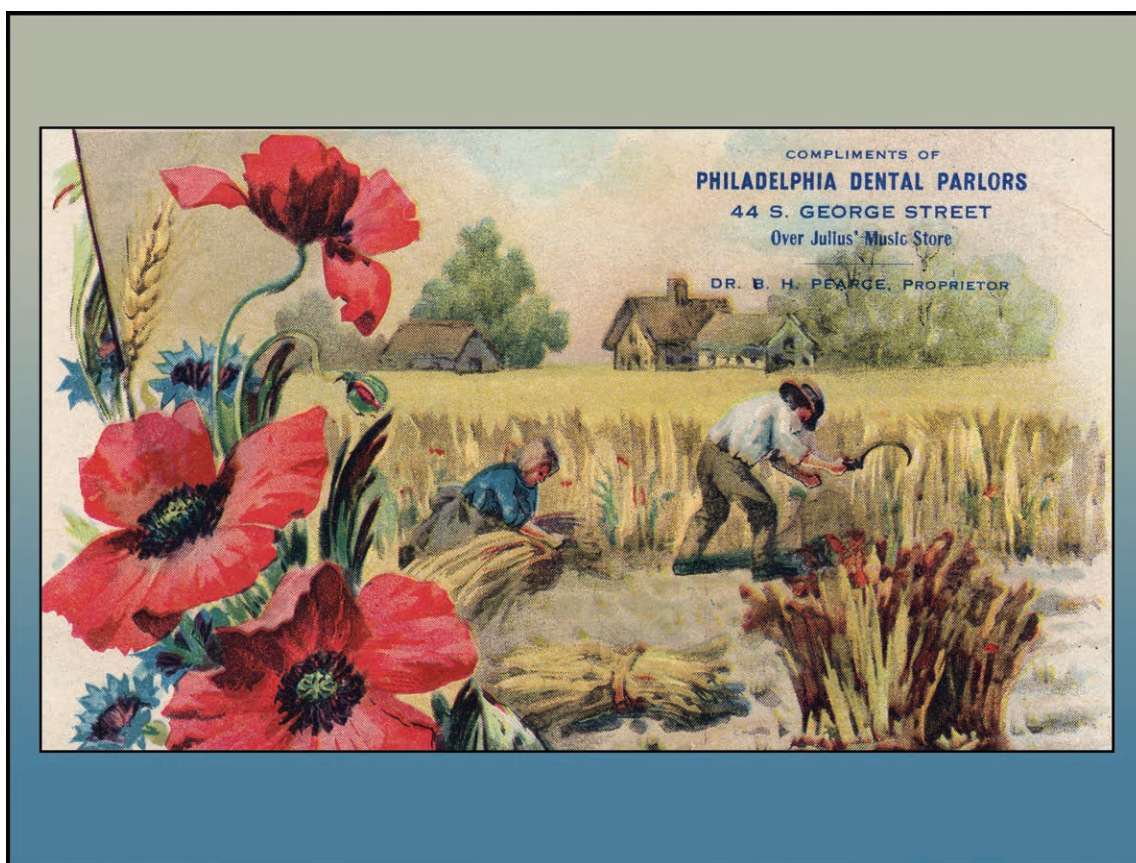


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Flowers on Dr. B. H. Pearce's Trade Card—Were Poppies in His Nitrous Oxide?



Barnum Herbert Pearce (1869 to 1952) learned that his hometown dentist had added a weak elixir of opium poppies to prolong the effects of nitrous oxide. This effort either anticipated or mimicked the early version of “Vegetable Vapor” patented by a Boston dentist. Pearce earned his D.D.S. in 1894 not in his native Ohio, but to the northwest, at the dental department of the University of Michigan. From there he moved east to Pennsylvania, and eventually set up a George Street office in the city of York, as a branch of the “Philadelphia Dental Parlors.” One of Dr. Pearce’s trade cards (*above*) depicts three poppies and a farming couple. Were the poppies pictured: (1) merely decorations on a trade card, (2) a nod to his hometown dentist’s poppy-elixir-laden laughing gas, or (3) an advertisement for Dr. Pearce’s own proprietary administration of nitrous oxide laced with a poppy elixir? A mystery of history.... (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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