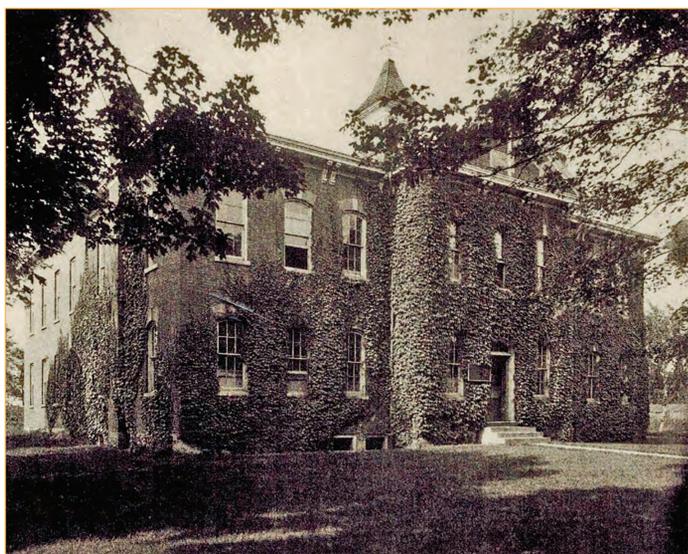


# LYDIA PINKHAM

## HER COBOURG PRESENCE

Do you know who Lydia Pinkham was? She was the smiling benevolent grandmother whose face stared out from bottles of her Lydia E. Pinkham Vegetable Compound. Her name became a household word and her face an iconic image.

The Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Co. began in Lynn, Massachusetts in the late 1800s. The company was so successful in the U.S. that the family **opened a Canadian branch in Cobourg in 1917**. The Pinkhams bought an attractive red brick building that had been the County of Northumberland Model School, a training facility for teachers. It was located at 128 University Avenue, now the site of Thomas Motors.



The Lydia Pinkham company was a quiet presence in Cobourg, manufacturing Lydia's line of products here for almost 50 years. The operation only required a small number of employees. Today there are only a few individuals in Cobourg who have any memories of the Lydia Pinkham factory.

### INDUSTRIAL WATER TREATMENT

Bird-Archer provides a wide range of technical service, chemicals, chemical proportioning equipment, and water conditioning equipment throughout Canada.

THE BIRD-ARCHER CO. LIMITED – Main office and factory, Cobourg, Ont.  
Represented in St. John's, Nfld., Halifax, Saint John, Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa, Oshawa, Toronto, Hamilton, London, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Vancouver.



The **BIRD-ARCHER**  
Company Limited  
COBOURG ONTARIO



- Mary Corbett recalls three employees: Tom Jones, Arthur Trolley and Ralph Strong.
- Marion Hagen commented that the premises were very well-kept by the company and she admired the beautiful ivy that covered the building.
- As boys, Paul Leonard and Wayne Crossen remember eating licorice root from the Cobourg factory.



Around 1962, when the popularity of Lydia Pinkham products was waning, the parent company in Massachusetts closed its Canadian branch in Cobourg. Another Cobourg company, Bird-Archer, bought the rights to continue turning out the Lydia Pinkham line for the Canadian market. Bird-Archer (later bought by the Diversey Corporation) was located on Second St. near Lake Ontario. Surprisingly, the company's main business was manufacturing chemicals for the treatment of water, as well as other chemicals, and providing specialized engineering services.

Bird-Archer built an addition to facilitate this new venture. Ralph Strong, formerly of Lydia Pinkham, oversaw the operation. From then on, the products bore a Bird-Archer label, even though they were still packed in the trademark Lydia E. Pinkham boxes. Cy Winter, a customs official in Cobourg, checked the shipments of alcohol before the factory received them. Bird-Archer continued manufacturing Lydia Pinkham products in Cobourg until c. 1977, about the time that the Lydia E. Pinkham Co. finally closed its doors in the United States. However even after that, Cooper Laboratories of California bought the rights to continue producing Lydia's products.

Over the next thirty years the handsome Lydia Pinkham building housed a number of tenants. Some may remember when Triangle Plumbing and Nyberg Plumbing operated businesses there. The building, though still viable, was demolished in 1998 to allow for the expansion of Thomas Motors.

# THE MYTH AND THE MAGIC

## THE BACKGROUND



*Yours for Health  
Lydia E. Pinkham*

To understand the Lydia Pinkham phenomenon, one needs to know what was going on in society in the late 1800s. Who was the woman behind the image on the bottle?

Lydia Estes had a good family background, was intelligent and well-educated. **But with marriage came problems.** Her husband, Isaac Pinkham, was a schemer and a dreamer who could not support their large family. During the national economic depression of the 1870s, the Pinkham family was almost destitute. Lydia's adult sons cast about for a money-making scheme.

They hit on the idea of manufacturing a root-based tonic that Lydia had been making for years and giving away to friends to treat female ailments. **Home-made remedies were common** during that time because people didn't trust doctors. Lydia's sons clearly had more business sense than their father. They patented their mother's tonic under the name of "*Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound*" and began manufacturing it.

Timing is everything. There was a widespread perception in society in the late 1800s that women were "weak and suffering". Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound met with astounding success in the latter years of the century and beyond because it promised to relieve almost anything.

