

## The Apotheosis of the Apothecary: Retailing and Consuming the Meaning of a Historic Site

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### Résumé de l'article

L'auteur examine ici la façon dont on s'est servi de l'histoire pour rénover la pharmacie de Niagara, qui fut l'un des premiers édifices à faire l'objet de restauration patrimoniale dans les années 1970. La pharmacie-musée, replantée dans son décor de l'ère victorienne, se trouve à Niagara-on-the-Lake, en Ontario. Paul Litt rappelle les étapes de la restauration de ce site historique et explique comment la tranche d'histoire qu'on y fait revivre a été modelée par diverses considérations. Parce que la pharmacie est située à Niagara-on-the-Lake, la Mecque du tourisme patrimonial et du consumérisme, il est possible de faire ici une intéressante étude de cas sur la façon dont on présente l'histoire au grand public. L'auteur étudie de façon générale la nature du tourisme à Niagara-on-the-Lake et analyse de plus près la clientèle touristique qui visite la pharmacie. Il montre comment s'affrontent, dans la récréation du passé de la pharmacie, l'historien professionnel, en quête d'objectivité, et les promoteurs du site, aux prises avec des réalités matérielles et des stratégies de marketing axées sur le romantisme, la spécialisation et la convivialité.

# The Apotheosis of the Apothecary: Retailing and Consuming the Meaning of a Historic Site

PAUL LITT

The tourist, strolling the main street of Niagara-on-the-Lake, encounters a neat frame building on a downtown corner. Something about this shop is different. Its windows are not as crammed with wares as those of neighbouring stores, and, over their arches, neat wooden letters spell out simply "The Niagara Apothecary." On a street crowded with commercial signs of the past, this storefront sends a different message. The tourist may well choose to go in. Every year, some 100,000 tourists do. This paper explores what happens next.

The Niagara Apothecary is commonly described as a restored Victorian drugstore and pharmacy museum, but for the student of public history it is also a fascinating forum in which to observe the interplay of various interpretations and understandings of a single historic site. The meanings derived from the site are, of course, as numerous as the individuals who visit it. But some messages are more common and influential than others.

On one level, the dominant pasts in play at the Niagara Apothecary reflect the different interests involved in the creation of the site. The local community, the restoration architect, and the pharmacists who operate it have had the greatest influence in shaping the messages retailed by the building, its displays, and its interpreters. These influences emerge clearly when the history of the restoration of the Apothecary is related.

Another pervasive influence has been tourism, an industry that has grown exponentially in recent decades to become a major force in our economy and a defining characteristic of our civilisation. The development of the Apothecary was shaped first by anticipation of tourists, and later, by day-to-day experience of it. Not any kind of tourists, either. Niagara-on-the-Lake attracted a particular type of tourist who sought nostalgically to experience a small town of yesteryear and interact with it through heritage consumerism.

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The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Ernst Stieb and Mr. Stan Tolan, who generously shared their knowledge of the history of the Niagara Apothecary and its operation as a museum and offered many observations about the reactions of visitors. Dr. Stieb also provided the author with a very instructive introduction to pharmacy history and corrections and comments on a preliminary historical background paper on the site.

The interests of the various parties involved with the Apothecary may not always coincide, but they share certain distinct modes of communication by which meaning is expressed and understood. The site is distinguished by its emphasis on material history, by a romantic treatment that ennobles it and generalises its significance, by its simplification of a complex past, and by how interpretation is accessed through consumerism. This paper will explore how these factors operate at the Apothecary and how they shape the meaning of the site.

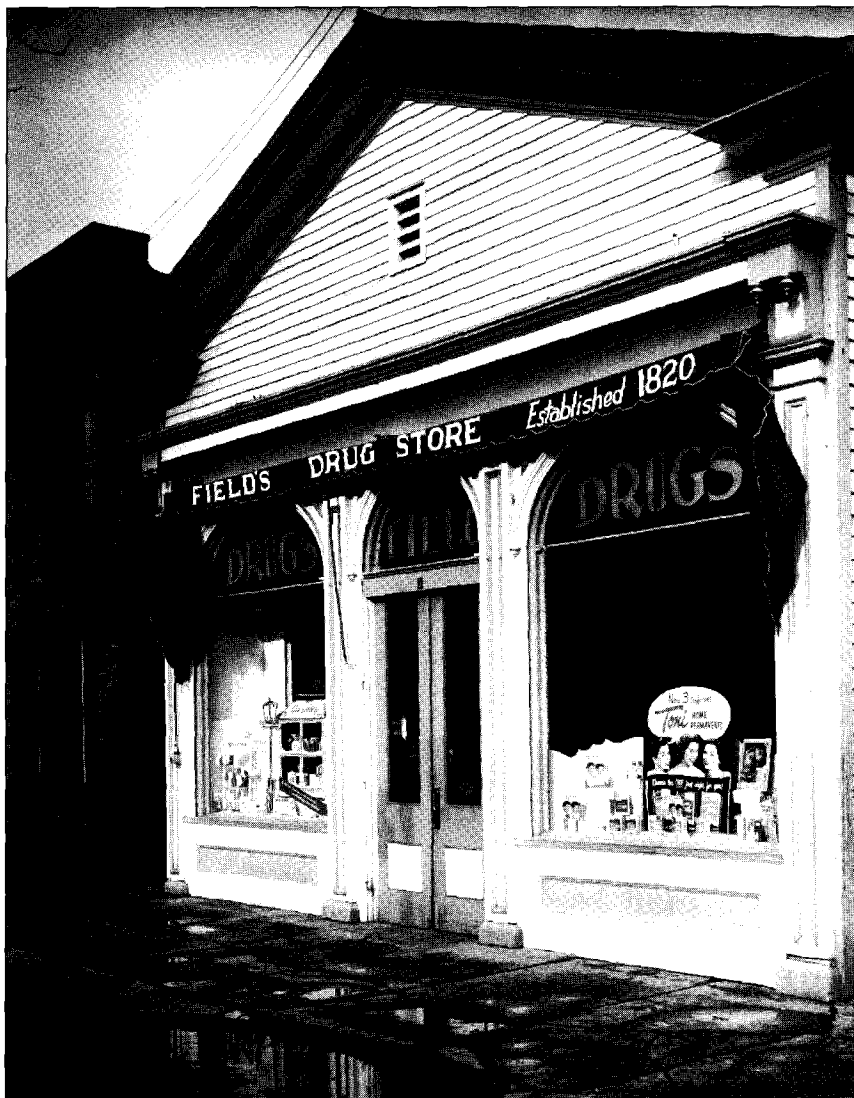
## Townsfolk

One notable cultural phenomenon of the 1960s in Ontario was the rise of a preservation movement concerned with saving historic buildings from demolition by modernising politicians and money-grubbing developers. Numerous old buildings were saved, and many were converted into period museums – so many, in fact, that it seemed that preservationists could think of no other good use for them. The Niagara Apothecary is an example of one such rescue project. A drugstore in Niagara-on-the-Lake that dates back to the 1860s, it was saved in the 1960s, then restored and reopened as a museum at the beginning of the 1970s. Its restoration has been called “one of the early and great triumphs of heritage preservation in the Province of Ontario.”<sup>1</sup>

The reconstruction of the Apothecary had its beginnings in the early 1960s during an efflorescence of preservation activity in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The town was then only tentatively feeling its way towards its present-day status as the Ontario capital of anti-modernist consumerism, but many of the key ingredients of its heritage future were at hand. Niagara-on-the-Lake took great pride in having been the first capital of Upper Canada and in its unique concentration of old upper-class residences. The town’s economic decline in the late nineteenth century had the happy side effect, from the preservationist standpoint at least, of leaving it with a high percentage of its early nineteenth-century buildings. It also left the town with a pre-industrial, upper-class streetscape, unmarked by unsightly factories, warehouses, or tracts of undistinguished workers’ housing. Many of the genteel old houses of the town had become summer homes where the well-to-do could live out their fantasies of genteel living in a civilised world. These seasonal residents and a strong supporting cast of summer tourists gave the community a strong economic interest in maintaining the look and feel of a picturesque backwater.

