



## Remarks on the Dedication of a Historical Marker Commemorating the First Licensing of Pharmacists in the United States

*by Glenn Sonnedecker\**

When we walk through this historical old pharmacy—as I have just done for the first time—it evokes a sense of the long history of the pharmaceutical profession, representing one of the services most essential to civilized life everywhere. It evokes a feeling for the tremendous change, in pharmaceutical technology and science, between the time when this Dufilho pharmacy was a living locus of medicinal aid to citizens of this city, and the time when it became a showcase of the past. Much of the pharmacist's hand apparatus has been outmoded. But the pharmacist has not been outmoded; indeed his responsibilities have been magnified, as drugs become more complex and potent, and his need for scientific knowledge has been intensified.

So while we admire the pharmacy-museum that has been reconstituted, on the basis of

a sense of history and cultural heritage for which the people of New Orleans are renowned, it is fitting that we focus today on a pharmacist who practiced here, Louis J. Dufilho, Jr., who symbolizes for us a new departure in America for assuring the exercise of technical competence at a reliably high level of social responsibility. The dimensions of this responsibility continue to evolve, and upon it the place of your pharmacist in society largely depends.

In a democracy we expect this responsible competence, in a service vital to the general health and welfare, to be reliably available in every neighborhood, to all who have legitimate need, whatever their station in life. This asks of the profession of pharmacy a predictable competence in the average practitioner of the neighborhood, however much we admire the deeds and discoveries of a scattering of great pharmacists, whose elite accomplishment transcends their time or place, and belongs to all mankind—pharmacists such as a Carl Scheele, Frederick Sertünér, or Ernest Fourneau.

\*Glenn Sonnedecker served as the Executive Director of the American Institute of the History of Pharmacy from 1957-1973 and 1981-1985. Original typescript of Sonnedecker's remarks at the dedication of the historical marker at New Orleans' La Pharmacie Française de Louis Dufilho is in the AIHP Kremers Reference Files at the University of Wisconsin School of Pharmacy.

## Dedication of Historical Marker

at  
La Pharmacie Française de Louis Dufilho  
514 Chartres Street New Orleans



first marker authorized in a national program by  
THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF THE HISTORY OF PHARMACY  
and placed under the auspices of  
THE HISTORICAL PHARMACY MUSEUM COMMISSION  
OF NEW ORLEANS

October 10, 1963

*Program for the dedication of a historical marker at La Pharmacie Française de Louis Dufilho on 10 October 1963. This was the first site commemorated in AIHP's national historical marker program.*

It is this assurance of reliable competence close to the people, rather than the brilliant innovator, that the name Dufilho represents. The Dufilho family helped bring to America an admirable combination of professional education and ideals that has characterized so much of the pharmaceutical profession of France. This left a mark on our segment of medical care in this region, just as other French influences left cultural marks. Visible reminders of that here still surround us.

The original Pharmacist Dufilho probably arrived in New Orleans about the beginning of the 19th century. His son, Louis Joseph Dufilho, Jr. was born in France, studied pharmacy in Paris at the Collège de Pharmacie, and joined his father here in 1816. It was this L. J. Dufilho, Jr., together with François Grandchamps, also of New Orleans, who that same year became the

earliest pharmacists, of present record, to be licensed in the United States.

Why should we now commemorate that event? After all there were men practicing pharmacy much earlier in many places. The pivotal difference, and forbidding fact, was that therefore a 19th-century business attitude of *caveat emptor* had dominated a segment of medical care where the buyer (or patient) was in no position to judge; and misjudgment might (and occasionally did) have fatal consequences.

After the beginning of licensing here in Louisiana, the system took root elsewhere—in South Carolina, Georgia, then other states. These early laws often were not well enforced, either in pharmacy or medicine, and later were even partly destroyed by state legislatures. Yet an important principle had been established, through which the practice of the pharmacist eventually would be recognized and regulated by all states of the United States of America. They would help assure that every citizen, in a neighborhood humble or elegant, would have his medicinal needs met by practitioners who surpass legally established minimums of technical competence, and who accept social responsibility.

Whether or not there were practitioners licensed specifically as pharmacists before Dufilho, under Louisiana's pioneer statute (1808), may never be known with certainty. We do feel certain that the license that bore the name Dufilho will ever serve to symbolize the kind of pharmaceutical service that the emergence of a licensing system has helped to make commonplace. We are confident that the historical marker we here dedicate, associated with the remarkable and fascinating "La Pharmacie Française de Louis Dufilho" that was restored on this site, will be a convincing and permanent reminder of another significant contribution of Louisiana to the development of America. Here we read in bronze, as will those who henceforth pass this way:

In his shop on this site Louis J. Dufilho practiced pharmacy. As one of the first of his profession to have been licensed in the United States (no later than 1816), Pharmacist Dufilho symbolizes the beginning of a system of certifying the professional competence of the pharmacist, and the recognition of the vital significance of that competence for the public health.