

Bradley Bros Drug

FROM THE HUNTINGTON COUNTY HISTORY AND EDUCATION CENTER

Liggett — and Bradley — had the prescription for pharmacy success

***5th in a series**

This week we continue our series exploring the enterprises on Jefferson Street that Robert Fettinger painted on a 19-by 8-foot mural inside the History and Education Center.

The Gass Ladies Store was the last discernible business on the west side of Jefferson in Fettinger's mural, so we now turn our attention to the east side of the Street, to Bradley Brothers Rexall Drug Store, at Jefferson and Franklin streets, just north of the Courthouse. This area is now a large parking lot, but at one time it was the location of a leading pharmacy in the city — Bradley Brothers Drug Store — which helped establish the Rexall brand here.

Before the turn of the century, and even for some time after, "patent medicines" were the norm. These concoctions were formulated with unknown substances by unknown means and touted to cure everything. Pharmacists had little way of knowing what was in these formulations or whether a particular "medicine" they were selling was helpful, except by feedback from their customers. Against this backdrop, in 1903, Louis K. Liggett persuaded 40 independent druggists to invest \$4,000 each — more than \$100,000 today — to form a retail cooperative called United Drug Stores to compete against these "snake-oil salesmen."

This cooperative would solicit the best formulations from druggists around the country and produce products of known composition, formulated for a specific purpose. Of more than 600 formulations submitted, about 200 were selected by a committee of pharmacists and produced under the Rexall name by the cooperative. All Rexall pharmacists had the ingredients in each product for the first time, so they knew what they were dispensing.

Bradley Brothers was one of the pharmacies that participated in this initial effort and that is how it became a Rexall Drug Store. After World War I, the cooperative established a franchise arrangement whereby other independently owned retail outlets could adopt the Rexall name and sell Rexall products.

In order to promote the name, Louis Liggett created the Rexall Train, which toured 47 of the contiguous United States and parts of Canada from March to November of 1936, covering more than 29,000 miles. A streamlined blue-and-white train of air-conditioned Pullman cars was pulled by a steam Mohawk locomotive from the New York Central Railroad. Four of the cars carried displays, four contained convention facilities for its franchisers, one housed a dining car, and Liggett traveled in an observation car at its rear. The train allowed local Rexall druggists to see displays of Rexall products without the cost of convention travel. Free tickets for locals to see displays of Rexall products were available at all local Rexall drug stores.

Rexall also gained nation exposure through its sponsorship of such famous classic American radio programs as "Amos and Andy," "The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show," "Jimmy Durante Show," and the incomparable, "Great Gildersleeve." Our kids do not know what they missed! Can you imagine them sitting in front of a piece of furniture without a screen for 30 minutes?

By 1958, Rexall had as many stores — nearly 12,000 — as McDonald's has restaurants today. Franchised stores were under attack by large discount chains by the late 1950s and most were gone by 1980, although some continued to use the Rexall name. Dollar General is now the exclusive retailer of Rexall-branded products.

It is against this background that the tale of downtown Huntington's Bradley Brothers Rexall Drug Store will begin to unfold next week.

— Researched and compiled by Dr. John Regan

The Huntington County History and Education Center, 315 Court Street, is closed to visitors from now through the month of January and into early February. Regular business hours — 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and Saturdays by appointment — will resume Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026. Information on the collection, tours, room rental, and how to become a member of the Huntington County Historical Society is available from History and Education Center Executive Director Barbara Rupley at (260) 356-7264 or www.huntingtonhistoricalmuseum.com