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1 Ontario Heritage Foundation - Niagara Apothecary Files (OHF NA), Margaret Carter, “The Niagara Apothecary: An Account of its Architectural History,” report submitted to the Ontario Heritage Foundation, May-July, 1989. It should be noted that an historical preservation impulse existed in earlier periods in the history of the province, albeit under other names and in varying degrees at different times.



*Field's Drug Store (n.d.) before its makeover. Ontario Heritage Foundation (Niagara Apothecary Files)*



*Interior of Field's Drug Store (n.d.), showing signs of the wide variety of products for sale inside. (OHF)*

Even residents who did not particularly care for the town's old buildings were conscious that they had economic value. When an upswing in prosperity after the Second World War brought new development pressures into play, the local establishment began looking for ways to protect the traditional character of the town.<sup>2</sup> A Town Planning Board meeting on February 5th, 1962 proposed the creation of a new organisation that could act to preserve local heritage. It took some lobbying at Queen's Park, but the Niagara Foundation was chartered under provincial legislation in 1962. Its first president was the town's mayor.<sup>3</sup>

One of the foundation's first steps was to persuade the National Historic Sites Service, then part of the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, to commission a local architectural survey. This was a pilot project for what would eventually become the national inventory of historic buildings.<sup>4</sup> The inventory focused attention on a number of interesting old structures in the town, including a commercial building known as Field's Drugstore. It was still an operating business, owned, as it had been since 1921,

2 Nancy Butler, Nick and Helma Mika, Joy Ormsby, *Niagara on the Lake: The Old Historical Town* (Belleville, 1990), 11.

3 For the general context of planning for heritage tourism in the region, see OHF NA, Carter, NA 18, "An Area of Historical Interest in the Counties of Lincoln and Welland Ontario," The Industrial and Publicity Committee and the Welland County Historical Council of the County of Welland, St. Catharines, Ontario, 1962.

4 G.R. Paterson, "The Niagara Foundation," *Bulletin of the Ontario College of Pharmacy* 20, 2 (April, 1971): 40-42.

by pharmacist E.W. Field. The shop had undergone some minor exterior alterations over the years but had retained, remarkably intact, an interior layout and fixtures dating back to the 1860s.

The Niagara Foundation was concerned about the future of the site. Mr. Field, the pharmacist, was old and ailing. He no longer operated his dispensary and his business was in decline. It seemed likely that the property would soon go on the market, and the foundation was eager to intervene lest the prime corner lot end up as a convenience store. But it needed help. Searching for a suitable ally, in 1963 it approached the Ontario College of Pharmacy (OCP), the provincial licensing body for pharmacists, to see if it would be interested in saving this well-preserved remnant of the history of its profession. The overture was well received. The OCP thought the site provided a perfect opportunity to establish a museum of pharmacy history that would be a good source of publicity for the pharmacy profession. Such a project offered, as one OCP official later put it, "a chance to influence public opinion on our behalf amongst an annually increasing number of tourists who represent a real cross-section of society."<sup>5</sup> The foundation had acquired a partner with a special interest in the building.

When Field retired in 1964, the Niagara Foundation and the Ontario College of Pharmacy rented the store from him and negotiated first right of purchase on the property. The question of acquisition came to a head when Field died the following year. Neither the Niagara Foundation nor the Ontario College of Pharmacists had the resources to purchase and operate the site. The Niagara Foundation approached the province, and in December of 1965 received a promise from the Honourable James Auld, Minister of Tourism and Information, that it would, as soon as it was able, take ownership of the building. With this guarantee, the foundation exercised its option to purchase. It was now the proud owner of an old drugstore.

It remained the owner for much longer than it had anticipated because the province was ill-prepared to act on its Minister's promise. The Ministry of Tourism and Information had acquired responsibility for a number of cultural activities over the previous decade. The centrepiece of its historical program was the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario, which put up the province's historical plaques and funded archaeological research. The Sites Board was regularly faced with entreaties to save historic buildings. In the early 1960s, Board member J.M.S. Careless oversaw the formulation of plans to create a new organisation, modelled on England's National Trust, that could do just that.

Such an organisation would be the ideal owner of Field's Drugstore, but its creation was not a rush item on the government's legislative agenda. After waiting in vain for two years for the province to act, the Niagara Foundation and the Ontario College of Pharmacy gave up hoping for government assistance and

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5 OHF NA, "Niagara Apothecary Project." This was the promotional brochure employed by the OCP to raise money for the apothecary restoration from its members.

made plans to restore the building themselves. Soon, however, it was 1967, and Canada's one-hundredth birthday saved the day. The anniversary celebrations demonstrated that history could be a tourist draw, and the restoration of a Confederation-era building like Field's Drugstore fit perfectly with the centennial emphasis on celebrating Canada's past.<sup>6</sup> The province atoned for its tardiness by providing in July a grant of \$15,000 which allowed the Niagara Foundation to discharge its mortgage on the property. This money served as a stopgap until the new provincial trust proposed by Careless could get involved. By early 1968, the Ontario Heritage Foundation (OHF) was up and running with a board, an executive director and his secretary, a \$50,000 annual budget, and a magnanimous endowment of \$450,000 with which to save all of Ontario's historic buildings. Field's Drugstore was one of the first items on its agenda and became its first restoration project.<sup>7</sup>

The OHF began negotiations with the Niagara Foundation and the Ontario College of Pharmacy, and within a few weeks they worked out a scheme to save Field's. The Foundation would take ownership of the property from the Niagara Foundation, accept donations on behalf of the OCP, and oversee the restoration project. The College of Pharmacy would remain an active partner with responsibility for interpreting the site. The OCP launched a fundraising campaign among its 4,000 members. When it generated less than a fifth of its \$25,000 target, the OHF pitched the project to the federal government and won its commitment to fund half the cost of the restoration. With this assurance, the Ontario Heritage Foundation purchased Field's Drugstore from the Niagara Foundation on July 10th, 1969.

The intervention of the Niagara Foundation was critical in bridging the gap in time between the demise of Mr. Field and the readiness of the provincial government to take ownership of the site. The foundation's existence reflected the special character of Niagara-on-the-Lake. There were few other communities in Ontario at this time where preservationists were as active and influential. While it was remarkable that Field's Drugstore survived into the early 1960s, it was equally noteworthy that local interests were there to save it at this relatively early phase of the post-war preservation movement. The contribution tourism had made to the town in the past, and anticipation of more tourism, provided both inspiration and justification for historical preservation.

