Library Exhibits Kenneson's 3,000 Bottle Collection

Proliferating at a rate more astonishing than the rabbit's, the bottle collection of Claude Kenneson of Carencro has burgeoned 3,000-fold since his first pop bottle acquisition just four years ago.

Kenneson has temporarily penned some of his ever-increasing horde of glass in the Jefferson Caffery Louisiana Room in Dupre Library on the USL campus. His exhibit, focusing on Louisiana medicine bottles and medicine-related artifacts, will be on display through March 30.

Included in the exhibit are such bottles of Louisiana manufacture as "Mamou Cough Syrup" (1936) and "Milk of Magnesia" (1934) and "Poultry Treatment" (1935), both manufactured by the Louisiana Drug Co. of Opelousas, (LADCO). According to Kenneson, LADCO owner Tony Chachere, now marketing "Tony's Creole Seasoning," at one time manufactured approximately 150 items, including perfumes, castor oil, and liniments.

The oldest bottle in the collection, perhaps 120 years old, contained "Dr. Jacob Hostetter's Stomach Bitters," a treatment for colic and constipation.

Also on display is a bottle with "Vermilionville" embossed on it, one of only five such known bottles. The bottle was manufactured by M. P. Young and Co., a drugstore located on the corner of Vermilion and Washington Streets in Lafayette from 1870 until 1883. Vermilionville was renamed "Lafayette" in 1884.

The drugstore was co-owned by Monroe Porter Young and William Clegg until the dissolution of their partnership in 1883. Young and Clegg manufactured at least two medicines during the 1870s: "Vegetable Tonic Bitters" and "Elixir of Calisaya Bark with Pyrophosphate of Iron." Kenneson's bottle probably contained one of these medicines.

Seven different Dr. Tichener's bottles on display show the progression in packaging of the antiseptic refrigerant, from the 1880s to the present.

Exhibited, too, is a collection of Hadacol bottles and various other vitamin tonics manufactured by Dudley LeBlanc.

Kenneson comments that, oddly enough, "while millions of bottles of Hadacol were manufactured, in the four years I've been collecting, I've found very few of them." 

Eye glasses, eyeglass cases, eyewashers, jars of salve, boxes of prepared chalk, doctors' receipts and general store ledgers round out the collection of Louisiana medical paraphernalia.

A bachelor of arts graduate in history, Kenneson finds a wealth of information about the past bound up with his bottles. To identify and date a bottle, for example, Kenneson will consult reference works and will peruse old newspapers and magazines, scanning the ads for his bottle and "learning some history in the process."

Bottle lips provide a first clue to an approximate date of manufacture, says Kenneson. Bottles manufactured around 1875 generally have a seam that stops at the shoulder. The nearer to the year 1918 the bottle was manufactured, the closer the seam will be to the top of the bottle. After 1918 or so, automatic bottle machines were in operation and the seam was continuous.

Kenneson's interest in Louisiana bottles extends to introduction to them four years ago in New Iberia. He also frequents flea markets and antique shops, but his preferred method of collection is to "do it himself," ferreting out bottles from attics and trash dumps ("Plaquemines is the biggest trash pile in many bottle shows since his Louisiana."

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