



Veterinary Roundtable

By Mike Smith, DVM
 Petvet@mindspring.com

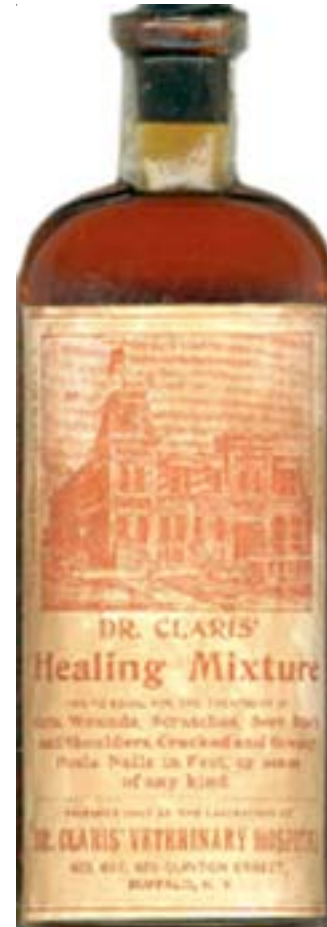
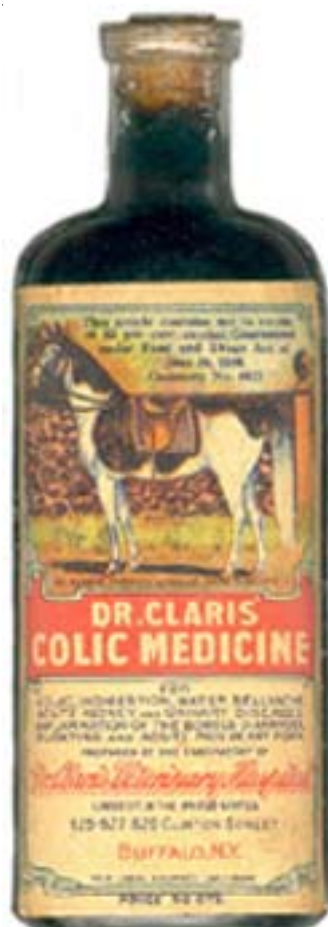
Dr. John T. Claris, V.S.
Buffalo, New York

All collectors spend a lot of time on deciding just how to display their collections. Veterinary collectors are blessed with a wide array of country store veterinary cabinets in which to showcase their medicines. It can be very frustrating however, to have a cabinet and be unable to find any medicines from the company that produced the cabinet. It is especially frustrating if the company produced some of the most colorful and detailed packaging in all of veterinary patent medicine history.

The following is the history of one such company.

John Claris was born in London, Canada in 1862. His family moved to Buffalo, New York where he resided his entire life. He attended public school in Buffalo and then went on to study at the Toronto Veterinary College. He graduated with his degree as a Veterinary Surgeon in 1882 at the age of twenty.

Upon his graduation, he returned to Buffalo and immediately became involved in government and private veterinary practice. Dr. Claris became the Federal inspector for the port of Buffalo, a post he held for eight years. He also opened his Buffalo East Side Horse Infirmary on Clinton Street.



Dr. Claris, a staunch Republican, had a lifelong interest and involvement in politics. He was on the State Republican Committee and became the Chief Inspector for Western New York for the Bureau of Animal Industry. This would later become the Department of Agriculture. Dr. Claris would hold this post for over 30 years.

His veterinary practice was very successful and quickly outgrew the first facility on Clinton Street. In 1884, he built a new brick building down the street from his first office. He included steam heating and "modern" ventilation. The ground floor held 16 box stalls and 20 open stalls. The second floor held doctor's offices, a museum of comparative anatomy, along with surgical suites and treatment facilities. The third floor was for the manufacture of veterinary medicines. This area was managed by Dr. W. T. Twitty, M.D. Dr. Twitty was also Dr. Claris' brother-in-law, having married John's sister. This third floor had a laboratory and rooms for labeling and shipping.

By 1896, the facility was again enlarged to add a 30 stall private boarding stable. Dr. Claris' veterinary empire went on to include a branch hospital near the Buffalo stock yards. By 1913, he had hospitals in Jersey City, New Jersey, Cleveland, Ohio, and Bedford, Massachusetts. Claris advertised that 2000 patients were annually admitted to his main hospital in Buffalo. The Claris Hospital employed a grandly painted animal ambulance which was known throughout Buffalo. The ambulance was pulled by Forepaugh and Barnum, Dr. Claris' famed pair of twin horses.

