



PERUNA - KING OF THE BRACERS

THE BOOZIEST STUFF IN TOWN

After discussing Lash's Bitters and other Lash's products in a past Medicine Chest, we discussed the thin line between a product and its relationship with the user as a "medicinal preparation," "cure," "remedy," or just a distraction from illness. Some were just plain old-fashioned boozy alcoholic stimulants created to intoxicate and addict the user.

Booze medicines consisted of alcoholic preparations sold under proprietary names. These nostrums pretended to be medicinal products and were common prior to federal and state regulation. These compounds and preparations became known by the Internal Revenue Department for taxation purposes as "Bracers." These products contained medicinal agents in amounts so insignificant that they were forbidden to be sold by druggists as medicine. It was illegal for a druggist to sell these "medicines" classed as "compound liquors" by the Internal Revenue unless he had paid a special tax as a retail liquor dealer.

In this article we wish to discuss Peruna, one of the most notorious patent medicines of all time.

Peruna Arrives on the Scene

Peruna was a well-known patent medicine sold from the late 19th- to mid-20th century. It was patented by Samuel Brubaker Hartman, and endorsed by hundreds of politicians. Peruna at one time released advertising that had fifty United States congressmen endorsing it as an invaluable household remedy. Its advertising campaigns were big and splashy, and no expense was spared on

promotion. It went on the shelves on July 29, 1885, as a cure for catarrh. Its inventor, Dr. Hartman, went to school in Cincinnati and apprenticed his medical training with Dr. Shackelford from Medway, Ohio. A graduate of the Medical School of Cleveland, he married, and by 1890 had moved to Columbus, Ohio.

At this point, Hartman abandoned his practice of medicine to manufacture remedies. He manufactured one named "La-cu-pia," a blood thinner, and one called "Ma-na-lin" for biliousness. His invention of "Pe-ru-na" was his greatest accomplishment, as it supposedly cured catarrh. The product literature will suggest its value as a tonic and preventative of lassitude.

What is catarrh? Dr. Hartman had a broad definition of catarrh. It was "Whatever ails you." No matter what bothered you, one will be greatly compelled by Dr. Hartman's Peruna publication "The Ills of Life." It served to diagnose your illness as catarrh and make you realize that Peruna alone will save you. Peruna bottles carried wrap-around labels, and were further wrapped in Peruna advertising as an outer layer. I've photographed these labels so you can get a full story of what Peruna cured, which was everything! It would be remiss for me to list the diseases here, but there's not enough room in this text.

It was claimed that Peruna could be used any length of time without acquiring a drug habit and nobody could get drunk on the prescribed doses. There was so much exaggeration here, and the words on the label and in his book are confusing to say the least. It is stated that the prescribed dose would be 3 wineglassfuls in 45 minutes. If you think about that, the amount would even temporarily alter a prohibitionist's look on life. Peruna was

profitable to the maker and a curse on the community at large.

The fact is that this minimum dose first ceases to satisfy, then users moved on to the moderate dose, and finally the maximum dose. The unsuspecting patron who began taking it as a medicine goes on to use it as a beverage, and finally be enslaved by it as a habit. At its peak, Hartman was earning \$100,000 a day from the Peruna sales. It was a wildly popular nostrum, so popular that babies were being named after it.

It's Good for You?

Peruna can be easily made. Before discussing that formula, here is a statement from the company made prior to the passage of the Pure Food & Drug Act of 1906. The makers of Peruna press release said: "That Peruna is simply a bitters containing whiskey as an ingredient is entirely false, and must be made by people either with no knowledge of its composition or by those who deliberately intend to deceive the public. Peruna contains no whisky, wine, rum, gin or brandy and, when used as directed on the label of the bottle or according to our literature, it cannot possibly do anyone any harm or cause any degree of inebriation no matter how long or continuously taken. We regard the whole matter of negative publicity as one of the unavoidable unpleasant incidents which will arise in consequence of the partial or absolute prohibition of the sale of alcoholic stimulus."