The medical thinking at that time in history was that the uterus was the root of all feminine diseases. The mainstream treatment of "women's complaints" as their ailments were called, was sometimes the surgical removal of ovaries. With this surgery, there was a 40% mortality rate, meaning 4 out of 10 women would die!



## THE COMPOUND

The compound was made up of Unicorn Root (illustrated), Life Root, Black Cohosh, Pleurisy Root and Fenugreek Seed, suspended in 18% alcohol. Although these ingredients changed somewhat over the life of the company, alcohol remained a constant. **The presence of alcohol and the amount may seem suspicious**, but even today alcohol is used as a carrier liquid and a preservative in herbal remedies.

While on the surface Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound might be regarded as quack medicine, it was not. Some of the ingredients used by the company in the vegetable compound are **still being used today** by alternative, naturopathic and traditional Chinese medicine to treat health problems.



## THE HYPE

From the beginning the vegetable compound was heavily advertised. Besides curing weakness and suffering, it promised to cure a whole litany of ailments. Over many years the claims made by the company became more exaggerated and the advertising more exuberant.

### Joys of Maternity

Why So Many Women Are Childless.  
A Problem That Has Puzzled Physicians for Centuries.



**R**EPRODUCTION is a law of nature, and no picture of joy and happiness can equal that of the vigorous mother and her sturdy child. Nature makes but few mistakes, and every thoughtful person must admit that a cause exists why so many women are childless.

The subject baffles the theories of physicians. Such cases are curable nine times out of ten, as evidenced by thousands of letters on file at Mrs. Pinkham's office. Many a darling baby owes its existence to Mrs. Pinkham's advice and the Vegetable Compound. This is not to be wondered at when such testimony as the following explains itself:

"I have taken three bottles of your Vegetable Compound, one package of Sanative Wash, one box of Liver Pills; and now I have a dear little babe four weeks old, and I am well. I have to thank you for this.

"I have spent \$200.00 for doctor's bills without obtaining any relief. For my cure I only spent \$5.00.

"I had been a victim of female troubles in their worst form; suffered untold agonies every month; had to stay in bed, and had poultices applied, and then could not stand the pain.

"My physician told me I would never be a mother. I had bladder trouble, backache, catarrh of the stomach, hysteria, heart trouble, fainting spells. Can you wonder that I sing the praises of a medicine that has cured me of all these ills?"—Mrs. Geo. C. KIRCHNER, 372 Belmont Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y.

Such frank, straightforward testimony as this should dispel all doubt. If you are ill, you owe yourself the chance that the compound will cure you.

**LYDIA E. PINKHAM MED. CO.,**  
Lynn, Mass.



No wonder so many women climbed aboard the Lydia Pinkham bandwagon. But no medicine could deliver all of the promises cited in the company's advertising. Perhaps the most outlandish of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound promises was *"A baby in every bottle."*

Women loved writing to Lydia Pinkham to tell her how much her compound had helped them. They placed absolute trust in her. The company used these testimonials to great advantage as part of their aggressive advertising. Taking Lydia Pinkham's medicines became ingrained in the feminine culture and was passed down through the generations.

Sewing Kits, tattle shuttles and booklets all served to spread the Lydia Pinkham name far and wide.



## Her Happy Day

A Charming Story of Medicine and Marriage.

Two Open Letters from a Chicago Girl.



**A**MONG the tens of thousands of women who apply to Mrs. Pinkham for advice and are cured, are many who wish the facts in their cases made public, but do not give permission to publish their names, for reasons as obvious as in the following, and no name is ever published without the writer's authority; this is a bond of faith which Mrs. Pinkham has never broken.

Chicago, Jan. 5th, '95.

My dear Mrs. Pinkham:—  
A friend of mine, Mrs. —, wants me to write you, because she says: "you did her so much good." I am desperate. Am nineteen years of age, tall, and weighed 138 pounds a year ago. I am now a mere skeleton. From your little book I think my trouble is profuse menstruation. My symptoms are . . . etc.

Our doctor (my uncle) tells father that I am in consumption, and wants to take me to Florida. Please help me! Tell me what to do, and tell me quickly. I am engaged to be married in September. Shall I live to see the day? . . .

LUCY E. W.

Chicago, June 16th, '95.

My dear Mrs. Pinkham:—  
This is a happy day. I am well and gaining weight daily, but shall continue the treatment and Vegetable Compound during the summer, as you suggest. Uncle knows nothing about what you have done for me, because it would make things very unpleasant in the family. I would like to give you a testimonial to publish, but father would not allow it. . . . I shall be married in September, and as we go to Boston, will call upon you. How can I prove my gratitude? . . .

LUCY E. W.

Just such cases as the above leak out in women's circles, and that is why the confidence of the women of America is bestowed upon Mrs. Pinkham.

Why are not physicians more candid with women when suffering from such ailments?

Women want the truth, and if they cannot get it from their doctor, will seek it elsewhere.

**Lydia E. Pinkham Med. Co., Lynn, Mass.**

The ever-present image of Lydia Pinkham even occasioned a slightly off-colour song composed by male university students and sung to the tune of the hymn I Will Sing of My Redeemer.

**Chorus: Oh, We'll Sing of Lydia Pinkham  
And her love for the human race  
How she sells her vegetable compound  
And the papers publish her face.**

Let us offer a toast with a sip of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound:

**"Here's to Lydia Pinkham and her vegetable compound  
that gave comfort to millions of women,  
and to a phenomenal advertising campaign!"**