On a personal note, Dr. Claris was quite an imposing figure. He was 6'7" tall and weighed over 300 pounds. He was married to Otelia Claris and had one son. John Woodward Claris would follow in his father's footsteps and become a Veterinarian. A surviving letterhead that I have seen shows that his son had joined the firm by 1922.

In 1921, John Claris suffered a "stroke of apoplexy" and his health never fully recovered. In August of 1923, he went to Albany, New York to attend a testimonial dinner. Witnesses stated that as Dr. Claris climbed the hill to the offices of the Department of Farms, he collapsed on the steps and died. The date was August 27, 1923. John T. Claris was 61 years old.

The Buffalo Courier of September 1, 1923 has a small article on the will of Dr. Claris. He left his private

veterinary business to his son, John W. Claris. He bequeathed the medicine manufacturing portion of the veterinary business to his brother in law, William T. Twitty, M.D. Dr. Twitty had been responsible for the development and production of the Claris line of veterinary patent medicines. Dr. Twitty's son, Robert Claris Twitty, V. S. was also a veterinary surgeon employed by the firm.

The Claris' remedies were led by a medicine he called Kronkine. This was billed as the great fever cure. It would stimulate the heart and nourish a sick horse. One tablespoon would stop a chill, relieve congestion, and prevent inflammation. Kronkine was available in powder or liquid and in quantities up to five gallons. A booklet from 1889 lists 19 different veterinary remedies produced in a variety of sizes.

Where are they? There can be no doubt that Dr. Claris had a large and thriving practice in Buffalo for over 40 years. Did he attempt to market his remedies nationwide or was he content with limited regional diversity? The scarcity of labeled Claris' remedies today would certainly seem to indicate a limited distribution. Perhaps his branch offices were short lived. Besides Buffalo, only the Jersey City location has had labeled medicine examples come to light.

Compared to existing numbers of Dr. Daniels' or even Dr. Lesure's remedies, Dr. Claris medicines have to be considered uncommon to rare. Claris did produce glass front display cabinets in quantity, so one must assume that country stores and stables sold the Claris' products. It is clear today that the cabinets exist in far greater numbers proportionally than the remedies. Collectors that have a Claris' display cabinet typically have few, if any, Claris remedies to display within the cabinets.

What great display appeal his medicines have. Detailed colorful labels were a standard on Claris' bottles. The graphic quality of the images on the labels are so appealing to collectors today. The best examples were the Colic Medicine, the twin horses on the Fever Medicine, the ambulance on Kronkine, and the decked out elephant on the Liniment bottles. As collectors, these are highlights to our collections.

Paper ephemera is somewhat more available in the form of company letterhead, receipts, and booklets. The Claris logos were extremely detailed. Signs, posters, and other advertising exist in very limited numbers. I have no doubt

that Dr. Claris believed in the old adage, "To be successful, you have to look successful". His attention to packaging and detail certainly paid off in his day and left a legacy, however small, to collectors today.

Photo Descriptions:

1. Kronkine. 7 1/2" x 2 1/2" x 2". Embossed: JOHN T. CLARIS V.S. / 625, 627, 629 CLINTON ST. BUFFALO, N.Y. // DR. CLARIS VETERINARY HOSPITAL. All embossing is on the sides.

2. Colic Medicine. Image of "Dr. Claris famous saddle mare Holly C." 6" x 2" x 1 1/4". Embossed: DR. J.T. CLARIS V.S. // BUFFALO, N.Y.

3. Fever Medicine. Image of Forepaugh and Barnum, twin horses used to pull the ambulance. 6" x 2" x 1 1/4". Embossed: DR. J. T. CLARIS V.S. // BUFFALO, N.Y.

4. Dr. Claris' White Liniment. 9" x 3 1/4" x 2 3/4." One dollar size. Embossed: JOHN T. CLARIS V.S. / 625, 627, 629 CLINTON ST. BUFFALO, N.Y. // BUFFALO EAST SIDE VETERINARY HOSPITAL.

5. Healing Mixture. Dr Claris hospital on label. 7 1/2" x 2 1/2" x 2". Embossed: JOHN T. CLARIS V.S. / 625, 627, 629 CLINTON ST. BUFFALO, N.Y. // BUFFALO EAST SIDE VETERINARY HOSPITAL.



Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors' Slide Shows for Rent

Educational - Fun Informative

To rent one of these programs, or if you have questions about the specific contents [please contact](#):

Barbara Hill
Box 60, Tulare, CA 93275
Phone: (559) 686-1873