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6 G.R. Paterson, "A Non-Active Practice: An Active Museum," *Bulletin of the Ontario College of Pharmacy* 20, 2 (April, 1971): 51.

7 The OHF had three capabilities that would greatly assist the project. First, it could take title to real estate. This might not sound terribly impressive, but there was only one other provincial government body, the Ministry of Government Services, that had this power. Second, donations to the Foundation were 100 percent deductible against taxable income at a time when most charities could offer a tax receipt good for only 25 percent of the value of donations. Finally, the OHF could grant money, the essential ingredient for any restoration project.

## THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE APOTHECARY



*The earliest known photograph of the exterior of the shop (1905), when it was the drugstore of pharmacist John de Witt Randall. The sign on the side of the shop reads, in part, "Randall's Drugstore. Kodak Supplies. Gasoline and Oils." The owner's name is spelled out in the panel that runs across the façade of the front windows. (OHF)*



*This photograph (c. 1914) was taken when A.J. Coyne was proprietor. Some forty years after it was built, the shop had a façade dominated by commercial signs. Railway ticket sales were a sideline for the pharmacist because of the proximity of the rail terminus. (OHF)*



## The Restoration

It took some months to get approvals confirmed by the federal bureaucracy, but finally, in April 1970, the Ontario Heritage Foundation and the Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development signed a cost-sharing agreement that paved the way for restoration.<sup>8</sup> The projected price tag was \$38,000. After six years of negotiation, manoeuvring, and delays, the survival of the building was finally assured.

The person hired to oversee the work was restoration architect Peter Stokes. Stokes was one of the moving forces in Niagara-on-the-Lake's preservation movement. He had studied architecture at the University of Toronto in the early 1950s and had worked at Upper Canada Village later in the decade. It was he, in fact, who had conducted the local inventory of historic buildings which first identified Field's drugstore as a significant building. He had been impressed by its elegant façade and its interior fittings, which featured fine cabinetry, elaborate wood carving, and ornate plaster-work. In an inventory form dated August 8, 1962, he had written "Of historic significance to the town ... *Restore if possible.*"<sup>9</sup> Now he was charged with fulfilling his own recommendation.

In this phase of the heritage preservation movement in Ontario, period restorations were guided by a focus on material authenticity. "Authentic" was defined in opposition to "fake" reproductions, which in turn were associated with cheesy commercial historical attractions.<sup>10</sup> In choosing form and fabric, the restoration architect's prime consideration was whether they were true to the period. Published sources of information were scanty, so the architect's aesthetic judgement and personal knowledge of the era in question inevitably had a profound impact on the style of a restoration.

Stokes' primary documentation of what the store had originally looked like was a series of photographs that dated back to 1905. He also relied on his interpretation of physical evidence revealed during the restoration to instruct him on how the shop was first constructed and decorated. Stokes went to great lengths to replicate original paint colours and duplicate the finishing techniques used by artisans in the nineteenth century. When an original part was missing, he used material from other buildings from the same period, or had pieces made using techniques typical of the era.<sup>11</sup> It was painstaking work. A sympathetic

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8 OHF NA, Agreements - Cost Share - 102, April 15, 1970.

9 Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings, File 06132 0017 00005. See also, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Manuscript Report Number 96, Parks Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, March, 1963.

10 Carter, "The Niagara Apothecary, 3.

11 OHF NA, Peter John Stokes, "Restoration of the Niagara Apothecary, Detailed Instructions," Part II, June, 1970.



*Constructing History: the mortar and pestle are affixed to the pediment, spring 1971. (OHF)*

and capable contractor had to be found, special artisans commissioned, and other workers taught how to do things the old-fashioned way.

Slowly but surely the venerable drugstore was spruced up. Sagging structural elements were realigned and reinforced, commercial signs and other unwanted accoutrements stripped away. Everything in sight was scrubbed, polished, or painted. Architectural details such as the fake columns and pediment of the façade were highlighted, and the faded old structure emerged from its cocoon of patina looking like a bright, clean little Doric temple. It was a beautiful sight.

An opening ceremony was set for May 14th, 1971, but unanticipated delays and uncooperative weather interfered, leaving little time to finish con-



*An ideal sight: one of the postcards sold at the apothecary in the 1970s depicts the apothecary's apprentice sweeping the sidewalk. (OHF)*

struction.<sup>12</sup> The last few days before the opening were frenzied as pharmacists manoeuvred precious artefacts safely into place while workmen applied finishing touches around them. Flotsam was stuffed into cupboards and the smell of wet paint hung heavily in the air when the doors opened for the big day. Federal and provincial officials arrived. So did local politicians, the architect, and representatives from the College of Pharmacy. A small crowd gathered under sunny skies to hear their speeches. The following day overflow crowds attended a "House Tour and Pharmacy Gala" sponsored by the Niagara Foundation. Field's Drugstore had begun a new life.<sup>13</sup>

12 Peter J. Stokes, "The Restoration of the Niagara Apothecary," *Bulletin of the Ontario College of Pharmacy* 20, 2 (April, 1971): 33-34.

13 Ernst W. Stieb, "Rough and Tumble Restoration," *Pharmacy in History*, 14, 2 (1972): 65-69. The niceties at the opening masked some fretting behind the scenes. There were the inevitable cost overruns, accompanied by dickering between the province and the federal government about who should pay. The total bill by the time of the opening was \$47,000. By 1973, it would crest at \$80,000, not including the purchase price. From today's standpoint, this amount looks insignificant. In fact, it was low even by the standards of the time, a reflection of the small size of the building and its relatively good condition [OHF NA, General Correspondence, - 101 (1970-75), L.T. Ryan to K. Allen, Cultural Affairs Division, Ministry of Colleges and Universities, November 27, 1973].

## The Operators

The restored drugstore and the museum it housed opened to glowing reviews. The project received an award from the Interior Designers of Ontario “in recognition of outstanding achievement in architectural restoration” and an award of merit from the American Association for State and Local History.<sup>14</sup>

The Ontario College of Pharmacy’s interest in Field’s Drugstore was a critical element in this success. It was one thing to restore an old building – capital funding for such projects was relatively easy to secure in the 1970s. But finding an appropriate ongoing use was far more difficult. In towns across Ontario, historic buildings were restored during the centennial period and put to use as community museums. But Niagara-on-the-Lake already had a community museum. The college’s interest gave the site a dedicated operator, and better still, a new purpose as a museum of pharmacy. A pharmacy museum was an appropriate use that the College of Pharmacy was ideally suited to provide. It was even willing to pay operating costs, considering the investment worthwhile for the public relations benefits it received from its association with the site.

