

Untitled

Edgar R.R. "Painless" Parker was a dentist who wore a top hat and a tooth necklace. He was a P. T. Barnum-like promoter whose gimmicks included pulling 357 teeth in one day, which he strung as a necklace. Below is a very unusual wooden pail filled with teeth pulled by this remarkable showman:

Just like the showmen who traveled early America in wagons, rolling from town to town with their shows, Parker would arrive in town in a horse-drawn wagon proclaiming that he practiced "painless" dentistry. He would give his patients whiskey and who knows what else, while a hired band loudly played popular music of the day. Apparently, the purpose of the music was to drown out the moans of pain while attracting large crowds of sufferers who might decide to go ahead and get that pesky tooth pulled.

You won't be surprised to learn that the dentists of the day were outraged at his antics. The American Dental Association labeled him as "a menace to the dignity of the profession" and swore they were going to put him out of business. Naturally, this just boosted his fame and attention from the media.

To run him out of the dental business, they accused him of fraud because no dentistry could truly be painless and took legal action to force him to drop his claims. This is where most people would give up - but not Parker. Instead, he had his name legally changed to "Painless". thus foiling his fellow dentists.

The Internet encyclopedia has this to say about him:

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"Edgar R.R. "Painless" Parker (1871-1951) was a flamboyant dentist and huckster"

I looked up the definition of huckster and found this:

1. One who sells wares or provisions in the street; a peddler or hawker.
2. One who uses aggressive, showy, and sometimes devious methods to promote or sell a product.
3. Informal. One who writes advertising copy, especially for radio or television

Obviously, #3 isn't appropriate for this clever man, but the first two definitely fit. The result of his marketing skill was a chain of 30 offices and 70 dentists working for him.

So is Painless Parker an admirable character? Maybe or maybe not. But there is no doubt that he was a brilliant marketer and was able to take any situation and turn it to his advantage. I definitely admire his cleverness and creative mind. If I wanted a teacher for Internet branding, I could never do better than him. And neither could you.

And an amusing PS: the bucket of teeth (picture above) is found at the Temple University dental museum. The establishment dentists hated Parker - but the museum was forced to acknowledge him because he graduated from the Philadelphia Dental College, which became Temple's School of Dentistry.

Posted by SydneyJohnston at February 1, 2006 11:37 AM