



The Hupa of Northwestern California utilize earth as an insulating material by building semi-subterranean plank houses. Photo by Peter Nabokov



The interior of a Hupa cedar plank house with the hearth in the foreground. Photo by Peter Nabokov

secration of the home according to ancient ritual is as important as its construction. For instance, the newly built addition to a Zuni home is laid out to conform to the ceremony that blesses it. One long room is designed so that in late autumn a 10 ft. masked dancer, known as a *Shalako*, can perform a trotting, back-and-forth dance within it. During the *Shalako* festival, six such dancers bless six houses; only then are the homes ready for habitation.

Visitors entering the Indian lodges built at our Festival will notice the skillful use of available materials. These home traditions perpetuate practical adaptations to climate; also, they indicate man's impulse to invest his immediate environment with spiritual meaning.

Suggesting Reading

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The Medicine Show

Brooks McNamara

*Oh! I love to travel far and near
throughout my native land;
I love to sell as I go 'long, and take
the cash in hand.
I love to cure all in distress that
happen in my way.
And you better believe I feel quite
fine when folks rush up and
say:*

Chorus:

*I'll take another bottle of Wizard
oil,
I'll take another bottle or two;
I'll take another bottle of Wizard
oil,
I'll take another bottle or two.*

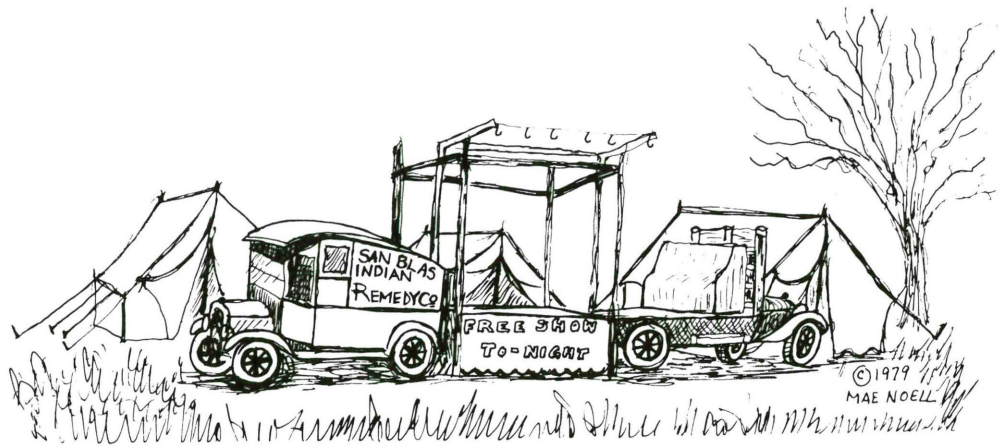
Carl Sandburg,

The American Songbag

The traveling salesman is a fixture in our folklore, celebrated in stories, jokes, anecdotes, and cartoons. Within the ranks of the salesmen, a special sense of mystery and glamour surrounds the medicine showman — the itinerant patent medicine seller whose free performances were an important part of small town life still within the memory of many Americans.

The American patent medicine seller derived from mountebanks — wandering herb doctors and medicine vendors who drew crowds with songs or conjuring. They appeared in the New World as early as the 1600s, but it was only about 1850 that the idea of selling medicine between the acts of a free show resulted from the rapid growth of proprietary medicine companies, many of which sent advertising units on the road after the Civil War. These units were

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especially popular in rural areas where regular theater companies rarely appeared. There was money to be made, and medicine shows sponsored by leading firms such as the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Co. and Hamlin's Wizard Oil were soon in competition with independent showmen who casually brewed up their remedies in boarding house bathtubs.

By 1900 medicine shows had invaded every part of the country where an audience could be found, and the various types of medicine showmen were vying with one another to present novelties and unique attractions. The basic show was offered by street pitchmen performing alone or with a partner. So-called "low pitchmen" worked directly on the ground, generally choosing a busy street corner or a promising location at a fairground. Most operated from a

Late low pitch operator, Port Gibson, Mississippi, 1940. Photo by Post. Library of Congress.



This sketch, by Anna May Noell, recalls the stage and set up of her family's medicine show of the 20s and 30s. We have used it as our model to recreate the setting for our performance on the mall.

(Editor's note — The use of American Indian identification in medicine shows is discussed in Rayna Green's article on p. 18.)