G.R. Paterson, a Professor of Pharmaceutical Chemistry in the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Toronto, was the key figure behind the OCP’s interest in the site. When the college had first become involved in the early 1960s, Paterson had assigned one of his students, Lynford Tapp, to research the history of Field’s Drugstore. Using local newspapers as his primary source, Tapp pieced together a chronology of the practice that set out the tenure of different owners and other information that could be gleaned from their newspaper advertisements. He established that Field was the sixth in a line of pharmacists in a practice begun no later than 1820 under the name of the “Niagara Apothecary Store, Sign of the Golden Mortar.”<sup>15</sup> Henry Paffard, the pharmacist who had set up the shop that Field was still operating in 1964, had taken over the practice in 1851. From the perspective of the pharmacy profession, then, Field’s Drugstore was more than just an old building. It represented

14 The first award came in June of 1972. The second was presented on June 5th, 1973 at the Ontario Pharmaceutical Association conference at the Château Laurier in Ottawa (OHF NA, (1721) 103C Trust Board Committee Meetings, Minutes, OHF Board, June 7, 1973). The Apothecary was even graced by royalty: on July 5th, 1981 a federal plaque was unveiled by the Queen Mother on the occasion of the bicentennial of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

15 Lynford Earle Tapp, “An Early Nineteenth Century Pharmacy in Upper Canada’s First Capital (Field’s Pharmacy),” B.Sc. thesis, Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Toronto, 1965, 7. On November 2nd, 1820, a local newspaper, the *Canadian Argus*, included a notice from Starkwather thanking his patrons for their support over the previous year. But there is some evidence that the practice began in 1818. The first four issues of the *Niagara Gleaner* in 1818 contained advertisements offering a store for rent at this location, but they were discontinued by the sixth issue [Ruth Segal, “The Pharmacy and Its Pharmacists,” *Bulletin of the Ontario College of Pharmacy* 20, 2 (April 1971): 36].

a pharmacy practice that was some 135 years old – one of the oldest, if not the oldest, continuously operated practice in the country.<sup>16</sup>

When the restoration commenced in 1970, the Ontario Heritage Foundation and the Ontario College of Pharmacy signed a 35-year contract in which the OHF agreed to restore and maintain the building if the college would “restore the apothecary practice as carried on during the period between the 1860’s and the 1890’s.”<sup>17</sup> The target audiences were identified as tourists and pharmacy students.

For aficionados of pharmacy history, Field’s Drugstore was a dream come true. Many account and prescription books from the practice survived. At its closing in 1964, the building contained practically all of its 1860s fixtures, including its built-in drawers, bins, cabinets, counters, and dispensary. Some of the drawers even contained chemicals that had sat unused for decades. The authenticity of the site was further enhanced by the fact that it retained a handful of trade-related artefacts that had been used by Henry Paffard, the pharmacist who had built the store in the 1860s.

The college had extraordinary good luck in recovering a large part of the original collection that was no longer on site. The pharmacist who had sold the practice to Field, A.J. Coyne, had taken 200 old containers with him to his new business in nearby St. Catharines in the 1920s. He had sold some of them, and this portion had eventually been purchased by the Academy of Medicine in Toronto, which now loaned them back to the Ontario College of Pharmacy. The remainder were found lined up on shelves in Coyne’s basement. His widow was happy to be rid of the clutter and further the history of pharmacy for a nominal sum.<sup>18</sup>

The reunited collection of artefacts original to the site consisted primarily of jars, bottles, and pots designed to hold liquids, powders, and ointments. Either ceramic or glass, they came in sets of matched colours and shapes that looked very impressive when lined up on the store’s shelves. The college supplemented these artefacts with others from its own collection, from the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Toronto, and from numerous private donors.

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16 OHF NA, G.R. Paterson, “The Niagara Apothecary at the Sign of the Golden Mortar: Historical Background and Significance of the Pharmacy,” manuscript, n.d. (c. 1967), 2.

17 OHF NA - Agreement between the Ontario Heritage Foundation and the Ontario College of Pharmacy, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1971. The OHF and OCP also signed an informal side agreement which continued their established practice of having the OHF accept donations for the apothecary, then grant them to the OCP for museum set-up and operation (OHF NA, Board Minutes, 11 March, 1970). This arrangement was made because the OHF could issue tax receipts for charitable donations.

18 OHF - Marketing and Communications, Interview with Ernst Stieb and Stan Tolan, Niagara-on-the-Lake, 17 April, 1998. Paffard himself may have inherited this collection from his predecessor. Although its exact origins were unclear, a significant portion was said to have been imported from England in the 1830s.

## THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE APOTHECARY

The creation of the museum was orchestrated by Dr. Ernst Stieb, a pharmacy graduate who had gone on to do graduate work in the history of the profession. After joining the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Toronto in the late 1960s, Stieb accepted responsibility for overseeing curatorial functions at the Apothecary on a part-time basis. His particular interest was the historical development of the pharmacy profession, and he used the Apothecary to good effect in presenting this theme, often enhancing its collection with material loaned from other institutions.

Field's Drugstore was an excellent place to interpret pharmacy history because it dated back to a period that had seen significant changes in the practice of pharmacy and in its status as a profession. New, more highly processed and more potent drugs were introduced in the late nineteenth century, and druggists had to be trained to use them properly. Their increased capacity to do good or harm increased the pressure for regulation of the profession. Regulation was also in the interest of pharmacists, who often clashed with doctors over their professional prerogatives. At the time, doctors could dispense their own drugs. Pharmacists, for their part, would commonly consult with their customers and give them remedies without the intercession of a doctor.<sup>19</sup> The Ontario College of Pharmacy was formed in the late 1860s to lobby for legislation that would clarify and reinforce the status of pharmacists in the health care field. The passage of the first *Ontario Pharmacy Act* (1871) was evidence of its success. This act provided the legislative context through which the college began training, licensing and regulating the pharmacy profession. The restoration of Field's pharmacy came one hundred years later, offering a most appropriate way for the OCP to celebrate the centennial of a pivotal event in its early history.

As the restoration project was launched, Stieb secured a \$7,000 research grant, which enabled him to hire a Ph.D. in pharmacy, summer students, and secretarial assistance to conduct research. Among the objectives of this research were a better understanding of the pharmacy in the life of the town and the history of the practice as a retail operation.<sup>20</sup> Its concentrated on deciphering the shop's account and prescription books, rich sources of information on the practice that had yet to be closely analysed. This work confirmed Lynford Tapp's observation that the drugstore had always sold a wide variety of products. Some, like patent medicines, bandages, and toiletries, were natural complements to the pharmacy trade, but others had only a tenuous connection. These included veterinary remedies, paints, oils, varnishes, gunpowder, cement, dyestuffs, alcohol, condiments, infant formula, cooking spices, flavour syrups,

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19 Stieb, "Rough and Tumble," 1985, 3.

20 OHF NA, Carter NA 15, National Awards Nomination Form: American Association for State and Local History, n.d. (c. 1971), 5-6.

and photographic supplies. The business records of the practice raised a number of interesting questions about the financial rewards of dispensing drugs and the broader role of the drugstore in the local retail scene.<sup>21</sup> Answers would have to wait. The museum was now endowed with sufficient intellectual capital to fulfil its mandate as a pharmacy museum, and further research was less of a priority than day-to-day operational concerns such as interpretation.

As the museum established itself in the early 1970s, it developed three different ways to deliver information to visitors. Along one wall were display cases in which interpretive materials could be presented without intruding on the original appearance of the shop. A small table in the centre of the floor was also used for exhibits. Stieb regularly set out new exhibits on the history of pharmacy in these areas. Another source of information was the museum's staff, who were available to answer questions from visitors when they were not demonstrating obsolete pharmacist skills like pill making. For the first few years, the Apothecary operated as a living history site with interpreters in period costume; thereafter it was staffed by retired pharmacists. The third source of information was a printed sheet (later a brochure) which briefly told the history of the pharmacy and its restoration.

