

Old ads, new interest

Wellsburg native posts advertisements from 1890s to early 1900s on website

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WELLSBURG - An ad from 1905 for an early Oldsmobile model touts it is "A trolley car that needs no track."

A 1900 ad for the Marion Harland Coffee Pot asks readers "Do you drink coffee?" while proclaiming it "is recommended by the highest medical authorities as the world's greatest and best coffee-maker."

And an 1890 ad for Mrs. Dr. William Baker's Magnetic Liniment claims it offers "wonderful and marvelous cures" for pain from rheumatism and other conditions.

Wellsburg native Jay Paull said newspaper and magazine ads from the 1890s and early 1900s reveal much about life in the turn of the century, what has changed and what has not.

And he should know, having posted more than 3,700 advertisements from the period on his website at jaypaull.com.

"My great-grandmother, Mariana Paull, started amassing these. I'm not sure why, but she passed them on from generation to generation and I got them," said Paull, a 1988 alumnus of Brooke High School involved with various startup ventures in the Reston, Va. area where he now lives.



AD MAN — Wellsburg native Jay Paull displays some of the many vintage ads he has posted on his website at jaypaull.com. Paull said the ads reveal much about how life and advertising have changed over the years and how it hasn't. -- Warren Scott

Paull said his grandmother must have appreciated the ads' historical value, noting she jotted down dates on clippings that didn't include a printed date.

He said in addition to their historic aspect, he likes how they reveal changing approaches in the advertising world.

"I've always loved advertising, even as a kid," he said, adding he would write to McDonald's and makers of soft drinks for proofs of ads and receive them, often in poster tubes, by mail.

Especially charmed by the ads of the turn of the century, which are in the public domain, he decided to post them online so they could be seen and possibly, studied, by others.

"I thought it would be an interesting and fun endeavor to scan and preserve them."

"It's highly unusual to have this many ads, some more than 170 years old, together in excellent condition that reveal such varied aspects of life from that period. The wide range of subjects and topics will appeal to virtually anyone's interests," Paull said.

A visit to his website reveals vintage ads can be accessed through more than 35 categories, including appliances, beverages, clothing, food, furniture, games, gun products, sports and recreation, tobacco and toys.

The automotive and carriage categories show how the marketplace shifted from horse-drawn carriages in the 1890s to the earliest forms of the automobile in the 1900s.

"You would rarely see an ad in 1910 for a carriage," Paull said.

The subject is of particular interest to Paull, who also features many of the ads in a short video posted on the site.

"I have quite a few Oldsmobile ads that are clearly from its earliest stages," he said.

Paull noted there are ads for vehicles that are no longer produced, such as the Locomobile or Yale Touring Car, as well as an electric-powered car, a concept that has been revisited in recent years.

There also are many ads for railroads, promising to take passengers to various vacation destinations. In the early 1900s commercial airlines were still developing in the U.S. and focused on cargo over passengers.

"Railroads were really a primary mode of transportation in that era," Paull said.

An ad for the Santa Fe Railway encourages people to book a trip to Los Angeles and San Francisco, where they will find "No cold weather. The sun shines warmly from

unclouded skies, and flowers bloom in plenteous riot of color. An ideal land for pleasure seekers."

"Why freeze at home?" it implores.

Paull said a number of the railroads strived to make traveling by train appealing to tourists, offering meals and other services aboard the trains.

"To have a dining car - that was a real luxury," he said.

Paull said in addition to modes of transportation, styles of clothing have changed much since that period, when ad illustrations depicted men and women dressed from neck to foot, and corsets were advertised for women, men and children.

One thing that hasn't changed is the public's interest in good health, he noted.

Paull said in those days before government regulation, there were many ads that made outrageous claims for alleged medicinal products, even one purporting to cure cancer.

Even an ad for baby food promised to make infants healthier, featuring an illustration of a baby appearing sickly before consuming the product and another of the child looking healthier afterward, Paull said.

He said some ads are of particular local interest, featuring businesses that once operated in Steubenville, Wheeling or Wellsburg or still do.

Among them are Davidson's Hat and Cap Store of Steubenville, Stevens and Aikens Dry Goods and the Wellsburg Book and Drug Store, both of Wellsburg; and the McClure Hotel and Mrs. Ziegenfelder's Ice Cream, both of Wheeling.

Paull said the ads also show how advertising styles changed over time, even within that period.

Ads from the 1890s typically contain many words and little illustration, he said, while illustrations of various styles dominate those from the early 1900s.

Paull said some of the drawings are quite elaborate, and advertising agencies even went as far as to hire leading book or magazine illustrators, such as Edward Penfield and Karl Anderson, to produce them.

The artists often signed their names to their work or received credit within the ad, he noted.

Paull added the advertising agency itself often was credited in the 1890s ads.

"You would never see that today," he said.

Paull said his website is unique because he doesn't use it to sell copies of the ad, doesn't contain any ads aimed at generating revenue and doesn't focus on a specific product.

He also makes no effort to digitally remove stains or other imperfections because he believes that's part of their charm.

With about 10,000 ads from his great-grandmother's collection still to be scanned, Paull uploads new ads to the site on a regular basis. He also randomly selects an ad to be featured as the Ad of the Day, so each visit to the website offers something new.

Paull said Dan Smith of River Merchant Web Design of Toronto helped him set up the website.

"I needed someone who knew how to put the databases together and do the backend work," he said.

Paull said he's been pleasantly surprised by the response to the website, particularly from other countries.

"I get hits from all over the world practically every day," he said, adding articles on it have been printed by newspapers in Spain and India.

"It's been interesting to see people from all over the world are interested in old American advertisements, not just Americans," Paull said.