



Modern Drugstores: Created by Civil War Soldier Eli Lilly

By Norm Dasinger

Have you ever wondered why you have to see a doctor for a prescription in order to get medicine? You know what you need but you still have to visit a doctor! You can thank, or not, Eli Lilly a Union officer from the Civil War.

Lilly, born in Baltimore, Maryland, grew up mostly in Indiana. He was always interested in chemistry as a boy and became an apprentice in a drugstore in Lafayette, Indiana in 1854. He loved it! By 1861 he was married, had a son, and was the owner of his own drugstore in Greencastle, Indiana.

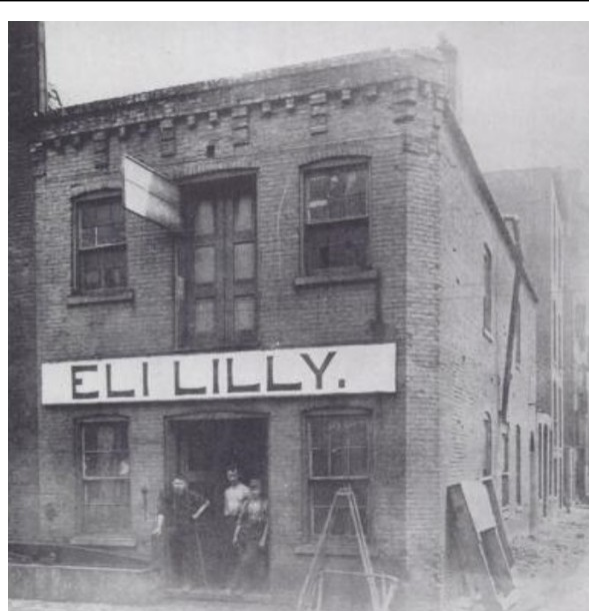
When the Civil War began, he enlisted in the US army and was soon an officer recruiting for the formation of an artillery unit. The 18th Indiana Artillery, known as Lilly's Battery, made their initial baptism into combat in Kentucky and Tennessee in 1862. Soon attached to Wilder's Lightning Mounted Infantry Brigade, Lilly and his men became some of the very best cannoners in the Army of the Tennessee.

By 1864, Eli had decided he needed a change and joined the 9th Indiana Cavalry. Quickly however, he was captured in Alabama, by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Shipped to Mississippi he finished the Civil War as a POW.

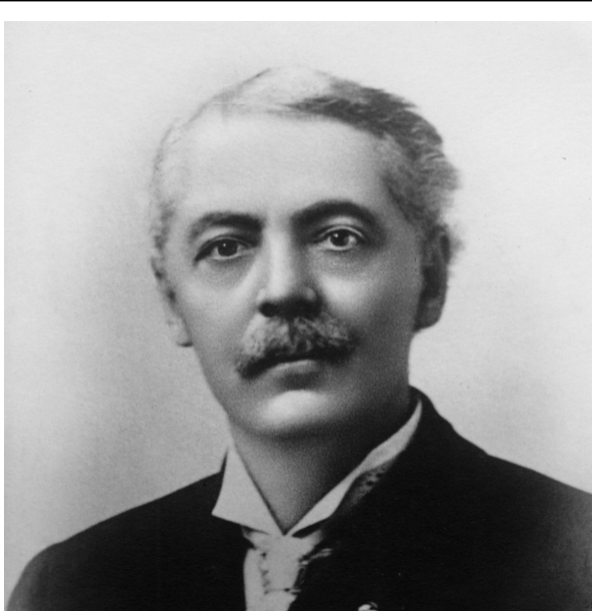


Eli Lilly during the Civil War

He liked the climate and opportunities Mississippi might afford a young entrepreneur, so after the War he relocated to the state to become a farmer. It was a disaster. His wife died of malaria and Lilly was broken both mentally and financially. He returned to his love of chemistry by opening a drugstore in Illinois, but one that was unique. Instead of just mixing chemicals, Lilly wanted to make his own drugs and therefore his own medicine. In other words, he wanted to control everything from the production, to the distribution, to the inventory and he wanted to become nationwide. His first innovation was the gelatin pill. Shortly thereafter, he was requiring a doctor's written authorization before medicine would be given. Eventually, the initial \$1,400 he invested in his new venture grew into a profit of \$48,000, then \$200,000 and then into the massive pharmaceutical powerhouse we know today, Eli Lilly and Company.



Lilly's first laboratory



Eli Lilly in 1894

Lilly was a proud member and financial supporter of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). He also established the United Way.

All drugstores today are patterned after the ideas and concepts developed by Colonel Eli Lilly! It may be strange, but it is important to understand our modern-day connections to the Civil War. Connections that are not so far removed from our daily lives.

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