

JOHN C. DARROW “The Swamp Root Man”

Lectures given Friday evening, June 2nd, 4 to 9 PM

Exhibit open Friday, June 2nd, 4-9 PM

and continues weekdays 11-5 PM through June 23, 2006

John Darrow, a native Binghamtonian, has had a 30+ year interest in, as he puts it, the “Kilmer Dynasty”. The Kilmer family who was to become one of the most influential families at the turn of the 20th century, started with S. Andral Kilmer, M.D. Born in 1840 in a little town north of Binghamton called Cobleskill, at the age of 18 began studying medicine and became famous for the preparation of his remedies. He was joined in 1878 by his brother, Jonas Kilmer, to run the business end of the proprietary medicine business. Some of his medicines include Dr. Kilmer’s Ocean Weed Heart Remedy, Female Remedy, Indian Cough and Consumption Cure, but the most well know remedy was Dr. Kilmer’s Swamp Root Kidney Liver and Bladder Cure. Swamp root listed many ingredients, but no doubt that which helped the user feel better was the 10½% alcohol. Swamp Root became a household name and made the Kilmer family millions.

The Kilmer family had diverse interests, besides a world renown patent medicine business, they built a Sanitarium and a Cancertorium, a very large manufacturing company producing baling ties and wire fencing, founded The Binghamton Press and also owned a 1918 Kentucky Derby winner named Exterminator. They had stables both in Binghamton and Virginia, which they named Remlik (which is Kilmer spelled backwards). They had a boat club, built the first 9-hole golf course as well as pioneering in forestry and game preservation.

Mr. Darrow will be displaying selected artifacts from his personal collection of the Kilmer family as well as lecture about the golden age of patent medicine. With amusing commentaries and antics Mr. Darrow will attempt to persuade you into believing the wondrous powers of Swamp Root. He’ll take you back 100 years ago when ‘snake oil salesmen’ came to town and put on a medicine show using all their powers of persuasion to convince you of the almost magic powers of their product. It was said that the medicine men competed with the circuses, the minstrel shows, and “wild west” performers to entertain the public—and sell their products. It wasn’t until 1938 when the 1906 Food and Drugs Act actually forced patent medicine makers to stop using the word “Cure” in their name and made them list their ingredients, including the percentage of alcohol, that sale of these products began to decline.

Mr. Darrow was brought up in the antique business and has lectured across the U.S. on the Kilmer family since the 1980’s. Today, he and his wife Danette run a full-time antique business and mostly do shows.



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