
Health, Luxury, or Vice?

— An Objects-Based Exploration of the 1894
Cambridge Drug Store Crisis —

Before you proceed, read the sections entitled “Preface,” “Learning Objectives,” “Lesson Outline,” and “Preparation” in the document that accompanies this slideshow.



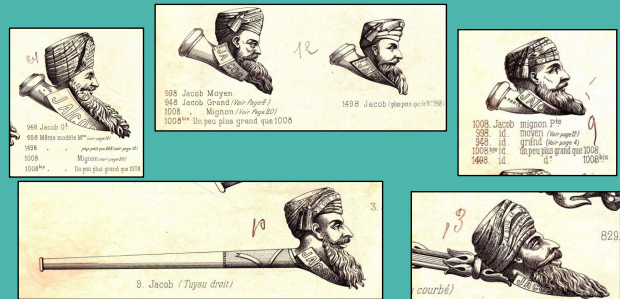
These are three objects from the late nineteenth century that were excavated from Harvard Yard. Take a moment to examine them. What do you think each object is? What features stand out to you?

The Jacob Pipe



The vrow of Mr. Frey of N. Y. once imported some Gambier clay bowls. Some Harvard men happening to buy some of these which colored well, I was immediately importuned for some of the same sort; but scarce a Gambier could I scare up, although I scoured far and wide. So this Frey made quite a *fracas* among French clay customers. No one denied that Gisclons and Fiollets colored; but I couldn't stop fellows' mouths with them. They called out the more Gambier! Gambier! Gambier! Then I threw myself on J. Gambier, and wrote, "Send me ten gross of the most hideous pipes that it ever entered into your heart to conceive of, and let them be of the kind which hurl color." And he did so; and after the *customary* delays, here they are, heads—Jacobs—shoes—&c. If you are at a distance, send a dollar and I will make selections and forward at once.

"J.H. Hubbard's Column," *Harvard Advocate*,
December 20, 1867, 96.



Maison Gambier, *Catalogue 1894 Vve Hasslaue de Champeaux & Quentin successeurs*, 1894, 4, 12, 20, 28, 29.

What do you think this object is? What features stand out to you?

This is a pipe bowl fragment, probably produced by Maison Gambier, a French pipemaker that produced an estimated two billion clay pipes between 1850 and 1926. Their most famous pipe design was the "Jacob," a representation of a Turkish man. Jacob was a hot commodity at Harvard, as shown by advertisements in the *Harvard Advocate*.

The Soda Fountain



THE SODA OF WILEY was most noted by fame; and the present administration, having been engrafted into the establishment under the tuition of that distinguished pharmacist, has reason to believe that its efforts to continue that fame have not been in vain. The syrups are made on the premises from the best refined sugar, flavored with juices of choice fruits, and not with artificial compounds. The carbonic-acid water, in tinned fountains, frequently tested for impurities, especially copper, so common where great care is not used, the whole drawn from

DOWS' ICE-CREAM FOUNTAIN,

gives occasion for the frequent remark, by returning graduates and others, "*You have the best soda in the country.*"

"J.H. Hubbard's Column," *Harvard Advocate*,
July 6, 1867, 144.

Before "dropping into poetry," let us mention that the

GLACIER FOUNTAIN,

with glass syrup-vessels and coolers, produces pure COLD SODA. That Hubbard's soda has for years been the favorite drink of Cambridge. That it is as good as ever, and many are they who drink it.

"J.H. Hubbard's Column," *Harvard Advocate*,
June 21, 1872, 160.

**"WHEN pain and anguish wing the brow
A ministering angel thou"--Bromo-Seltzer.**

Boston Daily Globe, September 9, 1893, 4.

What do you think this object is? What features stand out to you?

This bottle is possibly a small container of Bromo-Seltzer, a popular tonic marketed as a headache remedy and sold in several Harvard Square drug stores in the late nineteenth century. Local druggists like J.H. Hubbard advertised their soda fountains as "the best soda in the country." For this exercise, we'll use the bottle to represent soda and soda fountains.

