

First in
Relief of Pain

Against Pain

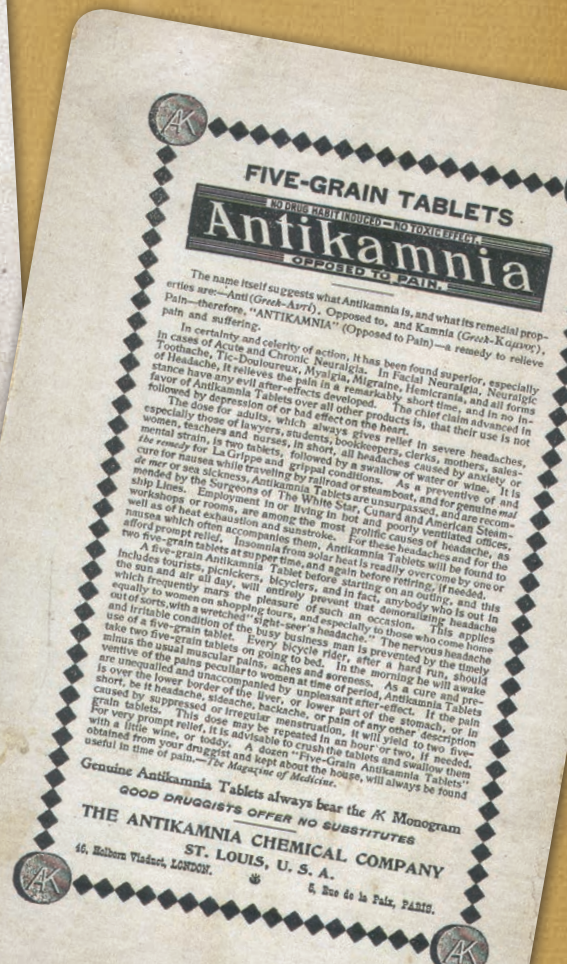
BY DAVID L. STRAIGHT



"Faith"

The ailments that could be treated with one or two Antikamnia tablets ranged from toothache to Le Grippe (today, the flu) as well as "severe headaches, especially those of lawyers, students, bookkeepers, clerks, mothers, saleswomen, teachers, and nurses." The tablets were also recommended as a preventative "before starting on an outing, and this includes tourists, picnickers, bicyclers, and in fact, anybody who is out in the sun and air all day, will entirely prevent that demoralizing headache which frequently mars the pleasure of such an occasion" or for "women on shopping tours." (Collection of the author)

Although unusual for its sacrilegious image of a nun lifting her eyes towards the "heavenly" Antikamnia tablet, this 1898 large format (5" x 8") trading card is typical of the formula that combined collectable pictures with printed product information on the verso. Tracing their origins from seventeenth-century London trade cards, trading cards evolved into our modern business cards. Trade cards, in the original sense of the word, referred to cards distributed by business proprietors to announce their trade or line of work. With the development of inexpensive color printing in the late nineteenth century, collecting and trading of these attractive cards became a popular hobby. (Collection of the author)



With palpable pain etched into her face and the enfolding wings of a powerful drug shielding the victim from the satanic serpent of her affliction, an 1899 Art Nouveau advertisement mailed to British physicians promoted the Antikamnia Chemical Company of St. Louis. Besides generating tremendous wealth, which allowed Frank A. Ruf an international reputation as an art collector, Antikamnia tablets and its advertising cards defined the power of the newly created Food and Drug Administration.

In the late 1880s, Louis E. Frost, a graduate of the St. Louis College of Pharmacy, and Frank A. Ruf, who had studied business at St. Benedict's College, met as drug store clerks and subsequently opened their own drug store. No evidence exists that either was ever a licensed pharmacist. After hitting upon a successful formula, they incorporated the Antikamnia Chemical Company to manufacture their analgesic, which combatted pain and incorporated antipyretic powder to reduce fever. The name, taken from two Greek words that combined to mean "opposed to pain," was trademarked in 1890. Financial reverses in other business ventures forced Frost to sell his Antikamnia shares in 1892. Combining a winning formula and good business instincts, Ruf continued the company with another partner. By 1894, the firm began using the monogrammed letters "AK" in its advertising and pressed them onto its tablets. Although

Antikamnia tablets did not require a prescription, the company sold primarily to drug stores rather than to individuals. Most of its advertising, such as the cards illustrated here, was directed towards physicians, encouraging them to prescribe and recommend the tablets to their patients.

While the precise formula varied over time, the principle active ingredients in Antikamnia tablets remained the coal-tar derivative acetanilid combined with caffeine, sodium bicarbonate, and citric acid. Two German chemists discovered acetanilid in 1886. When testing its capacity for reducing pain and fever, they noted the side effect of cyanosis, a turning blue in the extremities from a lack of oxygen caused by depressed respiration and heart rate. Acetanilid was a legitimate pharmaceutical, listed in the National Formulary until 1955. However, it could be deadly when used carelessly; the first acetanilid-related deaths were reported in 1891. Antikamnia tablets were also formulated in combination with codeine, heroin, quinine, salol, and laxatives.

Because of the deaths associated with this drug, Antikamnia was one of the patent medicines particularly targeted by progressive consumer advocate Harvey W. Wiley, the first commissioner of the newly created Food and Drug Administration. The term "patent medicine" is somewhat of a misnomer, because few, if any, of the medicinal remedies marketed before the advent of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug laws were actually patented. Application for a patent would require, among other things, that manufacturers reveal the exact contents of their medicines and prove their claimed benefits. After the Food and Drug Administration ruled in 1907 that

preparations containing acetanilid must be clearly labeled, the Antikamnia Company changed its formula for the domestic market, instead using acetaphenetidin, an acetanilid derivative. It then advertised that its product contained no acetanilid. However, the British market, still unregulated, continued to receive the original formula tablets. In 1910, U.S. marshals seized a shipment of tablets for being incorrectly labeled in violation of the Pure Food and Drug Act. The ensuing court case went all the way to the Supreme Court which ruled on January 5, 1914 (*U.S. v. Antikamnia Chemical Company*, 231 U.S. 654) that the Antikamnia Company had indeed violated the Pure Food and Drug Act both by not stating on its packaging that acetaphenetidin was a derivative of acetanilid and by the misleading advertising that the tablets contained no acetanilid. Beyond the impact on the Antikamnia Company, this ruling was a landmark in support of Progressive Era reform legislation because it confirmed that federal agencies, charged with the enforcement of an Act, had the administrative authority to make additional related regulations.

The markup on Antikamnia tablets, which sold at roughly ten times the cost of production, allowed Ruf to indulge his passion for Persian art, particularly rugs. When the quality of his rug collection came to the attention of the Shah of Persia, Ruf was awarded the fifth class star of the Imperial Order of the Lion and Sun in 1908. At his death in 1923, Ruf's estate was valued at \$2.5 million.



The Antikamnia Company directed a large percentage of its advertising budget into direct mailings, such as this postal card to physicians and pharmacists, providing them with free samples and literature to gain their acceptance and prescriptions.

(Collection of the author)

This "Dear Doctor" postal card with another graphic image of women in pain announces that a copy of the "Antikamnia Foetal Chart and Parturition Calendar" has been mailed gratis. Not unlike today, physicians received perks from the Antikamnia Company; in this case, a fetal chart and calendar on labor and delivery prepared by a well known medical illustrator. It is a small wonder that this card was not barred from the mail under the provisions of the Comstock Act (U.S. 17 Stat. 598) that prohibited mailing "lewd, or lascivious" materials.

(Collection of the author)