Wyeth
A History Through Artifacts

February 20, 2014 – October 2, 2015
This exhibition celebrates the legacy of John Wyeth (1834–1907), a graduate of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, who in 1860 founded, with his brother Frank, a drugstore with research lab that eventually grew to become the renowned, multinational pharmaceutical corporation, Wyeth.

The over 300 objects on display tell a rich story of innovation and keen business acumen. They document Wyeth’s humble beginnings and steady expansion over the company’s first few decades – a growth due to several key factors: the firm’s improvements to the taste of pharmaceutical products; its preparation of various compounds in advance and in large batches; the securement a government contract during the Civil War; and the invention of a machine for making tablets from medicinal powders, which allowed mass production of pills with pre-measured dosages. Among the “firsts” attributed to Wyeth in these early years are elixirs, compressed tablets, sugar-coated tablets, glycerin suppositories, effervescent salts, and soluble gelatin capsules.

The objects in the exhibition illustrate distinct moments in Wyeth’s complex 150-year history, and they consist of various categories of artifacts: manuscripts (ledgers, letters, records), ephemera, advertisements, prints and photographs, books, periodicals, devices, and drug bottles, containers and packaging. These items represent a limited sampling of the large historical archive that Wyeth employees carefully (and proudly) assembled over many years. With the aim of preserving this important collection in perpetuity, Wyeth generously donated their archive to USciences in 2009.

Michael J. Brody
Director and Curator, Marvin Samson Center for the History of Pharmacy
Wyeth Historical Timeline

1834  John Wyeth is born in Harrisburg, PA

1854  John Wyeth graduates from Philadelphia College of Pharmacy (PCP) with a thesis on the properties of *Gillenia trifoliata* (Bowman's Root)

1858  John Wyeth becomes the business partner of Henry C. Blair, in whose pharmacy he had served for five years

1860  John Wyeth and brother Frank establish their drug store at 1412 Walnut St, Philadelphia (where the Hyatt at the Bellevue now stands); above their retail store is the firm's lab and manufacturing space

1862  Wyeth's first catalogue is printed; it lists four pages of chemicals, crude drugs, extracts, fluidextracts, wines, and medicinal liquors

1862  Sadie Wyeth (née Stewart), John's wife, gives birth to Stuart, their only child

1864  Wyeth begins supplying medicines and beef extract to the Union army during the Civil War

1866  Edward T. Dobbins, also a PCP graduate, becomes a Wyeth partner; subsequently the retail operation is sold to Frank Morgan, and the brothers confine their business to manufacturing and wholesaling

1872  Wyeth employee Henry Bower develops one of the first rotary compressed tablet machines

1876  Wyeth exhibits a wide variety of medicated suppositories at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and wins four awards

1883  Wyeth opens its first international facility in Montreal, Canada and begins vaccine production

1889  A fire consumes two of Wyeth's three manufacturing buildings; Wyeth purchases a new property at 11th and Washington Sts

1899  The company incorporates under the name John Wyeth & Brother, Inc.

1901  Wyeth, Inc. privately publishes *An Epitome of Therapeutics, with Special Reference to the Laboratory Productions of John Wyeth & Brother Incorporated*

1907  John Wyeth dies at age 73 and is buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia; John's son Stuart, a lawyer, becomes the titular head of the company; Frank Wyeth serves as vice-president until his own death in 1913

1929  Stuart Wyeth dies and leaves his controlling interest (55%) in the laboratory to Harvard University, his alma mater

1932  American Home Products (AHP) acquires Wyeth from Harvard for $2.9 million

1935  Alvin G. Brush becomes CEO of AHP, Wyeth's parent company; under his leadership, AHP acquires 34 companies in eight years; over the next few decades, AHP expands into a conglomerate that includes health care, food, and household-product divisions

1938  AHP acquires SMA Corp., a producer of infant foods and vitamins

1941  The U.S. enters World War II and Wyeth ships typical wartime drugs such as sulfa bacteriostatics, blood plasma, typhus vaccine, quinine, and atabrine tablets; Wyeth is later rewarded for its contribution to the war effort

1942  Wyeth begins producing penicillin and very quickly becomes a main producer of the antibiotic

1943  Wyeth merges with Ayerst, McKenna and Harrison, Ltd. of Canada

1960s  Wyeth becomes a leading U.S. vaccine producer after supplying polio vaccine for Salk trials; the corporate headquarters is moved to Radnor/St. Davids, PA, where it remained until 2003

1967  The WHO approaches Wyeth to develop a better injection system for smallpox vaccines; Wyeth waives patent royalties on its innovative bifurcated needle, aiding in the delivery of over 200 million smallpox vaccines per year.

1984  Wyeth introduces Advil®, the first nonprescription ibuprofen in the U.S.

1987  Wyeth and Ayerst merge to form the prescription drug based Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories

1989  AHP purchases A. H. Robins Co., makers of Robitussin®, ChapStick®, and Dimetapp®; in the late 1980s Wyeth acquires the animal health businesses of Bristol-Myers and Parke-Davis

1993  Wyeth introduces Effexor®, the first serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI), for the treatment of clinical depression

1993  Wyeth founds the Women's Health Research Institute, the only institute in the pharmaceutical industry entirely dedicated to research in women's health

1994  Wyeth acquires American Cyanamid and its subsidiary Lederle Laboratories; this acquisition includes Centrum®, the leading US multivitamin

1995  Wyeth's sales top $13 billion

1997  The estrogen drug Premarin® becomes Wyeth's first brand to reach yearly sales of $1 billion

1997  Wyeth withdraws from the market its controversial diet drug fenfluramine after reports of deaths and other health problems associated with the drug combination known as fen-phen

1998  SmithKline Beecham backs out of an estimated $70 billion merger with AHP (SmithKline instead merges with Glaxo Wellcome in 2000, thus creating the world's largest drug company at that time)

2002  AHP changes its name to Wyeth

2003  Wyeth Pharmaceuticals establishes its global headquarters in Collegeville, PA

2009  Pfizer, one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, acquires Wyeth for $68 billion; the Wyeth name continues in various business units
Some Wyeth Landmarks

• The development of the “compressed pill” or tablet and the first rotary tablet press
• The first glycerine suppositories made in the U.S.
• The pioneering development of an infant formula patterned after mother’s milk
• The first orally active estrogen (Premarin®), which became the pioneer product for estrogen replacement therapy
• The first firm to produce penicillin commercially
• The first oral form of live trivalent poliovirus vaccine in the U.S.
• The development of a heat-stable, freeze-dried vaccine and the bifurcated needle, which led to the worldwide eradication of smallpox
• The first commercial synthesis of steroids for oral contraceptives
• The first Haemophilus b conjugate vaccine licensed for use in infants in the U.S. for protection against bacterial meningitis
• The first diphtheria/tetanus/acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine available in the U.S.
• The first serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor for effective treatment of depression (Effexor®)
• The first combination estrogen/progestin hormone therapy in a single-tablet regimen
• The first in a new class of rheumatoid arthritis drugs known as biologic response modifiers
• The first albumin-free formulated recombinant factor VIII product
• The first vaccine for the prevention of invasive pneumococcal disease in infants and toddlers
• The first antidepressant indicated for generalized anxiety disorder

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