"tripes and keister" — a satchel or suitcase containing the pitchman's remedies mounted on a tripod. "High pitchmen" worked from a platform or the back of a truck or wagon. Like their ancestors the mountebanks, street pitchmen presented only a simple show, often just a few banjo solos or magic tricks designed to attract a crowd.

In addition to a pitchman who sold remedies, more elaborate shows carried an entire cast of performers and musicians, as well as a more-or-less completely equipped tent theater. Some large medicine show companies, in fact, were capable of mounting several hours of entertainment with a

dozen or more acts as well as half a dozen intervals during which the showman could sell his products.

By the 1920s the shows were becoming less common. Increasingly rigorous legislation concerned with medicine bottling, labeling, and advertising was making medicine show business more complicated to operate and less profitable. Then, too, the automobile was bringing isolated communities closer to the city; and the phonograph, radio, and talking pictures were providing new forms of inexpensive and available entertainment. But there were those who continued to look forward to visits from the medicine showmen because they provided the opportunity for visits with friends and relatives and the chance to hear time-honored songs, jokes, and comedy routines. But by the end of World War II, most shows had disappeared.

The traveling medicine show was an itinerant folk community with its own traditions. The veterans claimed to "know everyone in the business," and they shared a distinct jargon: "lot lice," for instance, were show goers who came early and left late but never bought any medicine. The shows were the only form of entertainment in many rural American communities and one of the few sources of employment for folk musicians. Many of our most celebrated folk and popular performers like Bessie Smith, Clarence Ashley, Harmonica Frank Floyd, and Hank Williams got their starts in medicine shows.

Many skits were ancient acts passed from European mountebanks to medicine shows. They contain roughshod — often slapstick — country humor. Perhaps the most famous "afterpiece" (piece done after the show) is "Three

Healers, Curers, and Herbalists: Folk Medicine in America

Jack Santino

O'Clock Train," which, according to one showman, was seen as early as 1800-25. "What time does the three o'clock train go out?" "The three o'clock train?" the answer comes back, "Why, it goes out exactly 60 minutes past two o'clock."

The step-right-up pitch of the show's "Doc" was a powerful form of folk rhetoric. Witness this pitch from showman T. P. Kelley, from a biography by his son:

"You are all dying, every man, every woman and child is dying; from the instant you are born you begin to die and the calendar is your executioner. That, no man can change or hope to change. It is nature's law that there is no escape from the individual great finale on the mighty stage of life where each of you are destined to play your farewell performance. Ponder well my words then ask yourselves the questions: Is there a logical course to pursue? Is there some way you can delay, and perhaps for years, that final moment before your name is written down by a bony hand in the cold diary of death? Of course there is, Ladies and Gentlemen, and that is why I am here."

Suggesting Reading

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Disease, disorder, and discomfort, whether mental or physical, are inevitable. They must be addressed and alleviated, and people have invented elaborate systems for identifying, systematizing, and controlling them. These systems are most effective when they draw on a community's shared values, beliefs, and symbols. The tribal medicine man, the herbalist of folk societies, the doctors of contemporary America all do their jobs best when they understand that the faith their patients place in them and in their practices is derived from community-wide values and beliefs.

America is a complex land of many distinct ethnic communities, each with its own traditional medical beliefs, practices,



The country pharmacist knows his customers personally and dispenses concern and friendship along with medicine. Don Troutman, of Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, runs one of the oldest pharmacies in the United States. Photo by Barbara Reimensnyder for the Smithsonian.

and specialists. All people have home remedies. Who, in our society, for example, has not been told to drink ten sips of water or take some sugar or stare into a point of a knife to cure their hiccups? But when one *really* gets sick, he or she sees a doctor, a medical specialist who is legitimized by the authority of a formal organization, has earned a university degree, and has received practical training.

Other societies rely upon oral tradition as the legitimizing agency. Among the Eastern Cherokee, there are seven medicine men who are traditional healers, and each has a specific area of expertise. Some are more knowledgeable about herbs, others about spiritual power. They are all medical specialists within their community, and all serve the double function of preventing and curing pain and illness, on the one hand, and of calming and reassuring their patients and the community, on the other. They rely on the time-honored beliefs and practices of their people, and they share those beliefs with the patients they tend. Together, patient and healer work on effecting a cure.

Medical healing is always part science and part performance. The scientific aspect is comprised of knowledge about the curative powers of plant and animal substances and other means of correcting physical and psychological disorders (for example, the use of splints to mend broken bones). When combined with the ability to perform healing rituals, the patient receives a sense of security

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