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Discover History At Canadian River Valley Pioneer Museum!

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MUSEUM NOTES: JANUARY 27, 2021

FROM OUR ARTIFACT COLLECTION

Occasionally we will pull a box of artifacts from our collection to verify what is inside. Last week, I was going through a box full of glass bottles. The bottles were of every shape, size, and color imaginable. Some bottles were marked by their companies, but many were not. Some had bottle cap opening, some had screw top openings, and many had old cork stopper openings. They were really fun to look at. I selected these three because they are from companies that we are familiar with today, Clorox, Listerine, and Lysol. I did a little digging into their history and well...let's just say it was interesting. All three of these bottles are from the Horace and Pauline Rivers collection.

CLOROX

This Clorox brown glass bottle dates back to 1932. According to the Clorox Company's website, their first containers of bleach were introduced in 1913 in five-gallon crockery jugs. These jugs were sold exclusively to laundries, breweries, walnut bleachers, and municipal water companies in San Francisco, California.

By 1918, Clorox was sold to American households as a cleaning disinfectant. Between 1918 and 1928, Clorox bleach was sold to homes in 15 oz. bottles with no markings. In 1929, Clorox began to mark their bottles on the bottom. In 1931, the bottles were then marked on the bottom and also around the neck. In 1932, the bottles were marked on the bottom and the neck and also around the heel and shoulder, which is how this bottle is marked.

Clorox continued to sell their bleach in brown glass bottles until 1957. Subsequent brown glass bottles between 1933 and 1957 were changed in shape, markings, and screw tops.

LISTERINE

This Listerine bottle dates back to the 1920s. According to Alex Novak in his book, "Tawdy Knickers and Other Unfortunate Ways to Be Remembered: A Saucy and Spirited History of Ninety Notorious Namesakes," Listerine was invented in the 19th century as a powerful surgical antiseptic. Later, it was sold as a floor cleaner and a cure for gonorrhea, YIKES! It wasn't until the 1920s that Listerine was advertised towards women to fight against chronic halitosis, or really bad breath. In fact, the phrase "often a bridesmaid but never a bride," was part of Listerine's campaign towards women in the 1920s, warning them that bad breath could lead them to become old maids before their "tragic" 30th birthday. So, does that mean only women back in the 1920s had bad breath and not men? Maybe it was the organ shifting corsets that

fashion and society “encouraged” women to wear that caused their halitosis. Probably not, since Listerine soon after changed their marketing and advertised to both men and women.

LYSOL

This Lysol bottle dates back to the 1920s. Dr. Gustave Raupenstrauch created the first Lysol antiseptic formula in 1889 to combat against a cholera outbreak in Germany. The following year, 1890, Lysol was sold in America by Lehn and Fink Company. In 1918, Lysol was advertised as an effective defense against the Spanish Flu pandemic (sounds a little familiar in these COVID-19 times). A few years later, Lysol aggressively marketed towards women to be used as a feminine hygiene product, OUCH! Women were instructed to dilute the formula to 1.0% concentration and use it as a vaginal douche for freshness (please do not try this at home!). During the 1930s to the 1960s, Lysol was the leading feminine hygiene product in the U.S. At that time, birth control was costly and hard to afford by many women. So companies like Lysol would advertise for germ-free feminine hygiene, but that was actually code words for birth control. Although Lysol claimed that it was safe and effective to be used by women for dainty feminine allure, it was in fact extremely dangerous. The original Lysol formula contained cresol, which is highly toxic when inhaled or ingested. It is also corrosive to the skin, causing chemical burns, and could cause death if not diluted properly. Luckily, by 1952, Lysol changed to a less caustic formula and by the 1970s women were no longer using Lysol for cleansing their bodies, only their homes.

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