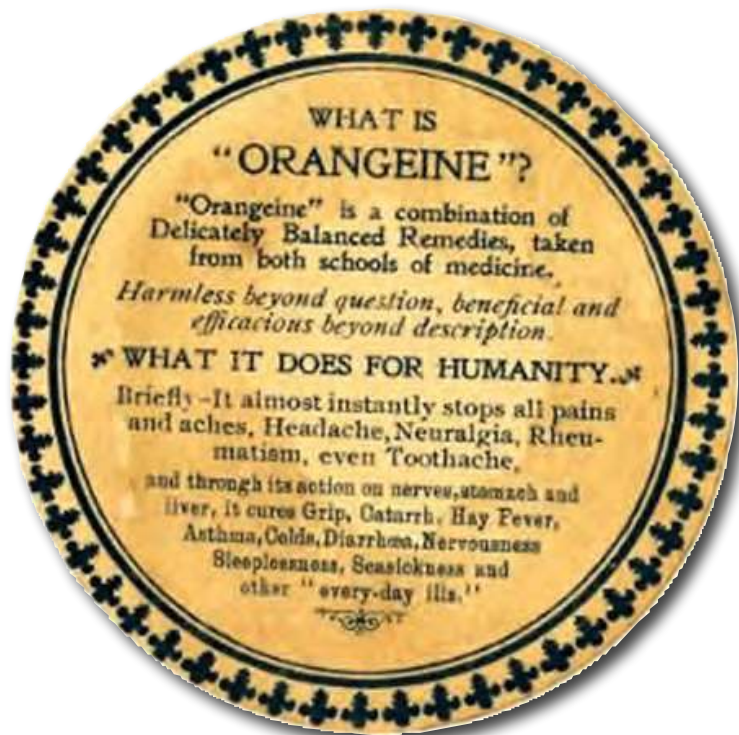
A while back I picked up a broadside or poster (21 inches by 16) advertising Orangeine at a sale here in Madison County, N.Y. Little did I know that Orangeine was one of the most notorious "killers" of its day, according to *The Great American Fraud: Articles on the Nostrum Evil and Quacks* by Samuel Hopkins Adams as printed in *Collier's Weekly*, December 2, 1905.

Packed in a bright orange box and sporting an orange wrapper, Orangeine, of course, contained no oranges at all. Instead it was primarily composed of the deadly drug acetanilid. Orangeine was billed as a headache powder that would cure about anything including "Brain Fag" (*Hub?!*) It claimed to strengthen the heart and produce better blood. Instead, acetanilid actually thins the blood, depresses the heart, and generally undermines the entire cardiovascular system.

Adams proclaimed about Orangeine advertising that "thus far in the patent medicine field I have not seen so direct and specific an inversion of the facts." Adams even made lists of otherwise



I conducted a pretty thorough search of the internet and I can find no other copies of this rare Orangeine broadside. I must say that the ad's pitch is pretty compelling. Hey, if you can't trust a nun, a Grandma, and a little girl who can you trust? They pulled out all the stops.



**BEWARE  
OF  
ACETANILID**

*The following well-known "remedies," both "ethical" and "patent," depend for their results upon the heart-depressing action of Acetanilid:*

Orangeine	Megrimine	Ammonol
Bromo-Seltzer	Anti-Headache	Salacetin
Royal Pain Powders	Dr. Davis' Headache Powders	Cephalgin
Miniature Headache Powders	Antikamnia	Phenalgin

*and practically all of the drug-store-vended "headache cures" and "anti-pain" remedies.*

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*Take no nostrum of this class without a doctor's prescription, unless you are sure it contains no acetanilid. Make the druggist tell you. He is responsible. A suit for damages has recently been won against a New York drug store for illness consequent upon the sale of a "guaranteed harmless" headache tablet containing three grains of acetanilid.*

**LEFT:** An image of the top to a can of Orangeine that I found on the internet. It is quite informative.

**ABOVE:** On this warning ad Orangeine is shown first on the list. The ad maker certainly wanted everyone to be very wary of using Orangeine.

healthy people who died directly as a result of taking Orangeine. For example, Mary Bispels of Philadelphia, just 18 years old, took two powders for a headache and died three hours later of heart and kidney failure directly related to Orangeine. Adams decried the "wickedness of the fraud."