The pharmacy history provided by these interpretive materials gave the museum intellectual depth and provided the context necessary for an understanding of the shop's artefacts and its layout. The focus was on the story of the professional practice rather than the retailing side of the business, the particular history of Paffard's shop, or the social role of the drugstore. Shop space that would have been occupied by non-pharmacy items was instead given over to trade-related artefacts, many of which were not original to Paffard's drug store. This reflected the Ontario College of Pharmacy's interest in the site and the fact that there was incomplete knowledge of other aspects of the shop's history.<sup>22</sup>

21 For results of the analysis of the books that was conducted at this time, see Beverly Hules and Ruth L. Segal, "The Niagara Apothecary. A Survey of the Nature of Business Transactions During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," 1973, Niagara Apothecary Papers, Ontario Archives, MS 661, Reel 1.

22 One might argue that the Ontario Heritage Foundation had a responsibility to represent the full spectrum of the Apothecary's history, but its status as owner of the site did not involve it in interpretation. That was the responsibility of the Ontario College of Pharmacy. As a public agency, the OHF might have responded to local pressure for such information had there been any. Perhaps if the Niagara Foundation had remained involved with the project, the local interest would have been better represented. As it was, the local historical interest in Niagara-on-the-Lake was subsumed, on the main street at least, by heritage tourism. The local museum, one of the oldest in the province, was located a couple of blocks away on a back street. The role of government in recreating the past, and the degree to which it does so to further its own interests, has been a subject of debate in the literature on public memory [See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991); and John

## Apotheosis

Lynford Tapp's paper on Field's pharmacy had traced Field's pharmacy practice back to its origins as "The Niagara Apothecary Store, Sign of the Golden Mortar" in the 1820s. The restoration architect and the pharmacists fell into the habit of calling the building they were working on "the apothecary." When it came time to christen their restored drugstore museum, "The Niagara Apothecary" seemed a natural choice. This name was formally proposed by Paterson in the OCP's official submission for assistance from the Ontario Heritage Foundation.<sup>23</sup> There was something appropriately dignified and venerable about it, so it stuck. To complete the effect a tinsmith was commissioned to fabricate a "golden" mortar and pestle that was hoisted to the peak of the shop's façade in the final stage of the restoration.<sup>24</sup>

In Stokes' speech at the opening of the restored drugstore, he made special mention of "the sign fitting the period and the symbol harking back to its earlier history."<sup>25</sup> There was no evidence that any such three-dimensional symbol, evocative of mediaeval guilds in Europe, had ever graced the premises of the practice in the 1830s, let alone in the late 1860s when Paffard's shop had been built. As for the accompanying sign, it may have fit the period in the crafting of its letters, but the name they spelled out was anachronistic. There was no documentary evidence that the term had been used since the 1820s. In fact, Tapp's paper clearly showed that other names were in use from the 1830s on.<sup>26</sup> Paffard's predecessor advertised himself as a chemist and druggist, and in Paffard's time the shop was known as Paffard's Drugstore.<sup>27</sup>

The bestowal of an ahistorical name upon the site was somewhat surprising, given the emphasis on authenticity that had otherwise guided the restoration project. But that authenticity was defined primarily in terms of the forms and materials used for the restoration rather than the broader history of the practice it housed. When it came to naming the project, there were compelling reasons to come up with something classier than "Paffard's Drugstore." Applying

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Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1992)]. In the case of the Apothecary, the government was a relatively passive owner. The Ontario Heritage Foundation provided money and was consulted on the original restoration, and thereafter occasionally funded maintenance and repairs, but it did not have an active ongoing role in interpreting the apothecary's past.

- 23 OHF NA, G.R. Paterson, "The Niagara Apothecary at the Sign of the Golden Mortar: Historical Background and Significance of the Pharmacy," manuscript, n.d. (c. 1967), 19.
- 24 OHF NA, General Correspondence, 1970s - 101, G.R. Paterson to P.J. Stokes, Feb. 24, 1971.
- 25 OHF NA, Carter NA 15, National Awards Nomination Form: American Association for State and Local History, n.d. (c. 1971).
- 26 Tapp, "Early Pharmacy," 4.
- 27 For James Harvey, Paffard's predecessor, see Tapp, "Early Pharmacy," 9; *Niagara Mail*, 18 January, 1843 and 8 April, 1846. For the name of Paffard's store, see *Niagara Mail*, 24 November, 1869, (as quoted in Carter, 19); *St. Catharines Evening Journal*, 6 December, 1869 (as quoted in Carter, 36); the *Niagara Herald*, 4 March, 1886.



the apothecary label signalled that this place was rare, special, and precious. The restoration architect, Niagara-on-the-Lake's preservationists, and government funders were all part of a preservation movement struggling to legitimise its cause. To establish the value of historical buildings, it was better to restore an apothecary – a term evocative of the ancient and the arcane – than a mundane drugstore. A nobler name and purer appearance helped justify all the trouble and expense involved. The new name was particularly attractive to a “parvenu profession” such as pharmacy.<sup>28</sup> The elevation of Paffard's Drugstore to a higher plane of existence reinforced pharmacists' professional status by presenting them as the custodians of a time-honoured science.

By detaching the shop from its historical context, the apothecary name also made it easier to treat the drugstore as a generic example of its type. Stokes regarded the shop as “the epitome of the old time pharmacy.”<sup>29</sup> This evaluation reflected his experience at Upper Canada Village, where structures from various settings were gathered together, each taking on a new role as a particular type of building in a composite Upper Canadian village. Presenting the Apothecary as a representative example of a nineteenth-century pharmacy bolstered the case for saving it and operating it as a museum. It also suited the pharmacists' interest in a museum that would depict the history of their profession in general. As Ernst Stieb explained, the “decision to return to [the] original name was taken deliberately to avoid association with particular pharmacists, especially Field, who would have been best known to town-folk.”<sup>30</sup> The apothecary name fit the bill because the new museum was not meant to exist in a specific place and time.

### Tourists

The romantic new name for the site also reflected its setting in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where the entire town was gussied up in a similar fashion to appeal to tourists. Soon after the Niagara Apothecary opened it was getting 800 to 900 visitors a day, and twice as many on weekends.<sup>31</sup> In 1971, it had close to 50,000 visitors; in 1975 the total was well over 80,000.<sup>32</sup> These figures included school

28 The term is from R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1994), 221-22. For the rise of the pharmacy profession, see also, R.J. Clark, “Professional Aspirations and the Limits of Occupational Autonomy: The Case of Pharmacy in Nineteenth-Century Ontario,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 8 (1991): 43- 63.

29 Peter John Stokes, “The Restoration of the Niagara Apothecary,” *Bulletin of the Ontario College of Pharmacy* 20, 2 (April 1971): 33.