From *The Great American Fraud* by Samuel Hopkins Adams

"Anyone wishing to make Peruna for home consumption may do so by mixing half a pint of cologne spirits (190 proof pure alcohol), with a pint and a half of water, adding thereto a little cubebs



In the Medicine Chest

By John Panella and Joe Widman



LEFT: Close-up of an early PE-RU-NA bottle with label.

ABOVE: Colorful Peruna advertising card showing an attractive woman with an enormous bottle of PE-RU-NA.



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for flavor and a little burned sugar for color. Manufactured in bulk, so a former Peruna agent estimates, its cost including bottle and wrapper is between fifteen and eighteen cents per bottle. Its cost (for consumers) is \$1. Because of this handsome margin of profit, and by way of making hay in the stolen sunshine of Peruna advertising, many imitations have sprung up to harass the proprietors of the alcohol and water product. There are many self-confessed imitations. From what the Peruna people tell me they are dangerous and damnable frauds, and they cure nothing."

Samuel Hopkins Adams was about to throw a monkey wrench into the works of the Peruna profit making machine, publishing eleven articles to expose the public health consequences in *Colliers* magazine. He later published *The Great American Fraud* exposing Peruna and many other dangerous and habit-forming nostrums to the medical establishment and the public.

The *Colliers* article and the book prompted the passage of the Pure Food & Drug Act of 1906. This act drastically changed the way patent medicine companies could market their goods and which ingredients they could include in their previously secret formulas. Peruna was in the spotlight, and it was ordered by the government that they could no longer use the vague term "cure" and must adopt the term "remedy." They also set requirements that medicines must contain effective amounts of medicinal ingredients.

The Internal Revenue authorities made it mandatory for Dr. Hartman to comply with their dictates or he would have to remove his medicine from the market and sell it as a liquor. Being a temperance advocate, he chose to change the formula of Peruna. He was required to add substan-



ALCOHOL IN "MEDICINES" AND IN LIQUORS.

These diagrams show what would be left in a bottle of patent medicine if everything was poured out except the alcohol; they also show the quantity of alcohol that would be present if the same bottle had contained whisky, champagne, claret or beer. It is apparent that a bottle of Peruna contains as much alcohol as five bottles of beer, or three bottles of claret or champagne—that is, bottles of the same size. It would take nearly nine bottles of beer to put as much alcohol into a thirsty man's system as a temperance advocate can get by drinking one bottle of Hostetter's Stomach Bitters. While the "doses" prescribed by the patent medicine manufacturers are only one to two teaspoonfuls several times a day, the opportunity to take more exists, and even small doses of alcohol, taken regularly, cause that craving which is the first step in the making of a drunkard or drug fiend.

An interesting government report exposing the alcohol content of several popular turn-of-the-century patent medicines, including Peruna, and comparing them to liquor, claret, and beer.



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TOP: An early testimonial claiming, "I am Healthy and Happy Once More" after consuming a bottle of Peruna.

LEFT: A later advertisement referring to Peruna as a "Remedy."

tial amounts of senna and blackthorn bark, both cathartics, and reduce the alcohol content of Peruna from 28 to 18 percent. This alteration was great enough to change the character of this drink, and received negative feedback from all across America. Sales plummeted and this enterprise was suddenly looking at bankruptcy.

Dr. Hartman and his partner Schumacher knew they needed to revive the old formula and market it as an alcoholic beverage to save the enterprise. The new product was named Ka-Tar-No-Tonic. It sold in bars and liquor stores, but was not a success, as the name recognition of Peruna was too great. On Dec. 11, 1914, the *New York Tribune* called out for a law to curb quack cures, specifically naming Peruna. On Jan. 6, 1915, Samuel Hopkins Adams calls out Peruna, stating that advertisements cannot sell health.

In later years Dr. Hartman's son-in-law took over the operation, with his partner Fred Schumacher being elected president of the City Board of Trade. Under his son-in-law's leadership the nostrum never regained the popularity of the original product. On Feb. 1, 1918, Dr. Samuel Hartman, age 82, dies of acute pneumonia at his apartment in the Hartman Hotel.

