

## **Huckster and Charlatans**

In the 19th and early 20th century, traveling medicine shows became a common part of rural American life. Itinerant hucksters with suspect credentials traveled from town to town pitching their patent medicines and miracle cures. The salesmen often billed themselves as "Doctor" or "Professor." They sold items with names like Mugwump, Kickapoo Indian Sagwa, and Clark Stanley's Snake Oil Liniment.

The shows featured vaudeville-style performances. Between acts, the fast talking salesmen would stand at the back of their wagon to hawk their product, offering outlandish guarantees. Among the promises made were cures for digestive problems, colic, venereal disease, and even cancer. The elixirs were low on medicinal value but high in alcohol content. Some even contained cocaine and opium.

Coppell was not immune to these clever con artists. In a 1989 interview with Wheelice Wilson Jr., Coppell native Mary Evelyn Mobley (born 1911) mentioned that medicine shows were seen in the Coppell of her youth. According to Mobley, the shows were held at the corner of Bethel and South Coppell Roads.

It is unclear if any Coppell residents became faithful customers or what magical elixirs they may have bought. Who knows? Perhaps somewhere in town there sits an old bottle filled with a cure for the common cold, or the gift of eternal youth.

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