

# Donation of the Month

**Object: Applegate Apothecary Bottle**  
**Catalog #: 1975.4.10.3**  
**Donor: Fred Applegate**



Time travel is possible at a few locations in Rogers, most notably in the exhibitions at the Museum and in the furnished rooms of the 1895 Hawkins House. But there is another special place in town where a person can step back in time and get a taste of long ago. Pass through the doors of 116 South First Street and enter the 1907 splendor of J.E. Applegate's drug emporium.

After scouting around a bit in southwest Missouri, Joseph Edgar Applegate (1857-1937) and his brother Alfred R. of Lawrence County, Illinois, traveled to Rogers in November 1881. Eager to take advantage of the business opportunities that the brand-new town offered, they bought the one-story, frame Pennington & McNeece Drugstore on First Street (where Centennial Park is today) and renamed it Applegate Drug Store. But A.R. was homesick so J.E. bought his brother's interest in the store. A few years later J.E. moved the business to a nearby two-story brick building and then, in 1905, began designing a new store with the help of noted Rogers architect A.O. Clarke.

The store opened to great acclaim on July 4, 1907. From its maroon-and-white tiled floor to its pressed-tin ceiling, the building was a showplace. The elegant mahogany and marble floor cases and shelves were built by the Huck Manufacturing Company of Quincy, Illinois, for a cost of \$2,192 (minus a two-percent discount because Applegate paid in cash). The price included the services of a factory representative to ensure the fixtures were properly installed. Other fancy features included a marble soda fountain and serving bar that came from St. Louis and over 180 storage drawers, each outfitted with a china knob painted with the name of the drawer's contents such as razor strops, acacia, brushes, aloe, rubber tubing, crocus, and mothballs. Faced with bands of plain and dressed limestone, the building's exterior complemented the beautiful interior.

As proprietor of the Applegate Drug Store, J.E. Applegate was one of many in a centuries-long line of pharmacists who practiced the healing arts. Although people the world over have always taken advantage of the therapeutic properties of various flora, fauna, and minerals, it wasn't until the Middle Ages that pharmacology - the art of preparing and dispensing drugs - came into its own. Although pharmacists took on the task of compounding, or combining, various drugs to form new medicines, oftentimes physicians prescribed and prepared their own medicines without the aid of pharmacists. By the end of the 19th century the division between pharmacists as makers of medicine and physicians as therapists was widely recognized.

For centuries pharmacists made their own tablets, tinctures, and tonics by hand, grinding, weighing, and compounding them into various formulations. That began to change during the 19th century with scientific advances and the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Progress in the field of chemistry led to new derivatives of old drugs and the first-time manufacture of synthetic drugs. Newly invented machines produced quality medicines faster and more economically than any pharmacist could. Using advertising to drive customer demand, patent medicines and prepackaged pills flooded the market, often displacing the pharmacist's own homemade specialties. The art of compounding began to fade away. By the 1940s only 26 percent of pharmacy-filled prescriptions required compounding; today the majority of pharmacists dispense factory-made medicines rather than those of their own manufacture.

But that was yet to come. When J.E. Applegate completed his course work in 1881 at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana, his pharmaceutical skills were still necessary, especially in a small town like Rogers. In addition to his own privately labeled plasters, powders, and pills, Applegate tailor-made prescriptions to suit the demands of area doctors and sold raw ingredients to folks interested in home remedies. As J.E.'s grandson John later remembered:

*. . . people would come in and we would weigh out maybe an ounce of some certain leaf or some certain root . . . a lot of people would use sassafras tea and use senna leaves and make a tea out of it for a laxative . . . and some people would use sulphur to make salves . . . they'd [even] take a dose of sulphur and molasses in springtime to purify their blood.*

Over the years Applegate's sold many drugs and herbs, including opium for pain relief, digitalis for use as a sedative or as a tonic for slowing and strengthening the heartbeat, and cannabis (marijuana), used as a tea for treating colicky babies. Citrus aurantium (orange) was used as an antispasm tonic as well as to flavor concoctions, plumbi acetate (lead sulfate) was used as a sedative and as an astringent, alum was used as a mouthwash astringent and in dermatological preparations, and cubeba (tailed pepper plant) was used as a stimulant or as a coloring agent (carmines). Quinine, as pictured in this early-to-mid-20th-century Applegate's bottle, was used to combat malaria, fever, indigestion, and mouth and throat diseases.