The Patent Medicine



don't mean that, for they are all *here*. Then fellows that have graduated come out here and say, "How are you, Hubbard, old fellow?" and buy pomades and perfumery and brushes and soaps, and get their medicines, for they can't get them so good anywhere else.

"J.H. Hubbard's Column," *Harvard Advocate*,
November 25, 1867, 80.

Wiley's Glycerine Lotion for chapped hands. "There are more things in a medicine shop, than have entered into your metaphysics."

"J.H. Hubbard's Column," *Harvard Advocate*,
December 20, 1867, 96.

JOHN H. HUBBARD,
APOTHECARY,
468 HARVARD STREET,
Harvard Square.

Will be happy to serve those who are as unfortunate as to require the aid of medicine. He undertakes that his preparations shall be correctly made of pure standard materials and intelligently dispensed by careful assistance. All the

POPULAR PATENT MEDICINES

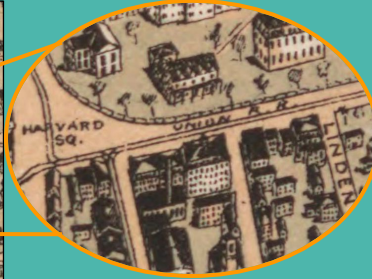
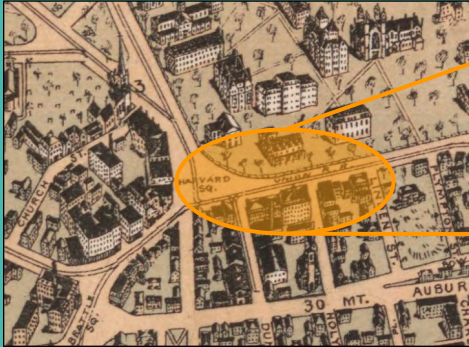
Of the day will be sold as low as any respectable dealer can afford to handle them.
He would recommend his own **EXTRACT OF JAMAICA GINGER** as being what it pretends to be, without foreign admixture.
WILEY'S ORANGE FLOWER GLYCERINE LOTION for chapped hands.
ELIXIR OF CAYA BARK as a tonic.
SOLD at all prices.
PINK B OILS HAIR BRUSHES and TOOTH BRUSHES.

Cambridge Tribune, April 16, 1887, 2.

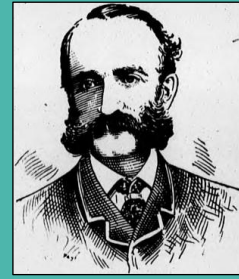
And what do you think this object is? What features stand out to you?

This cobalt blue glass fragment likely belonged to a patent medicine bottle. Patent medicine refers to proprietary drugs that became big business in the unregulated nineteenth century market, promising cures to all sorts of diseases, infirmities, and woes. Many drug stores had backroom laboratories where druggists brewed up custom medicines, and it's possible that the "ILE" on this shard is part of Cambridge druggist A.S. Wiley's name.

The Drug Store Connection



"City of Cambridge, Mass,"
1877, Harvard University Library.



John H. Hubbard,
Cambridge Tribune, May 14, 1887, 9.

These three objects are connected because they represent goods available for purchase from Harvard Square druggists like J.H. Hubbard. Hubbard, who owned a drug store on Massachusetts Avenue facing Harvard Yard, proudly advertised his tobacco pipes, soda fountain, and patent medicines to the public. Is it surprising to you that these three objects were sold in drug stores at the end of the nineteenth century? Why?



Health...



...Luxury...



...or Vice?

In the late nineteenth century, the tobacco pipe, soda fountain, and patent medicine bottle were understood within shifting contexts of health, luxury and vice. In this exercise, you'll have to make the case for classifying them under one of these distinct purposes.

These divergent purposes sparked conflict in July 1894 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

THE SUNDAY LAW.

To His Honor Wm. A. Bancroft, Mayor.

