

THERON T. POND AND HIS WITCH HAZEL

Utica, N.Y. - The Birth Place of the First Mass Produced Medicine

By Jon Landers

In 1800, a man born on a farm in Augusta, NY would go on to start a small company in Utica, NY that developed a product that eventually would be used by every household where the English language was spoken. And while Theron T. Ponds' achievements didn't make him wealthy, it did cause two other Utica men to do quite well with their business endeavors. The original company would evolve to become a worldwide conglomerate that amazingly, is still in business in 2012.

In 1829 as a young man, Theron T. Pond was a captain on the new packet boat CITIZEN on the recently opened Erie Canal. This packet boat made trips between Schenectady and Utica.

It has been said that T. T. Pond was also a chemist, pharmacist and scientist. Whether he was or not, it is not known; but his first business in Utica was that of being a partner in a saddle, harness and trunk store. In 1843, Pond and his partner, Samuel L. Gordon had a store at 47 Genesee Street.

During this period, Pond became acquainted with a medicine man from the nearby Oneida Tribe. Pond learned the medicine man had knowledge on how to make age old remedies that had been passed down generation to generation in the Oneida tribe. One item Pond took interest in and eventually became fascinated with was a concoction made from the bark of the witch hazel bush. The Indian man claimed this extract was almost a wonder drug that could cure wounds, burns, bruises and many other skin ailments. The medicine man also asserted that witch hazel trees were native to only a few locations.

For several years the medicine man acted as a mentor, taking Pond into the woods teaching him exactly which bushes were the witch hazel trees. They took the twigs and branches back to Utica where the Indian would show Pond how to boil them to make the potion.

Pond built an inexpensive laboratory in a warehouse and experimented with the remedy for several years before he felt confident enough to market the product. The Indian method was to boil the twigs and branches of the witch hazel bush in a cauldron, much like a tea kettle. This produced a tea like liquid which was then partially evaporated. Pond improved the method by distilling the liquid much like the process in making essential oils. Eventually, the self taught druggist discovered that a small amount of alcohol was needed to preserve the medicine and after improving the product; Pond felt it was time to market the ointment for local commercial use. According to T. T. Ponds' cousin (Theodore S. Pond) the first batch used was made in a building near the Park Avenue canal bridge.

In 1848, Pond, along with the Oneida Tribes' medicine man and several partners formed the T. T. Pond Company. The Company on Ponds' suggestion, named their medication, "Golden Treasure." Like most attempts at creating something new, Pond didn't find instant success and there were trials and errors and a few setbacks in marketing the product. Then about 1850, just when Pond perfected the manufacturing process, he became seriously ill and unfortunately died from consumption. When he was on his death bed, Pond sold his interest in the company along with the Indian medicine mans' for a very small sum.

Upon his death, Azariah S. Palmer, who was Ponds' good friend, neighbor and probably one of the investors, took charge of running the company. A Utica iron foundry establishment named Hart and Munson bought Ponds' share of the company. Why the owners of an iron foundry business decided to invest in this type of business, it is not known, but they stayed involved for only a short time.

Under Palmers guidance, the company decided to rename their medicine "Ponds Extract" and had a supply of bottles made with PONDS EXTRACT embossed on one side. Labels were printed for the other side with the words, "Vegetable Pain Reliever" and instructions on how to use the medicine. Sales improved to the point that three locations were needed to make the witch hazel extract. While there were three production locations, each one was only a small crude distillery which used four kettles to make the ointment.

The three distilleries were located in Frankfort, Little Falls and Tightsville, New York. At this point in the company's history, Palmer started using copper kettles with crude hoods and coils which produced an even better product.

Additional Information about this business is scarce, but at some point the three operations were consolidated into one at Rome, NY. At a later time, the business was sold to a New York City firm that failed to increase the assets of the company and resulted in the firm being sold by the sheriff at public auction. Azariah S. Palmer, who was still running the business, bought the company claiming he never gave up his interest in the firm in the first place. Palmer in the meantime had started his own separate Utica business that manufactured and sold Palmers' Homeopathic Remedies. One of his leading products was Palmers' Extract of Witch Hazel. Palmer claimed that Pond on his death bed had given him permission to make and sell Witch Hazel. His homeopathic remedy business survived for 12 or 13 years and provided him with a good living.

Another Utica gentleman, Dr Frederick Humphrey, a former Methodist minister who had helped form the Methodist Episcopal Church in West Utica and who was also a physician played a large part in the Pond's Extract story. Humphrey had studied medicine under his father in Utica for several years. Later, he attended medical college in Pennsylvania and received a degree as a homeopathic physician. About 1860, Humphrey relocated to New York City and started the New York Homeopathic Medical Company. This business evolved into a large and very successful enterprise. Humphreys' most popular product was Ponds Extract of Witch Hazel. Humphrey had been Theron T. Ponds' personal physician for several years in Utica before he died. Humphrey claimed that Pond had also given him permission to manufacture and sell Witch Hazel.

When Azariah Palmer found out that Humphrey was selling Pond's Extract of Witch Hazel, he sued him and brought an injunction forbidding Humphrey from using either the names "Pond's Extract" or manufacturing Witch Hazel.

Shortly after, Humphrey sold his successful business for a very large sum of money. The new owners did not want to be involved in any costly litigation and offered Palmer a 1/8 ownership in the \$100,000 company. According to some historians, the lawsuit between Palmer and Humphrey was never settled and remains an unsettled claim.

Ponds Extract sales grew to a point where it was distributed in every location the English language was used. By 1886 the company had a national advertising campaign. In 1914, Ponds Cold Cream and Vanishing Cream was introduced to the public and with an intense advertising campaign their names became a beauty icon. By 1920, Ponds Cold Cream was being endorsed by Hollywood movie stars and other beautiful women.