But pharmaceuticals weren't the only merchandise or service the store offered. Staff were on hand to fix watches, scoop ice cream, make lotion from rose water and glycerine, sell cigars and veterinary supplies, fit people for eyeglasses, and stir up sodas. As John Applegate once reminisced:

*. . . they didn't do sodas like these fast-food places [of today]. . . you put your syrup right up there to the syrup line [marked on the glass] and then you put some chipped ice in and then filled it full of carbonated water and stirred it up, and then you had your drink.*

Pharmacy was in the Applegate family's genes. Five of J.E.'s sons went into the business as well, either working with their father in the First Street store or operating other stores in Rogers, Bentonville, and Springdale. Fred Applegate, one of J.E.'s grandsons, owned and operated the Corner Drug Store in Rogers. It was Fred who donated the quinine bottle to the Museum, along with a number of other apothecary jars, medicine bottles, and items from Applegate Drug Store including a cork sizer, tobacco cutter, apothecary scale, spectacles, and prescription pads.

After J.E. Applegate's retirement in 1919 his son Charles took over the business, only to be followed by

his son John in 1947. In 1964 John sold the family business, but not the store, to John and Jo Lewis, who renamed it Lewis Drug Store. Although he had several offers to buy the store (including one to turn it into a restaurant), John Applegate refused, until he met Steve and Betty Goodman of Carthage, Missouri.

The Goodmans had a successful gift and candy store in Carthage when they began searching for a suitable location for a second store. When Steve Goodman, a cabinetmaker, saw the beautiful 80-year-old store fixtures still in place, an amazing feat considering the 20th century's obsession for progress and the removal of all things old and outdated, he knew the building had to be preserved just the way it was. With the proper caretakers for his family's legacy finally found, John Applegate sold the building and in 1987 Poor Richard's Gift and Confectionary opened for business. In 1991 the Goodmans were recognized for their preservation efforts with a Personal Achievement Award from the State of Arkansas.

Walk into Poor Richard's today and you'll catch a glimpse of 1907 Rogers. While the store doesn't carry the pharmaceuticals it once did, you will find a few modern-day "medicines" in the form of chocolate and caffeine (coffee), both of which have been recently touted as having beneficial effects. And you can even get an old-fashioned soda at the marble soda fountain. At the back of the store is a display of Applegate memorabilia on loan from John Applegate, including old photos, medicine bottles, soda fountain paraphernalia, and even the large, hand-painted safe that once safeguarded the pharmacy's valuables. In recognition of this wonderful building's landmark status, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

#### **CREDITS**

"Handsome Drug Store," *Rogers Democrat* (7-10-1907); "The Applegate Drug Store," *Benton County Pioneer* (May 1956); "Applegate Drug Store," *Rogers Democrat?* (2-15-1936); "Preserving a Part of the Past," *Sunday News* (5-6-1979); "Applegate Follows in Dad's Footsteps," *Northwest Arkansas Morning News* (5-28-1981); untitled brochure produced by First National Bank (1982); transcription of an RHM program featuring John Applegate and Steve and Betty Goodman (circa 1993); "Applegate Drug Store Owner Recalls Former Days in Rogers," Anita French, *Benton County Daily Record* (8-6-1995); "Glossary of Apothecary Terminology," Antique Bottle Collector's Haven website ( [www.antiquebottles.com/apothecary/glossary.html](http://www.antiquebottles.com/apothecary/glossary.html) ); and "The History of Pharmacy," History of Professional Compounding Pharmacy of Minneapolis, MN, website ( [www.lindsaydrug.com/newhist.htm](http://www.lindsaydrug.com/newhist.htm) ).