Resolved, that his honor the mayor be respectfully requested to execute all laws which are designed to secure the keeping and sanctity of the christian Sabbath; such as prohibiting the sprinkling of the streets, the sale of tobacco and confectionery by druggists, and any other statutes which aim at practices that are known and acknowledged to be violations of the law.

Alexander Blackburn, "Petition to Mayor Blackburn,"
quoted in *Cambridge Chronicle*, July 7, 1894, 1.

These divergent purposes came to a head in Cambridge in 1894, when a coalition of ministers petitioned Mayor Bancroft to enforce the Sunday laws against drug stores like Hubbard's. Sunday laws had been on the books since 1658, when the Massachusetts Bay Colony declared that no one "shall prophane the Lords day by doing any servill worke." It was actually illegal to make non-necessary sales on Sunday in Massachusetts until 1983. However, there were over 50 exemptions, including the sale of drugs and medicines, and the law wasn't usually enforced in the late nineteenth century. You've all been invited to a panel arranged by Mayor Bancroft to figure out the best way to respond to the ministers' petition.

Panelists

J.H. Hubbard, Druggist



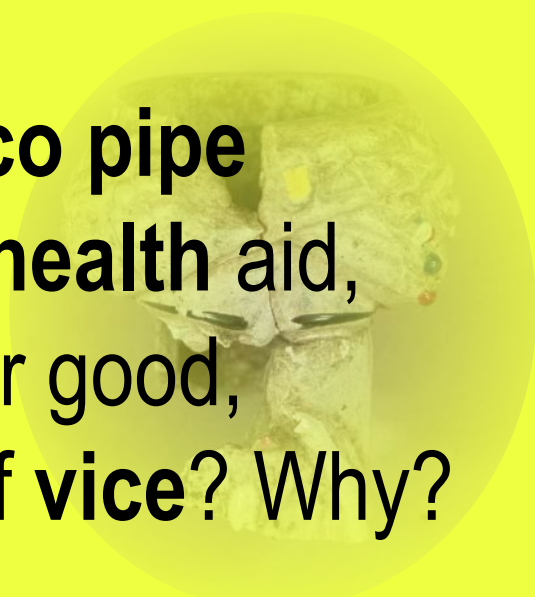
Alexander Blackburn, Reverend

Aleck Quest, Social Critic

THE FAST SET AT HARVARD

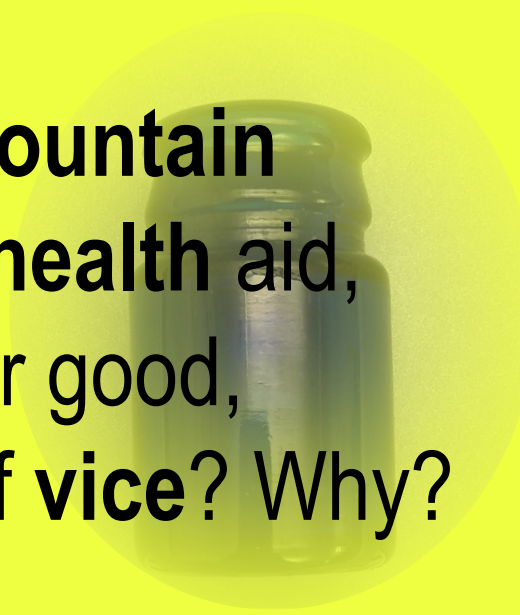
- You are druggist J.H. Hubbard. You view these three objects as legitimate drugs and medicines that should be exempt from the Sunday laws.
- You are Reverend Alexander Blackburn. You view the objects as luxury consumer goods that should not be sold on Sundays.
- You are social critic Aleck Quest. You view the objects as instruments of vice that should not be sold at all.

In your small groups, take a couple of minutes to read your handout and prepare to explain why each object should be classified as drugs and medicines or luxury consumer goods or instruments of vice. Try to refer to the physical objects as much as possible.



Should **the tobacco pipe** be classified as a **health** aid, a **luxury** consumer good, or an instrument of **vice**? Why?

Each group has 30-60 seconds (depending on lesson length) to explain how tobacco pipes should be classified and why.