30 Ernst Stieb, note to author, July 1998.

31 OHF NA - (1721) 103C Trust Board Committee Meetings, Minutes, OHF Board, 16 September 1971.

32 *Ibid.*, 2 May, 1973; OHF NA, Apothecary (1721) 103C Trust Board Committee Meetings, Report on 1975 Operations.

groups, among them students from the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Toronto. But the vast majority were tourists who encountered the museum while strolling the streets of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The town was getting more and more tourists every year. It was increasingly publicised in the media as an attractive day trip for city dwellers in northern New York State or Ontario's Golden Horseshoe. The Shaw Festival was bringing in theatre buffs who were charmed by its ambience and returned to visit. Tour buses to nearby Niagara Falls stopped regularly. Consequently the Apothecary did not have to attract visitors from afar. As one report on the site put it, "strenuous promotion and publicity...are unnecessary."<sup>33</sup> Streams of tourists came to the door every day.

The one catch was that the tourists did not come because they had a particular interest in the Apothecary. Nor were they attracted by the local history of the town. They were coming to take a stroll back in time through a well-preserved nineteenth-century small-town streetscape. Niagara-on-the-Lake offered a fair approximation of everyone's fuzzy nostalgic notion of what a typical small town was like in days gone by. Its downtown functioned as a stage set against which visitors could pretend to be citizens of a small town of yesteryear.<sup>34</sup>

This nostalgic notion of the small town embodied a sense of community that was defined in opposition to modern urban life. One of the key features of this ideal community was its human scale. Each shop had its own shopkeeper whose contribution to the whole was readily comprehensible. With specialised social and economic roles embodied in one person in a designated space, the whole of society could be comprehended within a few short blocks. The old-fashioned architecture of the commercial district contributed to this charade because each shop had a unique appearance. The drugstore, of course, was one of the main street shops that was a fixture in this set piece.<sup>35</sup>

33 OHF NA, (1721) 103C Trust Board Committee Meetings, Report of the 1985 Operation of the Niagara Apothecary. The location of the Apothecary puts it in a somewhat unique position relative to the contemporary debate on whether museums should become more relevant by making themselves more populist and attracting more visitors. For an introduction to this topic, see Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, "Counting Visitors or Visitors Who Count?" in Robert Lumley, ed., *The Museum Time Machine* (London, 1988), 213-6. The Apothecary seemingly had the visitors without pandering for them. On the other hand, to the extent that it was complicit in the heritage scene that surrounded it, it was pandering.

34 As David Lowenthal put it, in an oft-quoted phrase, "If the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it 'the foreign country with the healthiest tourist trade of all.'" (Lowenthal, 4).

35 While the tourist might find a pharmacy museum in a new facility out of place and therefore not of interest in the setting of Niagara-on-the-Lake, a pharmacy museum in an old local drugstore is acceptable. John Urry has observed that "Some apparently unlikely museums ... nevertheless succeed ... because some connections between the past and the present are usually provided by place. It may sometimes be provided by occupation, industry, famous person or event. ... museums cannot be created about anything anywhere. But a museum on almost any topic can be created somewhere" [John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, (London, 1990), 134].

There was a connection between the type of tourist trade that was attracted to Niagara-on-the-Lake and the naming of the Apothecary. Dealing with types is a comfort to the tourist, who can identify with the general idea of a drugstore much more readily than with the complex details of a particular drugstore in a real town. As the shop was being restored, G.R. Paterson had informed his colleagues of the potential of the tourist audience and advised that “we must be sure they like what they see.”<sup>36</sup> The Apothecary was restored as a typical drug store that would fit into a typical small town scene in part at least because the heritage tourism that flooded Niagara-on-the-Lake encouraged making the drugstore representative of a type.

The small-town setting was all the more attractive to tourists because they could interact with it in a way in which they felt comfortable: that is, through their real-world conditioning as consumers. Antimodernist sentiments may have inspired their small-town nostalgia, but they were incapable of stifling the modern habit of consumption. Quite the contrary. Nostalgia seemed to provide a particularly potent inducement to spending. Consumption made the small-town experience interactive and, therefore, seemingly more real.

Heritage consumerism drove up rents in the downtown area, and the regular small town stores that served the local market were pushed off the main street by businesses that catered exclusively to the tourist trade. Hardware and grocery stores gave way to shops retailing gifts, arts and crafts, reproductions of Victorian bric-a-brac, wildlife prints, and souvenir kitsch. Real old stores couldn't compete with fake new shoppes that were cuter, more picturesque and seemingly more historic than those they replaced. There was a touch of this process too in the renaming of Paffard's Drugstore. In the rarified streetscape of Niagara-on-the-Lake, it was appropriate that a drugstore should go upmarket and style itself like a boutique.

## Déjà Vu

One striking aspect of the rescue and restoration of the Apothecary in the 1960s was the absence of historians. Before Ernst Stieb arrived on the scene, Lynford Tapp's paper served as the main historical source on the site. Paterson had condensed its contents for the OCP's submission to the Ontario Heritage Foundation. When the federal government requested background information, the Foundation incorporated this piece into its brief, and it became the basis for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada's decision to designate the Apothecary a national historic site.<sup>37</sup> At no stage in this process was it thought necessary to engage a professional historian to research the site.

36 G.R. Paterson, “A Non-Active Practice: An Active Museum,” *Bulletin of the Ontario College of Pharmacy* 20, 2 (April 1971): 51.

37 “Niagara Apothecary,” Agenda Paper 68-72, National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

## THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE APOTHECARY

In short, approvals and funding for the apothecary project were granted in the absence of any more history than that produced by an undergraduate pharmacy student who had limited time and no background in history. Stieb's research project in the early 1970s provided additional background on the general history of the store. It concentrated on the account and prescription books, an approach that was entirely in keeping with the immediate priority of interpreting the pharmacy history of the site. The next sustained research effort came 17 years later when the Ontario Heritage Foundation secured capital funds to do maintenance work on the building. An architectural historian, Margaret Carter, was hired to provide the foundation's architects with information on the building's history that would help them conduct the work without compromising the building's historical integrity.<sup>38</sup>

Carter was expected to produce a narrow account of the structural history of the Apothecary. However, she interpreted her mandate liberally and set out to understand the building within its historical context. This approach led her to interesting new information. One thing she discovered was a fairly fundamental point: the date the shop was built. In 1962 Stokes had identified the Apothecary as an 1866 structure. He had been aware that there had been a fire that year in the commercial district of the town that included Paffard's previous shop, and concluded that the Apothecary had replaced premises that burned then. This conclusion was somewhat at odds with the 1867 date on the clock in the dispensary counter, but no one had ever seriously questioned it. From local newspapers, land transfer rolls, and account books, Carter produced conclusive evidence that the drugstore had actually been built in 1869.<sup>39</sup> Though not terribly significant in itself, this revelation was enough to shake one's confidence in the historical information previously provided about the site.

More significantly, Carter's work contributed to a better understanding of the building by fleshing out the life and times of Henry Paffard. Stieb's research had already established that he had been a prominent community figure who had served as mayor for some 23 years.<sup>40</sup> It was also known that he had an interest in horticulture and had initiated landscaping projects to beautify the town. But Carter illuminated these facts with fulsome historical context. Paffard, she noted, took office as mayor at a time when the town was in economic decline. In 1862, the county seat was moved to St. Catharines; in 1863

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38 The Foundation had inherited the restoration architect's responsibility for the physical fabric of the building. The fact that it solicited historical research as part of this project showed that heritage conservation practice had changed somewhat since the original restoration project.