In 1902 the death rate from sudden heart failure in New York City alone jumped to 1.34 per thousand. That was six times the death rate of typhoid fever. Almost all of the additional deaths were ascribed to overdoses of "headache powders" such as Orangeine.

Orangeine encouraged users to "get the habit" (at least they were honest about luring addiction). They suggested taking Orangeine at night, in the morning, and between meals.

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The president of Orangeine was Yale graduate Charles Bartlett. Interestingly, Orangeine was only a secondary interest to Charles. He was the western distributor for the Ivory Soap Co. A major corporate player, he was a highly respected businessman from coast to coast, which gave validity (albeit undeserved) to the Orangeine claims.

The largest stakeholder in Orangeine was well-known Connecticut actor and playwright William Hooker Gillette. William was immensely popular for his role as Sherlock Holmes and he even appeared in early silent films. On stage it is said that he'd openly promote the virtues of Orangeine (at intermission, I guess) and he made sure that his playbills always featured ads for this poison.

With two well-respected, turn-of-the-century figures promoting Orangeine what could there be to fear?

And now, meet Mike Beardsley. Mike explains that "Collecting came naturally to the Beardsley Family. In the early 1960s we discovered New York State

Archaeology and our family spent countless hours slogging through muddy, plowed fields in search of Indian sites and arrowheads. My dad, Leigh Beardsley, never did anything half way. We immersed ourselves in local history and built a very large artifact collection.

"Around 1967 Dad decided that he wanted to collect an arrowhead from all fifty states. He ran an ad in *Antique Trader* stating that we'd trade New York arrowheads for arrowheads from other states. We got a letter (forerunner to email for those not familiar) from a man in Kansas. He had lots of arrowheads but he didn't want ours.

"He said if we sent him antique canning jars then he'd send us arrowheads. Seriously, who would want old fruit jars? We raided my grandmother Beardsley's basement and sent him a box of jars. By return mail we got an incredible collection of artifacts. The light bulb clicked on. Opportunity was knocking.

"Beginning then and there Dad and I put about every spare hour into building a major antique fruit jar dealership. We





**LEFT:** I can't help it. I'm a sucker for great jars. I picked up this exceedingly rare Ball Fruit Jar (RB 195-1) earlier this year. It was an attic find from Clinton, N.Y., in excellent condition. I was attracted to the jar because it is one of the few jars that Dad and I never handled, and that's saying a lot. I had no idea it existed. And Jar Tsar Jerry McCann later commented: "The photo of the BGGMCo. jar is that of a very rare early Ball jar. Only reported in quart size, it is the first and earliest fruit jar to have Ball's name embossed on it."

"The jar is circa 1883 and it is not until the late 1890s that the Ball Brothers start adding their name to their fruit jars. Value is \$3,500 or better."

**All in One Box**  
OF  
**"ORANGEINE"**

**A Safe Allayer of Pain.**  
Headache, Neuralgia, Rheumatism, Women's Pains.

**A Manifold Remedy.**  
Cures Colds, "Grip," Catarrh, Hay Fever, etc.

**A Safe "Bracer."**  
Revives, Cheers, Brightens, Without Reaction.

**A Pocket Physician.**  
Used under directions in package.



*The talented favorite, Miss Alberta Gallatin, writes: "My experience, unalloyed, proves 'Orangeine' a great remedy of wide usefulness."*

**A Blessing to the Poor.**  
A well-known lady worker among the poor writes: "Your 'Orangeine' is a veritable godsend to my poor working women, whose suffering from headaches, neuralgia, rheumatism and women's troubles one or two powders invariably relieve and thus save for them often a whole day's work."  
DR. C. F. ELY, 34 Washington street, writes: "I have a patient suffering from Locomotor Ataxia who has taken 'Orangeine' with more relief than from any other remedy. He is poor and I am willing to ask if you will contribute a substantial package of same."  
MR. WILLIAM GILLETTE, the great actor, says of "Orangeine": "A most wonderful remedy; the only certain headache cure and the only one with absolutely no bad after effects."  
THE HON. FRANK H. JONES, ex-Assistant Postmaster General and a prominent Chicago lawyer, says: "I carry 'Orangeine' always ready to 'beat off' colds, headache and nervous exhaustion. It is 'great.'"

