

How Dr. Pierce Promoted Himself

By DICK HARRIS

For an all-purpose cure-all, it's not likely that anyone will ever match Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription. It was guaranteed to cure a variety of human ailments, including female weakness, weak lungs, asthma, impoverished blood, constipation, and diseases of the liver, kidneys, stomach, rectum, bladder, and generative organs.

The barns of rural America bore the promise of Dr. R.V. Pierce's miraculous medicine. Those barns, symbols of industry and integrity, gave credibility to the potions that made the enterprising Buffalo doctor a millionaire. And now that the Federal Trade Commission in Washington has ruled that doctors may advertise their services, Dr. Pierce's century-old commercial approach to medicine may see a revival.

The modern medic may envy Dr. Pierce, who exploited an advertising bonanza on the sides of country barns. Free from legal restraints, he promised remedies would cure "or your money back."

There was no Food and Drug

Administration at this time, and Ralph Nader wasn't around to look into the validity of the doctor's claims.

The ingredients, Dr. Pierce maintained, were gifts of nature: "Tinctures of fluid extracts prepared from roots, barks, and herbs which are fresh and selected with the greatest care."

Technique Explained

Dr. Pierce's advertising technique was simple, yet enterprising—and effective. Painting crews fanned out over rural America, offering farmers with roadside barns a deal that was hard to resist. Pierce's organization would paint the side of a barn facing the road or highway and pay the farmer \$10 to \$15 a year depending upon the size of the barn. The barn would get a fresh coat of paint every four or five years.

The barns bore one of these three messages in letters five feet high: DR. PIERCE'S GOLDEN MEDICAL DISCOVERY, DR. PIERCE'S PLEASANT PELLETS, or THE WOMAN'S TONIC—DR. PIERCE'S FAVORITE PRESCRIPTION.



A Dr. Pierce Ad Can Still Be Seen on a Barn Facing Highway 91 in Northern Utah's Cache Valley

Because patent medicine had acquired a bad name, Dr. Pierce insisted on calling his remedies "prescriptions," pointing out that they had "the sanction and endorsement of medical gentlemen of rare attainment and mature experience."

Dr. Pierce was, after all, a medical doctor, one of the staff of consulting physicians and surgeons at the Invalid's Hospital and Surgical Institute and president of the World's Dispensary Medical Association of

Buffalo. He was also the author of a best seller first published in 1895, "The People's Common Sense Medical Advisor in Plain English, or Medicine Simplified."

An astounding 64 editions were published, six of them in England. No fewer than 2,100,000 copies were sold. The book offered helpful hints on diet, infant feeding, exercise, sanitation, ventilation, clothing, work habits, and achieving happiness and peace of mind. It also presented stern

warnings against the use of tobacco, alcohol, and opium.

His book concluded with the statement: "Upon the health of its people is based the prosperity of a nation."

One of the last of the Dr. Pierce barns still stands facing Highway 91 in Northern Utah's Cache Valley. Built at the turn of the century, the barn received its last paint job in 1936. And that was the last year its owner, Lovenus Olsen, received his \$10 check from Dr. Pierce.