

Hook's

# DRUGSTORE MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

## HOOK'D ON HISTORY

Welcome back to another edition of Hook's Drug Store Museum newsletter. We hope to add value to your medical knowledge with fun and interesting information from the bygone era of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with facts and tales that will be sure to entertain.

### UNDERSTANDING 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PRESCRIPTIONS

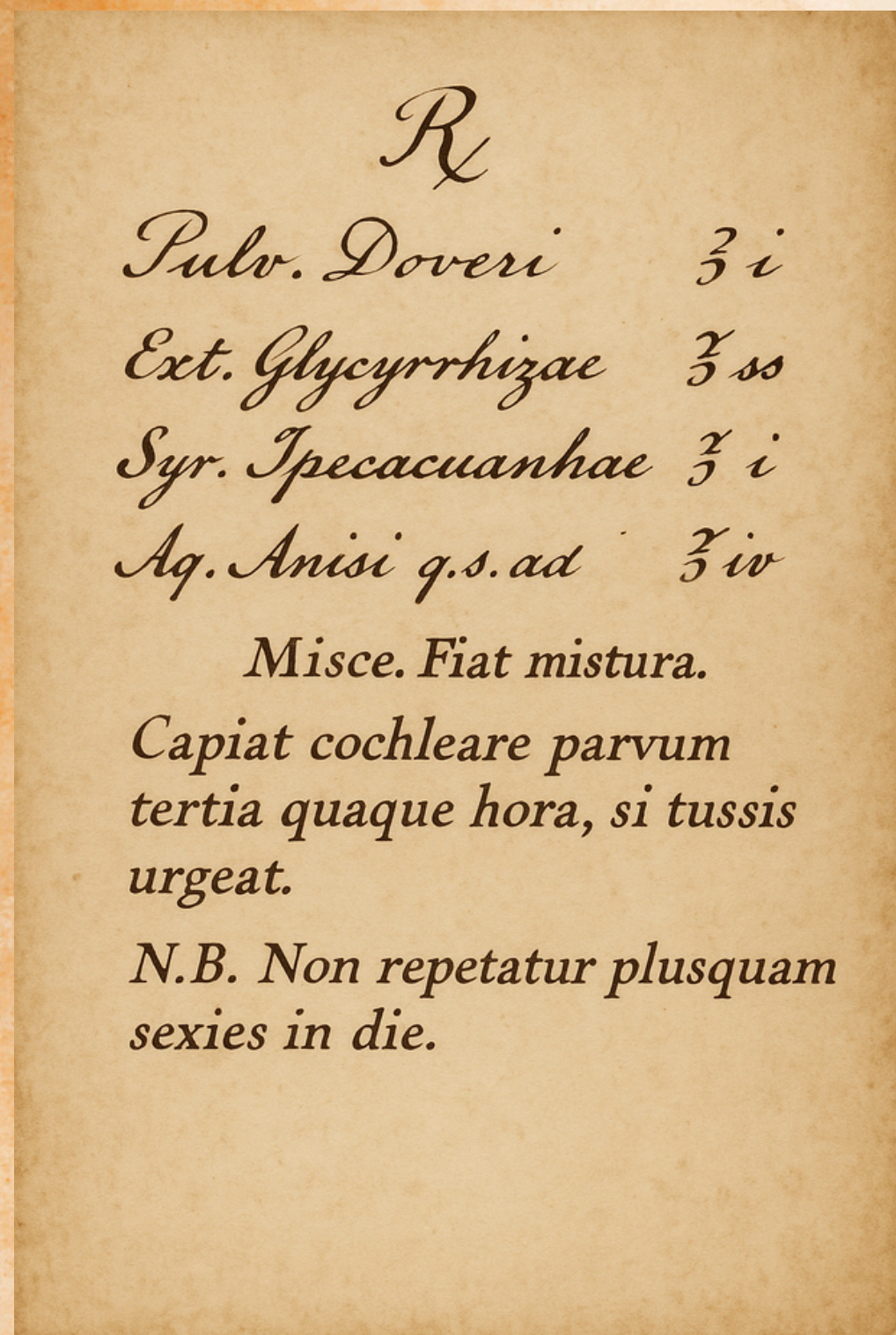
To understand 19<sup>th</sup> century prescriptions it is important to understand how and why doctors and druggists communicated. It's hard to imagine, but there were no phone-in prescriptions, and no computers to e-prescribe. There was only pen and paper, and prescriptions hand delivered to the drug store. They were complex and hard to read. **And they were written in Latin!** That is the focus of this newsletter.

In the 1800s, Latin was as dead a language in the US as it is today. So why were prescriptions written that way?:

1. Universal Language of Scholars: By using Latin, doctors could communicate effectively across different regions and countries, despite speaking different native languages.
2. Tradition: The roots of Western medicine trace back to ancient Greece and Rome, and many foundational medical texts were written in Latin or Greek.
3. Clarity and Precision: Latin allows for the precise expression of medical instructions. Using Latin also allowed physicians to write prescriptions in a way that could be universally understood.
4. Secrecy and Protection: It meant that only those with medical knowledge—typically, other doctors or trained pharmacists—could read and interpret the prescriptions properly.
5. Standardization of Dosage and Treatment: Latin also facilitated the standardization of medical practices across different regions.



Let's look at a simplified late 1800's prescription for a bad cough:



artist representation

Prescription:

Pulv. Doveri (Dover's Powder) – 1 drachm  
(contains powdered opium and ipecac; used as a  
sedative and cough suppressant)

Fluid Extract of Licorice – ½ ounce (soothes  
throat and aids expectoration)

Syrup of Ipecacuanha – 1 ounce (mild  
expectorant in small doses)

Anise Water – add sufficient quantity to make 4  
ounces (used for flavor and to ease digestion)

Mix. Let a mixture be made.

Directions: Take one small spoonful every 3  
hours, if the cough is troublesome.

Note: Do not take more than six times per day.

Do pharmacists and physicians of today need to know Latin?

Absolutely not. However, up to 60% of English words have Latin roots  
and that number goes even higher for medical terms. Today's  
prescription is a call back to Latin terms: Such as

- Your prescription is an "Rx" meaning "recipe" in Latin which instructs  
the pharmacist to take the listed ingredients and prepare the medicine
- It may be ordered "prn" meaning "pro re nata" in Latin which is "as  
needed"
- Most medications are dispensed "po" for "per os" meaning "by mouth"
- Everyone knows what stat is. It is short for the Latin word "statim"  
meaning "immediately"

The earliest Hooks pharmacist took Latin classes and by necessity  
relied upon on it. Today's pharmacist wouldn't recognize the  
language of that time although it is still an important part of  
understanding modern prescriptions and modern medical terms.

We hope to see you at the fair this year.

If you have any ideas for this newsletter, please let us know. If you want a tour or to  
volunteer let us know as well.