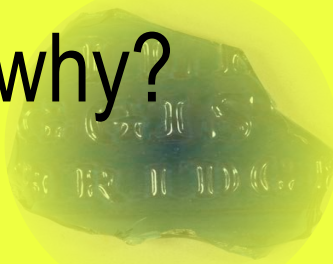
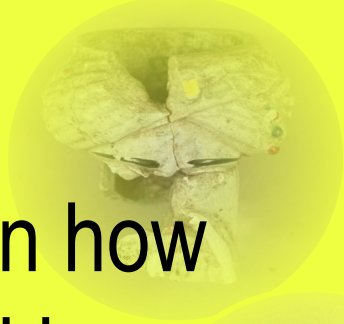
Should **the soda fountain** be classified as a **health aid**, a **luxury** consumer good, or an instrument of **vice**? Why?

Each group has 30-60 seconds (depending on lesson length) to explain how the soda fountain should be classified and why.

Should **the patent medicine** be classified as a **health aid**, a **luxury** consumer good, or an instrument of **vice**? Why?

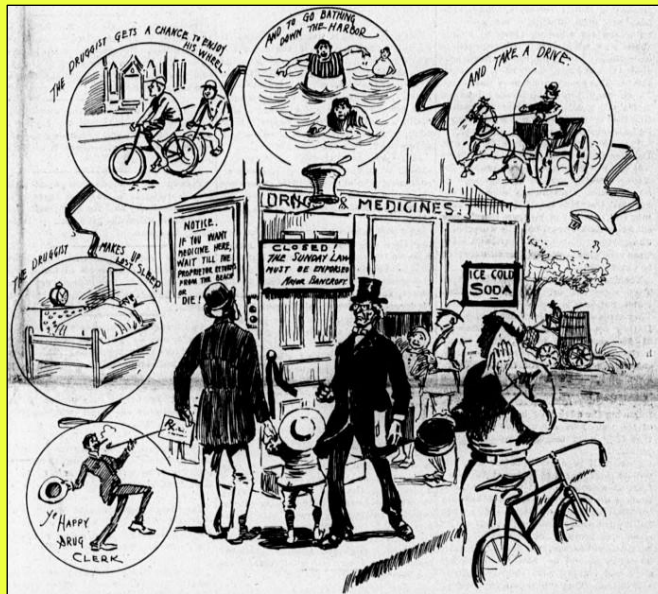
Each group has 30-60 seconds (depending on lesson length) to explain how patent medicine should be classified and why.

Any closing words on how these objects should be classified and why?



Each group has 30-120 seconds (depending on lesson length) to make a closing statement.

“THE CAMBRIDGE IDEA.”



Cambridge Chronicle, July 14, 1894, 1.

In real life, Mayor Bancroft did not convene a panel. Instead, he vaguely instructed the chief of police to enforce the law, effectively modifying the law's implementation not by changing the law, but by changing the definition of drugs and medicines. In response, area druggists formed a Cambridge and Somerville Druggists' Association. Inspired by the labor movement and the ongoing Pullman Strikes, they collectively decided to completely shut down every local drug store on Sunday rather than try to conform to the policy.

LAST SUNDAY'S WINDOW SIGNS.

"The druggists hit out right and left in the signs on their stores last Sunday. Among others the following were displayed:

"This store will not be open on Sunday, till further notice. Buy your Sunday papers at the car station in Bowdoin square. Cigars, soda and candy in Somerville. Per order of the Mayor."

"Closed for all sales whatsoever, by order of the chief of police."

"Wonders will never cease, dear friends,
Even if you have the money;
For our drug stores will be closed today,
Now doesn't that seem funny?
During six days thou shall do thy work;
That's what we hear them say,
And on this seventh—we'll have a rest,
For to us it's a holiday."

"Take notice: No soda cocktail for me today. What shall I do?"

"For the first time in eighteen years this store will be closed all day. At rest."

"Bancroft closed us up. In November we'll close him up."

"Bancroft did not dare to stop the West End road."

