

Wyeth

A History Through Artifacts



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 securing of 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.

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John Wyeth & Brother manufacturing plant, 11th St. & Washington Ave., Philadelphia; illustration reproduced from a 19th-century photograph

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 large, 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 Products 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



Wyeth rotary tablet press, 1890s, height about 40”

- The first targeted chemotherapy agent using monoclonal antibody technology
- The first to market an OTC ibuprofen product (Advil®)
- The first canine heartworm preventative that provides six months of continuous protection in one injectable dose
- The first canine Lyme disease and Lyme combination vaccines
- The first molecular cloned feline leukemia vaccine
- The first modified-live canine parvovirus vaccine
- The first West Nile virus vaccine for horses



Small glass dish (or ashray) with the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates and the Wyeth Logo

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