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## Medina Native Influential in Development of Pharmaceutical Industry

Matthew R. Ballard

*Orleans County Department of History*, [matt.ballard@orleanscountyny.gov](mailto:matt.ballard@orleanscountyny.gov)

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## Medina Native Influential in Development of Pharmaceutical Industry



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Perhaps one of the most frequently overlooked stories in Orleans County history is that of Silas Mainville Burroughs and the development of the pharmaceutical company that would become one of the largest in the world. The son of Silas M. Burroughs and Laura Bennett of Medina, Mainville as he was called by friends and family was born on December 24, 1846. At the age of five he suffered the loss of his mother and nearly nine years later his father, a Republican Congressman, died unexpectedly leaving an aunt and uncle to raise the young boy.

After attending local schools in Medina, Burroughs attended the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy where he qualified for graduation in 1877. His thesis focused on the development of compressed tablets as a more effective alternative to the traditional rolled pills; the former dissolved far better in water than the latter. Soon after he entered employment with John Wyeth

as a salesman and travelled to London to sell pharmaceuticals. It was during these trips that he realized the potential for pharmaceutical development in England.

Inviting Henry Wellcome to London, the two partnered to form the business Burroughs Wellcome & Company. A natural born traveler, Burroughs continued to tour the globe in an effort to expand the fledgling business as Wellcome remained in London to manage the manufacturing facility. It was during this time that Burroughs embarked upon a global trip, traveling through the Mediterranean, to India, Southeast Asia, and Australia. During these trips he kept extensive notes about new ideas for developing, packaging, and selling medicines.

Upon the completion of his trip in 1883, he returned to America and married his wife Olive, whom he brought with him to London. It was during this time that his personal writings in both journals and letters indicated a growing frustration with Wellcome. These quarrels developed into legal battles that would have indicated a certain end to the partnership. Meanwhile, Burroughs was beloved by his employees, being one of the first employers in England to implement an eight hour work day while instituting profit sharing options for his employees.

A devout Christian, Burroughs was committed to charitable giving and was often responsible for raising funds for charitable endeavors he found fitting and worthwhile. On one such occasion, he gave 1,000 pounds to start the fundraising campaign to build the Livingstone Hospital at Dartford – the two hospital wards were named in his honor; the Silas Ward and the Burroughs Ward.

In 1894 Burroughs embarked upon a European cycling tour with his sister, but due to over exertion, fatigue, and poor weather, he developed a cough. Expecting to rest and recuperate, the mild cold developed into pneumonia and he died shortly after in Monte Carlo at the age of 49. The sudden and unexpected death sent shockwaves through the business, employees were devastated, and letters of sympathy flooded the Burroughs home. Per his will, his wife received 4/24 of his estate, each child received 3/24, his employees received 1/24, and the remainder was distributed among his favorite charities.

Today the pharmaceutical company that once bore the name of Silas Mainville Burroughs exists as GlaxoSmithKline, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world behind the likes of Pfizer and Merck. Manufacturing numerous brand name drugs such as Advaid, Augmentin, and Nicorette, GlaxoSmithKline applied for approval for the first malaria vaccine in 2014. Without the hard work and funding put forth by Silas Burroughs in the earliest stages of Burroughs Wellcome & Co., the global pharmaceutical industry would be far different today.

Burroughs remains as one of Orleans County's largest and most influential legacies, one that all residents should appreciate.