

Curator's Choice

Dr. John Bull's Extract of Sarsaparilla

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Produced in the 1850s, Dr. John Bull's Extract of Sarsaparilla was a success from the start. It was the perfect miracle cure, with six times the amount of pure sarsaparilla than other similar products. Or at least that's what the advertising claimed. In reality, it was just normal sarsaparilla and its medical feats were iffy at best. But luckily for Dr. John Bull, people believed it.

John Bull was born near Simpsonville, Kentucky in 1813. At twelve he became a porter in Hyer's and Butler's drug store, and he studied medicine under Dr. Shrock. In 1837, he opened his own drug store, which failed within two years. Bull then joined the wholesale drug firm of James B. and Edward Wilder as a prescription clerk, where he also began to produce his own medicine. Eventually his medicine earned him a lot of money, getting annual business of around \$311,540.

The sarsaparilla was one of his more successful medicines and was said to be able to cure Scrofula, King's Evil, Cancers, Tumors, Colds and more. Apparently hundreds of physicians had overseen its production and not one had said anything bad about it. This obviously was either a marketing ploy or poor physicians, because the healing properties it had are suspect.



The sarsaparilla bottle from the circa 1850-1870 Feature 30 privy at the Federal Reserve Site (18BC27).

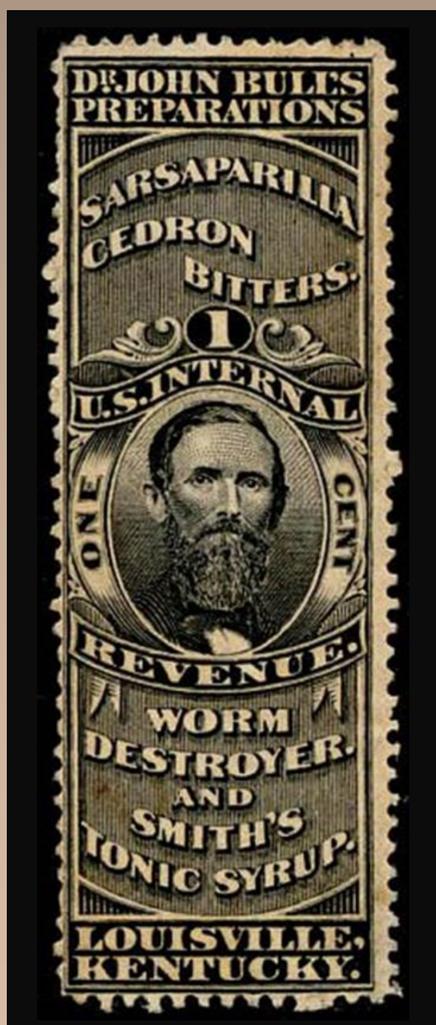


John Bull Extract of Sarsaparilla bottle seen from the side, showing the plate mold with John Bull's name. The privy pit where the bottle was found contained trash from the Southern Dispensary, a neighborhood medical facility that operated in the mid-nineteenth century.

References

Dr. John Bull and Louisville at That Time. Ferdinand Meyer V. Website. www.peachridgeglass.com/2014/.../dr-john-bull-and-louisville-at-that-time/ Accessed on 6/8/2015.

Bull's Sarsaparilla Advertisement. *Southern Cultivator and Dixie Farmer* volume 44. January 1886, pp. 296.



Portrait of Dr. John Bull on this private die proprietary stamp. <http://www.rdhinstl.com/mm/rs42.htm>.



The leaves and berries of the sarsaparilla plant, a woody, rambling vine native to Central and South America. <http://therootsstory.co.uk/sarsaparilla/>



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