Then came Prohibition. States going dry started to rely again on the "new" Peruna, and extensive media and radio advertising took the reins of promotion and sales. During national Prohibition, Peruna came to be known as "Prohibition Tonic." All along Peruna was endorsed by heavy advertising over the airwaves and endorsements from temperance advocates and clergy. Sales were brisk again, but never as good as in early ventures.

With repeal of Prohibition, Peruna started to crash and burn. Even with formula changes, new themes and slogans, as well



as new curative boasts, it was withdrawn from the market during the 1940s.

It was a good run, but the writing was on the wall for Peruna.

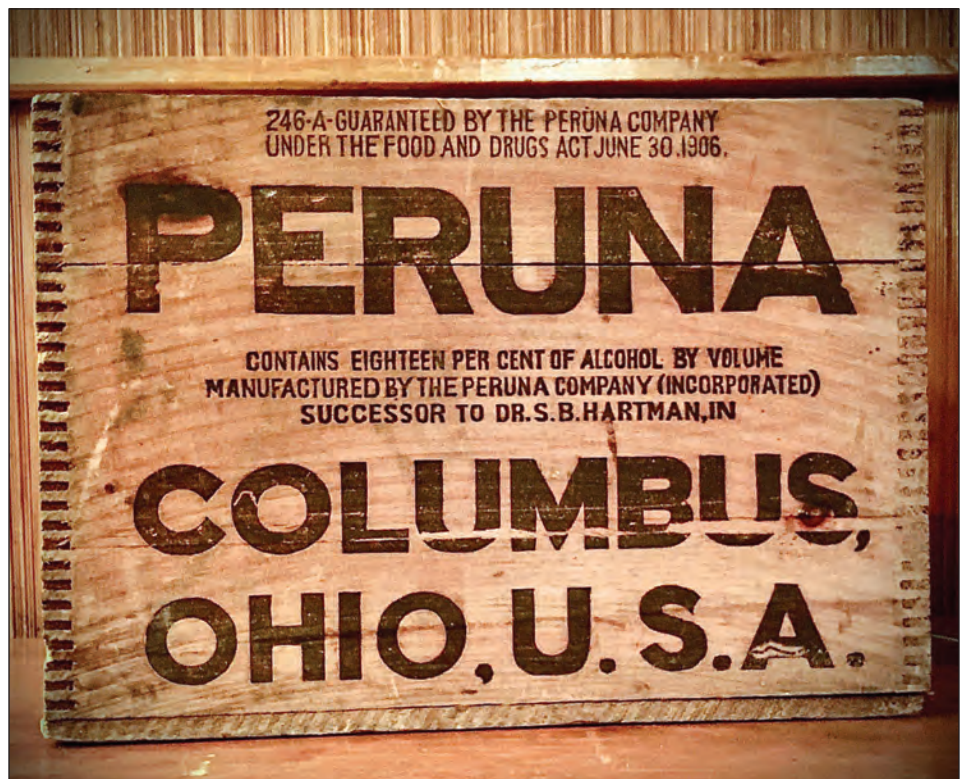
Credits: This article was composed using material from a variety of sources including the internet. Texts and references were gathered from *The Great American Fraud* (1905) by Samuel Adams Hopkins; *Bottles and Extras Magazine*; *The Peruna Story: Strumming That Old Catarrh*, May-June 2007, by Jack Sullivan; *Toadstool Millionaires* by James Harvey Young (1961); *The Golden Age Of Quackery* by Stewart H. Holbrook (1959); and *Nostrums & Quackery* Vols. 1-3, AMA/ Crabbe, Dr. Dennis G. Pappas Sr. M.D., Dr. George D. Oetting, ex-Director of Education for the Medical Association of Alabama, Dr. Robert Kravetz M.D., FACP, MACG, University of Arizona.

I thank all for their help, guidance and inspiration through the years.

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An early Peruna crate with curative claims.



Revised PERUNA crate after Pure Food & Drug Act of 1906. ***Eighteen Percent Alcohol*** had to be listed.

