

# A Bitter Pill To Swallow

King James I of England instituted the first pharmacy guild in the early seventeenth century, which helped to solidify the central role of pharmacists in health care today. Known as apothecaries, their role was to prepare and provide medicines and often give medical advice to their customers and patients. During the early period of Onslow's history it would have been common for country doctors to act as apothecaries, compounding and dispensing medicine when they visited a patient. Prior to 1910 neither the United States Census or the North Carolina Pharmaceutical Association list any pharmacists living in Onslow County. However, by 1910 there were several pharmacists serving in Richlands and Swansboro. Norwood Cox and Paul Ervin both operated stores in Richlands, while the 1910 census listed William Willis as a salesman at a drugstore in Swansboro.



Norwood Cox's drug store, ca. 1910, located in Richlands, served as a place to purchase medicine, but also a gathering place for the community. Behind the small counter at left, Cox interacts with a customer. At right, a clerk works the soda fountain. Residents

would have been able to purchase prescribed medicines as well as over the counter pre-made remedies. Food and drinks as well as news and gossip could also be found in small town drugstores.



Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century pharmacists and their industry became increasingly regulated through licensures, pharmacy schools, and state and local laws. Tests given by the Pharmaceutical Association of North Carolina, organized in 1880, ensured that registered pharmacists were capable of mixing and dispensing prescription drugs. It also maintained a registry of all the pharmacists licensed in North Carolina.

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Jacksonville City Directory, 1967

Johnson Drug Company, one of six pharmacies operating in the city of Jacksonville in 1967, is still open today with locations in Onslow as well as surrounding counties. Opened in the 1933, it is the oldest family owned pharmacy in the county.