39 Carter, "The Niagara Apothecary," 19, 36-37.

40 Segal, "The Pharmacy and Its Pharmacists," 36. Paffard's terms as mayor were 1863-1874, 1876-1880, and 1888-1896. Paffard's predecessor and his successor in the practice both served as mayor as well.

the town's largest industry, the Niagara Harbour and Dock Company, closed its doors; and in 1864, the British military garrison was withdrawn. Staggered by these three major economic blows, the town plummeted into a depression.

The town council responded by seeking new ways to propel the local economy. The economic development strategy of seeking salvation in tourism when traditional industries decline is so prevalent today that it may come as a surprise to learn that Niagara-on-the-Lake adopted it in the 1860s. To encourage visitors from Toronto, Hamilton, and nearby American cities, it promoted itself as a weekend spa, "the most fashionable inland watering place on the continent."<sup>41</sup> The town built a luxury hotel, the Royal Niagara, and spruced itself up by planting trees and creating a public park on the military common.

Carter demonstrated that Paffard was at the head of this campaign and posulated that he did not limit his involvement to his civic responsibilities. To demonstrate his faith in the town's future, he constructed a new commercial building, the Paffard Block, near his drugstore on Queen Street. He also built new premises for his practice. Like the Paffard Block, the construction of his new drugstore was, Carter argued, an "act of civic bravado" – a statement of pride and confidence in the future of the town.<sup>42</sup> This interpretation, rooted in local conditions at the time the shop was built, explained the ornate, intricately carved dispensary, finely crafted drawers and display cabinets, ornate gas chandeliers, and intricate plaster work that distinguished Paffard's Drugstore. Carter found illustrations of typical drugstore interiors from the period which looked extremely plain in comparison. She also suggested that the building's façade projected an image of industry and urbanity by echoing a design motif from the Crystal Palace at the New York World's Fair in 1853. In short, the store Paffard built in 1869 was an attraction designed to impress tourists with its sophistication and elegance. Few commercial establishments in small-town Ontario could equal the style and grace of Paffard's Drugstore. It was a rarity the day it was completed.

This conclusion pointed towards an explanation for why these premises survived relatively unaltered for a century. It may well be that the high quality of the shop's interior delayed modernisation to a point in time when its "old-fashioned" appearance became a commercial asset.<sup>43</sup> Carter's research also

41 Carter, "The Niagara Apothecary," 18. The quotation is from the *Niagara News*, 23 August 1871.

42 The term is Carter's (Carter, 7).

43 One of the long-time interpreters at the site, Stan Tolan, recalls that the shop was known in the region as a unique old drugstore by the early twentieth century (OHF - Marketing and Communications, Interview with Ernst Stieb and Stan Tolan, Niagara-on-the-Lake, 17 April 1998). See also Peter John Stokes, "The Restoration of the Niagara Apothecary," *Bulletin of the Ontario College of Pharmacy* 20, 2 (April 1971): 33, and Carter, "The Niagara Apothecary," Figure 13, in which the shop's awning reads "Established 1820."

highlighted a ubiquitous paradox of heritage restoration. Often buildings are restored on the grounds that they are representative; but the very fact that they have survived and are deemed worthy of restoration suggests that they are anomalies.

If Carter was correct about Henry Paffard's original intentions for his little shop, there is some rich irony in the circumstances of its restoration. The building was restored with a tourist clientele in mind, but the restorers had no idea that it had originally been built with a tourist clientele in mind.<sup>44</sup>

### Sightseers

Carter's report gave the Apothecary a history of its own by explaining how it originated in a particular place and time. However, her findings did not precipitate any great change in interpretation. When the Ontario Heritage Foundation prepared a new brochure on the Apothecary two years later, it incorporated some information from the Carter report. Otherwise, nothing more was done about it. Local history was simply not terribly relevant to the function of the site.

The present-day impact of tourism was considerably more influential. By the 1990s, the Apothecary was receiving 100,000 visitors a year. While it is impossible to know the responses of each and every sightseer who visited the site, enough is known to comment generally on how they react to it.

From the street, the Apothecary looks slightly different from the other storefronts because its façade is relatively unadorned. It might best be described as the most picturesque shop on a street of picturesque shops. There is no admission charge to enter, nor is there a ticket office, a turnstile, or any other physical indicator that one is passing into a different era. Some people come in the front door, pull up short, exclaim, "Oh, it's an old drug store!" then promptly turn around and leave.<sup>45</sup> Others, particularly Europeans who are used to patronising pharmacies that look much the same, mistakenly believe that the Apothecary is an operating business. But the reaction of most visitors falls in between these extremes. Upon entry, they first have to adjust to the fact that they are in a period museum. For most this is a surprise, for they have happened upon the Apothecary while shopping and haven't prepared themselves for a museum experience. The confusion is compounded by the fact that, in order to preserve the original appearance of the shop, signs of a museum are unobtru-

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44 The difference is that Paffard intended to impress by being up-to-date; now the attraction of his shop is its age. Moreover, there is evidence that tourists have sustained the shop throughout its existence. One-time owner A.J. Coyne was quoted as complaining "You were run to death in the summer and starved to death in the winter" (Tapp, "Early Pharmacy," 5).

45 OHF - Marketing and Communications, Interview with Ernst Stieb and Stan Tolan, Niagara-on-the-Lake, 17 April 1998.

sive. There is no obvious interpretive trail to follow and no clear signals that this is an experience best mediated by explanatory texts.

The tourists' first level of experience, then, is to view the material history around them. To an extent, of course, this is as it should be: the use of artefacts to interpret the past is the defining feature of a museum. The visitor is presented with an orderly panorama of brightly coloured jars and bottles of uniform shapes, row upon row of drawers, bins and shelves, and intricate wood carving. The forms, materials, and finishes are varied. The decor is rendered with flourishes and embellishments that speak the aesthetic language of the Victorian era, while the grid layout of the storage units suggests modern scientific order. After taking in this unique setting, tourists have a choice. They can make an intellectual effort to engage and understand it, or they can leave.

Most leave. There is an interesting parallel in the way the restoration architect viewed the restoration primarily in material terms, relying on physical traces of the building's past, the way that the Apothecary as a period museum privileges artefacts, and the way in which tourists are satisfied to encounter the past simply as material evidence of a different era. Material history alone is sufficient. Nothing more is required because they are operating on a high level of generality where this particular setting is no more than a prop that serves as a prompt for them to revisit their preconceived notion of an old drugstore.

For those who persevere, more specific historical information is available through the display cases that hold exhibits on the history of pharmacy. For additional background they must secure a brochure or win the attention of one of the interpreters. Here the fact that the Apothecary is a reconstructed store again influences its visitors' responses. Not only is there a counter with a cash register, but the pharmacist-interpreters typically operate from behind it, just like clerks in any retail establishment.<sup>46</sup>

The museum's similarity to surrounding shops is further reinforced by the fact that it offers numerous items for sale at the counter. Over the years these have included boutique versions of typical drugstore products such as spices or soaps, souvenirs related to the pharmacy profession such as miniature reproductions of mortar and pestle sets, and postcards and ceramic tiles bearing an idealised portrait of the shop's façade.<sup>47</sup> The appropriateness of selling things

46 Ernst W. Stieb, conversation with the author, 17 April 1998. The professional status of the pharmacist is preserved in this situation; as in an operating pharmacy, the staff have the knowledge and the patrons must buttonhole them to get it.