**The Secret of Its Charm.** A Chicago physician says: "The charm of your prescription is that an 'Orangeine' powder taken (either dry or in soda water) when needed to relieve exhaustion or pain keeps the system free from disease attack. It also normally regulates stomach and liver and insures just the right action for continued good health."  
*"For a refreshing 'reviver' at home, drug store, club or bar, stir one 'Orangeine' Powder into a glass of carbonated water. Drink foaming."*



The Beardsley Family posing in the "Indian Room" circa 1969. I'm the extremely dorky-looking dude, easy to pick out. Leigh, Mary, Brad, Brenda and yours truly.

I thought your readers might find this ad interesting as a follow-up to Panella's and Widman's great work.



**ABOVE:** In keeping with the collecting bug, Nancy and I have one of the largest and most diverse collections of very scarce Chittenango Pottery pieces. This ill-fated local pottery was in operation only from 1897 to 1904 and burned twice during that period. In this photo are some of their trademark beer mugs and steins. Fun to collect.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** More Chittenango Pottery. Many of these pieces were made for the 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo as the company was failing.



found out about bottle shows. Dad would set up our table and I'd roam the dealers to pick.

"I covered the Northeastern shows and Dad covered the Midwest. It was a blast. We collected amazing jars here in the Northeast when jar collecting was in its infancy, and sold them through hand-typed lists six times per year all over the U.S., to folks like Alex Kerr, Dick Vanderlaan, George McConnell, Roy Brown, etc. And we had such fond memories of the early Rochester, N.H., and the Rochester, N.Y., shows, Laconia, N.H., Portland, Maine, the two-day Syracuse show at the fairgrounds, St. Louis, Lancaster, Schupp's Grove, York, etc. The friendships that we built along the way with folks like Ralph Finch were priceless.

"Mom (Mary) built a wonderful collection of baking powder jars and ephemera. My sister collected glass infant feeders. I built an impressive collection of colored Mason 1858 jars. Even my wife, Nancy, new to collecting anything, put together a comprehensive collection of horseradish jars.

"As Beardsleys, we were driven to find things, from arrowheads to great jars. Today, at nearly seventy, the collecting spirit imparted to me by my folks still drives me to old dusty barns, country auctions, etc. Sadly, Dad is gone, but Mom, who was ninety last October, is still my biggest fan and gets as much thrill from the hunt as I do.

"What a wonderful gift they gave that has endured for a lifetime. I still slog across muddy fields looking for arrowheads. I work with the New York State Museum Paleo Archaeology team and I've been fortunate to discover a major Paleo (Crowfield) cluster of sites here in Madison County. But, I still have a soft spot in my heart for my roots, the old canning jars and related advertising. Once it is in your blood it never leaves.



**LEFT:** This lovely dark aqua Ayres & Lewis Baking Powder jar was Mom's first purchase in what was to become an impressive collection of baking powder jars, advertising, and ephemera. Mom and I bought it at a small antique show in Waterloo, N.Y., about 1968. The collection has gone on for others to appreciate but we kept this piece. It's sentimental.

**BELOW:** My better half and very patient wife Nancy. She has put up with my collecting habits for 45 years. She has camped at York, slept in our old van outside bottle shows, and generally put up with what some would call clutter but I refer to as "historic treasures."

**BELOW:** We took Mom to a nice lunch recently (August 2020) at a restaurant overlooking Cayuga Lake, directly across from legendary Frontenac Island ("the Island of the Dead") where our family first got hooked on archaeology all those many years ago. Too bad Dad wasn't there to join us. The beer was good, and cold!



*Editor Ralph Finch notes: I knew Mike's parents, Leigh and Mary, decades ago. I was so impressed by them. And while Leigh didn't really collect, wow, could he come up with treasures. Fifty or so years ago, I would stand outside the Rochester bottle show, impatiently waiting for the door to open. When it did, I would run, usually with Chicago's Jerry McCann, past all the other tables to get to Leigh's.*

*Leigh was a wonderful man. And Mary? I fell in love with her smile fifty years ago, and I doubt that it has changed much. The Beardsley family? They make the hobby really important and worthwhile.*