Today's pharmacies regularly stock distilled witch hazel and carry ointments containing witch hazel to reduce inflammation, slow bleeding and relieve pain. Homeopathic remedies for various conditions also use witch hazel.

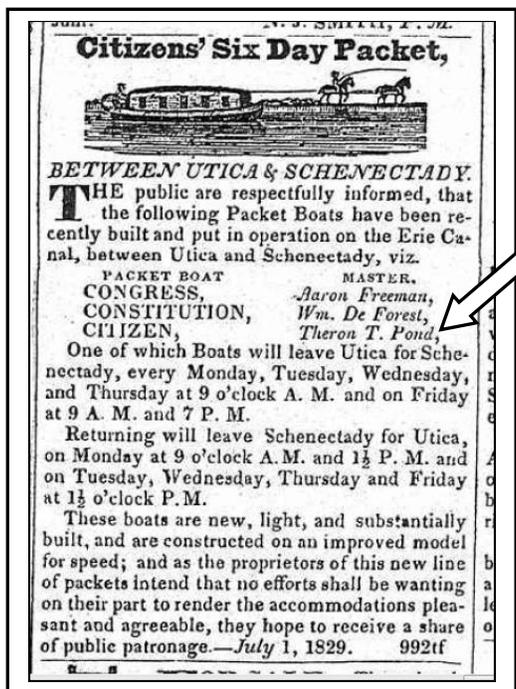
In 1955 the company merged with Chesebrough Manufacturing Company, creators of Vaseline Petroleum Jelly. The joined company diversified further with Cutex nail polishes, Prince Matchabelli perfumes and other products. In 1987 the British and Dutch owned Unilever purchased Chesebrough-Pond's, which is now a division of that corporate giant.

Although, Theron T. Pond's Golden Discovery whose recipe came from a Medicine Man of the Oneida Tribe, was not marketed very successfully during his lifetime; changing the name to "Pond's Extract of Witch Hazel" after his death did result in financial achievement for his supporters and Utica, New York was where it all started.



Editor's note: Many aqua bottles c1920 exist with the words "POND'S EXTRACT" embossed on one side of them. The bottles are so common; there is little demand for them. Early aqua bottles with pontil scars from the early years of the company c1857's embossed with "POND'S EXTRACT" are very scarce and examples with a Utica, NY label are rare. There are no known GOLDEN TREASURE bottles.

I have been doing research for this article for quite a few years and information for the piece was taken from newspapers, Utica city directories, the internet and documents from the Utica Public Library. Today, the Ponds Witch Hazel story is still taught to many pharmaceutical and advertising students. What a great little segment of local history. The Utica Observer Dispatch a year or so ago did an article on Theron T. Pond but unfortunately I never got a chance to see it. Does anyone have a copy?



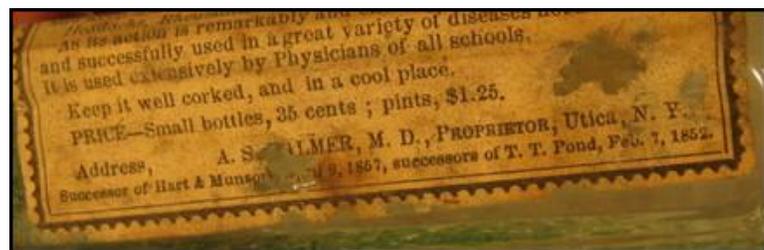
Above: A very rare aqua, embossed POND'S EXTRACT bottle with pontil scar and 90% of original label. The label is marked Utica, New York. This is one of the earliest Ponds Extract bottles known to exist c1852.

Mark Yates Collection

Advertisement from *Schenectady Cabinet*

Dated Wednesday July1, 1829

T. T. Pond Captain of Packet Boat CITIZEN



At left: Photo of part of a label from a POND'S EXTRACT OF WHICH HAZEL/ A. S. PALMER/UTICA, N.Y. Palmer had the abbreviation M. D. on his label and also states he was successor to Hart & Munson in 1857 and they were successors to T. T. Pond in 1852.

At right: Photo of the embossed side of the bottle shown above. The aqua POND'S EXTRACT OF WHICH HAZEL/ A. S. PALMER/UTICA, N.Y. bottle has a smooth base and would date 1857 or later.



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Advertisement for Pond's Vanishing Cream c1920

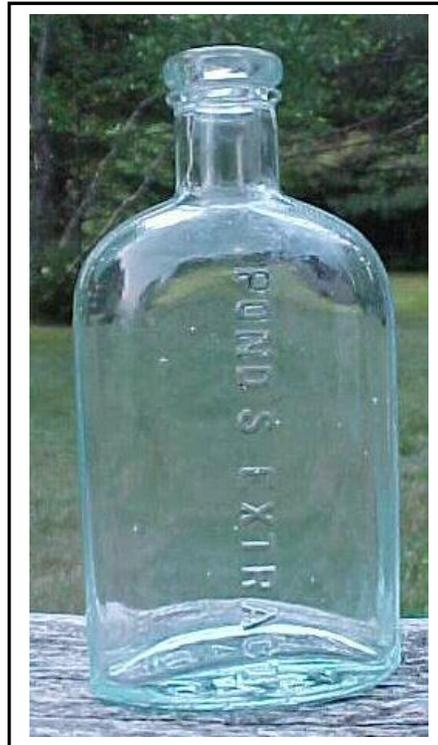


Photo of common Pond's Extract bottle c1920