47 The reproduction of certain images of the site is recognised as a standard feature of constructing the tourist "gaze." It helps train people how they should be seeing the sight (See Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1976): 42-48). The factors that MacCannell suggests are involved in presenting a site include naming, framing and elevation, enshrinement, mechanical reproduction, and social reproduction, a list that shares many characteristics with the four modes of interpretation discussed in this paper.

was initially a source of much debate among the museum's operators. Opponents of the idea argued that retailing detracted from the museum function of the building, even though the museum was trying to recreate what had been a retail operation. This concern effectively vetoed any attempt to make the operation financially self-sufficient. Nevertheless, the retail function is essential to the interpretive experience at the apothecary. Fresh from prowling neighbouring gift shops, visitors arrive at the Apothecary in consumer mode. Often the retail transaction becomes the gateway to interpretation of the site because it facilitates contact between visitors and interpreters. The path to history lies through buying something.

For some, the purchase of a souvenir is a way to avoid deeper interaction with the site by employing the ruse of taking a bit of it away to look at later. They opt for take-out, and would probably use a drive-through if one were available. Once engaged with an interpreter, however, visitors are liable to begin asking questions about the site. They focus first on a few obvious subjects. The story of the restoration itself is a main point of historical interest because it explains the presence of real history in an ersatz neighbourhood. Visitors also like curious artefacts such as the leech jar, demi-johns, portable enema kits, and radium water jar. All are novelties that amuse with their quaintness, a quality derived from a modern perspective of knowing superiority. As the guides and visitors commune over such objects, their interaction reinforces the professional image of the pharmacist as scientist, an active agent in the tale of progress being revealed.

By now the visitors have been funnelled in to a point where serious engagement with the history of pharmacy is only a short step away. A small percentage are increasingly intrigued by the subject matter, immerse themselves in the world of nineteenth-century health care, and end up getting more history than they had bargained for that day. Learning about bleeding, purging, mercury therapy, and similar practices might even be enough to cure their nostalgia. Or maybe not. "One of the characteristics of modernity," one cultural commentator has written, "is the belief that authenticity has been lost and exists only in the past..."<sup>48</sup> By this measure, the tourists who persevere in search of an authentic experience are more touristy than their less diligent brethren. Recall that Paffard's Drugstore was designed for tourists in the first place, and the irony is double-dipped.

The pharmacists' concentration on pharmacy history at the Apothecary – as opposed to, for instance, the retail side of the pharmacy business or the place

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48 Jonathon Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Oxford, 1988), 160. See also the discussion in preceding pages in which Culler considers "The distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the touristy, [which] is a powerful semiotic operator within tourism."



of the shop in local history – simplifies the historical messages conveyed, making its meaning easier for visitors to digest. The fact that the Apothecary is a period museum which visitors are supposed to see as it was, unencumbered by interpretive signage, also imposes practical constraints on presenting its broader history. These factors conspire to limit the picture of the site's past that is presented.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, if tourists are interested enough to explore a little, the Apothecary offers them a stimulating and enriching historical experience. It delivers history in increasing doses according to the tolerance of its clients. Certainly their experience of the site is conditioned by the sugary nostalgia that cloaks Niagara-on-the-Lake's shopping district. But in the Apothecary at least the ratio of history to heritage consumerism is inverted. There the cloak is pulled inside out, and there is a silver lining.

### Conclusion

The meanings retailed at the Niagara Apothecary clearly reflect the various interests involved with the site. The building was restored as part of a community effort to promote the local economy through heritage tourism. Its naming shows that the restoration movement was willing to indulge in a little invention to advance its cause. The history presented at the site is primarily the history of interest to its operators, while most tourists look at it as another piece of background scenery against which to indulge their fantasies of small-town life in an indeterminate past. These different interests find common ground in a material, romantic, specialised, and consumer-friendly experience of the past.

The influence of these four factors upon the interpretation of the Apothecary might provoke the professional historian to wag a finger disapprovingly at such deviance from thorough research and balanced presentation. Fair enough. But there are lessons that the historical profession can learn from the Apothecary as well. There has been considerable angst in Canadian history circles of late about the waning of historical consciousness in our society. In this context, the Apothecary provides an instructive example of a situation where professional historians have been almost completely absent from an

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49 Some of the obvious questions that go unanswered relate to the social history of the site. These include questions about what it meant to be a middle-class professional in 1860s Niagara-on-the-Lake (Was Paffard propelled into public office because of his professional status in the town, or did his political activity indicate that he couldn't make a living solely through his shop?); questions about the availability of health care (Were the pharmacists' services cheaper than those of the doctor? Were they affordable to working-class members of the community?); and questions of gender relations in the drugstore setting (What were the implications for female customers of having to access health care through male pharmacists?). The list, of course, could go on and on, a fact that argues in favour of focusing on one subject area as the apothecary museum does.

enterprise that seemingly lies squarely within their competence. It is a striking illustration of the contemporary irrelevance of historians.

This lesson gains significance when one acknowledges the apothecary's success in delivering history to a broad audience. The four features that characterise historical interpretation at the Apothecary can be seen as communications strategies that provide points of entry into the past for as many visitors as possible. When the restorers renamed the Apothecary, for instance, they did so to draw it to public attention and emphasise its significance. They were saying, in effect, "Look, this is special and important, and you should pay attention to it." The naming was a rhetorical device, hyperbole deployed for a specific effect. Far from being misled by the exaggeration, the tourist public, experienced and literate in this form of communication, reads the name and understand the message.<sup>50</sup> The inauthentic signals the authentic – or at least, something that is more authentic than anything else in the Niagara-on-the-Lake streetscape. The purist might condemn this means of flagging the site as an unforgivable distortion of the past, but in the final analysis it leads significant numbers of tourists into an encounter with a history purer than that which they would otherwise experience.

If the historical profession truly wishes to become more engaged and influential in society, it needs both a better understanding of how history is communicated in popular contexts and a willingness to come to terms with this type of communication. Ideally, this project would involve an appreciation of popular history, material history, and yes, even heritage consumerism, as partners in the enterprise of deriving meaning from the past. Any objective critical appreciation of popular history techniques should, of course, point out their failings as well as noting their benefits. If the profession was more accepting of the conventions of popular history, perhaps the broader public could be made more receptive to the profession's legitimate concerns with the effects of present-day influences and interests on historical interpretation. Dialogue is a prerequisite to increased cultural literacy in both camps. From this perspective, the Apothecary is not a false idol to be denounced, nor a perfect model to be emulated, but rather the type of place where the meaning of the past should be continuously engaged and negotiated.

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50 As Jonathon Culler has written, "In their most specifically touristic behavior . . . tourists are the agents of semiotics: all over the world they are engaged in reading cities, landscapes and cultures as sign systems" (Culler, *Framing*, 155). Culler cites Dean MacCannell's revelation that "My colleagues (in decoding meaning) were everywhere on the face of the earth, searching for peoples, practices and artefacts that we might record and relate to our own socio-cultural experience" (MacCannell, *The Tourist*, as quoted in Culler, *Framing*, 155).