

# Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil Trade Card

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[c.1875-1940?]



## Title Statement

Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil Trade Card Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil Trade Card, [c.1875-1940?] Ms.2009.064

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## Profile Description

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## Descriptive Summary

### Unit ID

Ms.2009.064

### Unit Date

[c.1875-1940?]

### Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

### Abstract

The Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil trade card is an advertisement for a cure-all serum marketed most popularly during the Victorian era. This particular trade card was distributed by James H. S. Aumann, M.D., a druggist and chemist from Wytheville, Virginia.

### Creator

Aumann, James H. S.

### Extent

0.1 Cubic Feet 1 folder

### Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

# Administrative Information

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## Source of Acquisition

The Dr. Thomas' Ecletric Oil Trade Card was purchased by Special Collections in 2009.

## Processing Information

The processing, arrangement, and description of the Dr. Thomas' Ecletric Oil Trade Card commenced and was completed in April 2009.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], Dr. Thomas' Ecletric Oil Trade Card, Ms2009-064, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

# Historical Note

Dr. Thomas' Ecletric Oil was first produced by Dr. S.N. Thomas of Phelps, New York, in the late 1840s. While the Ecletric Oil was quite popular in the local markets of the time, the popularity of the product significantly increased when Dr. S.N. Thomas sold the formula to Excelsior Botanical Company in the 1880s. Dr. Thomas' Ecletric Oil became both a domestic and international sensation, and advertisements for the "cure-all" medication can easily be located in family health periodicals published in the late 1800s.

This particular trade card was distributed by James H. S. Aumann, M.D., a druggist and chemist in Wytheville, Virginia. While little evidence has been found to attach a specific date to this trade card, Aumann was in law school at the University of Virginia in 1879, placing the card within a loosely based time frame of circa 1875-1940. The image of a woman dressed in Victorian clothing on the front of the trade card, however, suggests that the card was produced and distributed before the end of the Victorian era in 1901.

External Source: Nickell, Joe, "Snake Oil: A Guide for Connoisseurs", *Skeptical Briefs*, Vol. 16.3, Sept. 1, 2006, <https://skepticalinquirer.org/newsletter/snake-oil-a-guide-for-connoisseurs/>, accessed April 10, 2023.

# Scope and Content

While Dr. Thomas' Ecletric Oil was marketed until the 1940s and 1950s, the particular trade card in this collection most likely dates to the late Victorian era. The Victorian era is a period of time that directly corresponds with the reign of the English Queen Victoria (1837-1901). The Victorian era saw the development of socialism, Marxism, Darwinism, and scientific Agnosticism. This period was a time of challenging known "truths." The Victorian era was also a time of snake oil peddlers—a phenomenon that lasted in one form or another through the mid-20th century. These medicines were marketed as a cure to almost any ailment, ranging from coughs and colds to deafness and lameness. While many medicines were snake oil products, some were marketed under a different label, such as "liniment," "tonic," and "compound."

# Keywords

Folk, historical, and patent medicine  
History of Food and Drink  
Local/Regional History and Appalachian South  
Patent medicines

# Existence and Location of Copies

This collection has been digitized and is available online.

## **Rights Statement for Archival Description**

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## **Arrangement**

The collection is arranged by material type.

## **Description of Subordinate Components**

**Trade Card**

**Unit Date** [c.1875-1940?]

**folder** 1