"We would gladly furnish our customers with a glass of soda, a cigar, a pill, or a dose of rhubarb, but the law says no. If you will kindly wait until tomorrow, we will try to serve you better than even before. Give us a rest."

"Blue laws. No medicine sold on Sunday. Sick people hold over until Monday."

Cambridge Chronicle, July 14, 1894, 5.

FIZZLED OUT.

"My position in regard to this matter of enforcing the laws relating to the Lord's day has been an entire willingness to enforce the law whatever it might be.

As to what was law, I took the advice of the city solicitor. It was assumed by the druggists, as I understood, that it was my intention to complain of them for selling tobacco as well as soda water and other drinks of like character; but I have always regarded these articles as drugs and medicines.

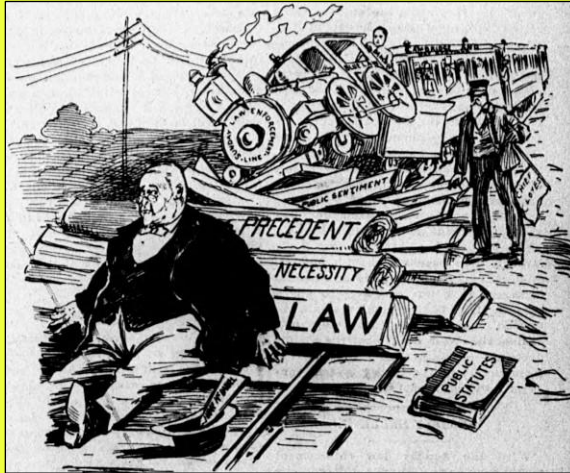
Indeed, in many cases they are used as drugs and medicines. It is for the court to decide what they are.

Intending, however, to act in good faith, I notified the druggists and other people that I should enforce the law, whatever it might be, for it was said that the druggists were selling toilet articles and articles not ordered by the prescription of a physician, and which were not mechanical appliances for the use of physicians and surgeons; that is, articles not excepted by the law of 1887.

Cambridge Chronicle, July 28, 1894, 5.

These closures caused massive inconveniences and sparked public outcry. Storeowners put up signs like "Bancroft closed us up. In November we'll close him up." Mayor Bancroft tried to walk back his actions, explaining that he merely wanted "to enforce the law whatever it might be" and that he "always regarded these articles as drugs and medicines." He hoped the ministers would voice support, but most of them went on vacation as soon the controversy began.

"DITCHED."



A train on the "Sunday Law Enforcement Movement Line" drawn by the engine "Blue Law," Bancroft engineer and Cloyes conductor, runs into an obstruction near District Court station and is "Ditched." An investigation of the accident reveals the fact that the obstruction was caused by Judge Williams, who had thrown a log of law, precedent, necessity, and public sentiment on the track and was found boldly backing them up when the collision came. The train was filled with Cambridge ministers and was running at good speed. The engineer and conductor escaped with only a few scratches. Except a slight shattering of the nerves of a few clergymen on board and the temporary loss of breath of a few druggists and ice cream dealers who were picnicking near by, no one else was hurt.

Cambridge Chronicle, July 28, 1894, 1.

This all backfired gloriously on the ministers, who damaged their public credibility, inspired the druggists to get organized, and lost the political support of Mayor Bancroft. Most significantly, their effort to enforce the Sunday laws had the opposite effect. When a judge refused to hear a case about ice cream delivery on Sundays, he effectively nullified the Sunday laws, making it possible for any object to be interpreted as a necessity.



Health?



Luxury?



Vice?

Even though today you might associate smoking with vice, soda with recreation, and medicine with health, all three of these objects could be interpreted within the context of vice or luxury or health, and they really were used in all three ways. These categories can be arbitrary and have been blurred throughout history, but that's not to say that they don't matter. To the contrary, the 1894 drug store crisis in Cambridge demonstrates how abstract debates over the definitions of words can have real-life consequences.

What do you take away from our debate? Are there any modern parallels to these debates? Do you agree that these categories are arbitrary?