

Herbs ^[1]

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by Chester Paul Middlesworth, 2006

Herbs and their use as medicines date back to the earliest recorded history of the region that became North Carolina. Native Americans ^[2], under the direction of tribal medicine men, established many herbs as natural remedies and used "medicinal plants" for a wide range of treatments. Modern tribes of Native Americans in North Carolina continue to use herbal remedies for illnesses, although to a lesser degree.

Early European settlers ^[3] of North America brought herbs with them for medicinal use. They soon found similar and new plants and herbs being used by the local Indians. The marketing of herbs in North Carolina began in colonial times. Druggists, physicians, and medical institutions purchased a variety of herbs from small herb-gathering groups and individuals. As early as 1600, some merchants were buying and selling herbs on a regular basis and druggists were advertising for the specific types needed.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, businesses marketing medicinal roots and herbs were operating in Piedmont ^[4] North Carolina. The Statesville Landmark ^[5] reported in 1888 that "there were only three herbariums in the United States, those of the Wallace Bros. and L. Pinkus in Statesville and that of Park, Davis & Co. in Charlotte." The Wallace brothers began trading in herbs in the early 1850s in South Carolina before moving to Statesville. They opened their firm in Statesville in 1859 and expanded their herb purchasing and selling rapidly. By 1870 the Wallace Brothers Herbarium had grown so large that the brothers established it as a separate branch from their other businesses. They also hired famed botanist Mordecai E. Hyams ^[6] as a researcher and manager. Hyams had worked for the Confederate government ^[7] during the Civil War ^[8], buying roots, bark, and plants from which medicine could be made for the Confederate army.

In 1876 the Wallace herbarium entered a botanical display in the Philadelphia Centennial. It included 300 varieties of the fruits from medicinal plants, 125 varieties of mosses, 200 kinds of wood, 400 boxes of the types of roots purchased annually, and 600 medicinal plants in glass frames with the root and flower of each. The display took the gold medal for first place; two years later, a similar exhibit took first place at the world's fair in Paris.

In 1888 the Wallace brothers purchased the herb business of Park, Davis & Co. (which later became a major pharmaceutical firm) and moved that operation from Charlotte ^[9] to Statesville. The Pinkus firm was a large operation and continued as competition for the Wallaces until after the turn of the century.

The Wallaces continued in the herb business until 1942, helping North Carolina remain a leader in the buying and selling of herbs. The popularity of natural herbs and roots was renewed in the latter part of the twentieth century, when natural food stores were established and many herbal medicines once again came to public attention, even becoming available through major grocery store chains.

References:

Anthony Cavender, *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia* (2003).

Molly Culbertson, *Country Home Book of Herbs* (1994).

Frances P. Porcher, *Resources of the Southern Fields and Forests* (repr., 1970).

Charles Wilson, *Green Treasures: Adventures in the Discovery of Edible Plants* (1974).

Additional Resources:

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Herbarium: <http://www.herbarium.unc.edu/> ^[10]

Subjects:

Food and drink ^[11]

Gilded Age (1876-1900) ^[12]

Great Depression (1929-1941) ^[13]

Medicine ^[14]

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Reconstruction (1865-1876) ^[16]

World War II (1941-1945) ^[17]

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Origin - location:

Iredell County ^[19]

Mecklenburg County ^[20]

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