



COLLECTORS



ASSOCIATION

Dear Colleagues:

The major news item to report is the plan for the First International Meeting of the Medical Collectors Association which will take place in Frankfurt, Germany on September 1-4. Dr. & Mrs. Erwin Rugendorff have been hard at work putting together a very exciting program. A copy of this program is included with the Newsletter. The preliminary program includes the plans for a Frankfurt city tour, visit to the old Roman castle which houses a medical instrument collection, and a day trip to Heidelberg with a visit to their famous pharmacy museum. The grand finale farewell dinner at the Schloss Hotel Kronberg should also be a great event. The highlight, as usual, will be the scientific program. We already have three speakers lined up for papers and three dealers have expressed early interest in the meeting. In addition, several other dealers including Elizabeth Bennion from England are seriously considering attending. The dealers have agreed to respond to a special members wants list for those individuals attending the meeting.

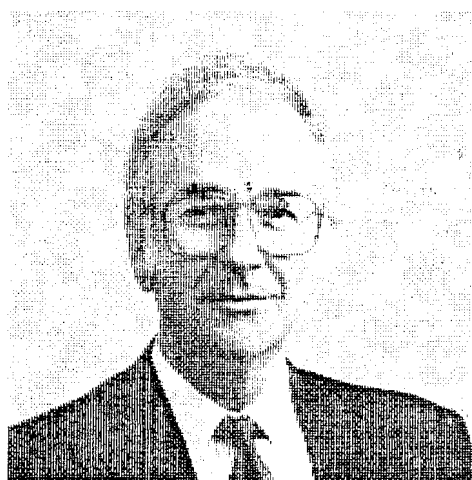
Appended with this Newsletter is a copy of the preliminary program. We are working out the details of the meeting in terms of registration fees and logistics. An early registration form is attached as well. I expect that sometime around October we will make a mailing separate from the Newsletter calling for registrations. Since this is an International event, we hope that people will register early to allow us to plan appropriately for the activity. Included with this Newsletter to begin to orient you are brochures which

describe the city of Frankfurt and also a brochure about the Steigenberger Frankfurter Hof Hotel which is the finest in the city. The meeting itself will be held at the Marriott Hotel. The Marriott Hotel (brochure enclosed) will be the official meeting hotel, but we have also reserved rooms at the Steigenberger for those who are seeking something more luxurious. Please put these dates in your calendar and make plans to attend.

Another exciting development in connection with the meeting is the agreement of the International Congress on the History of Medicine to include our meeting as a satellite. The Congress will be printing the announcement of our meeting in their future mailings. Anyone wishing information on the International Congress or wishing to combine it with our meeting should contact the International Hippocratic Foundation c/o Dr. S.G. Marketos, 20 Patr. Ioakeim Street, 106 75, Athens, Greece. I am working with a travel agent on a group flight - hotel package. These prices will be available around October for the next mailing.

For those of you who did not have an opportunity to attend the last meeting of the Association in Minneapolis, I can report to you on a very successful event. This meeting was somewhat unusual in that in spite of a very large attendance, there were no dealer exhibitions and none of the museum curators attended.

Both of these absences were a disappointment and I certainly hope at the meeting in Frankfurt we will have a good representation from the medical museums curator group. I can say with confidence we will have a good representation from the dealer group. The presentations were superb and generated a great deal of discussion and interest. Our hosts, Al Kuhfeld and the Bakken Museum were exceedingly gracious. The Bakken is a



remarkable museum and everyone enjoyed the opportunity to tour the museum and have a first hand overview from someone who is intimate with its daily workings. Dr. Kuhfeld has been

gracious enough to send me a collection of brochures from the Bakken which I have included with this Newsletter. After the lectures and lunch and the tour of the Bakken, we all journeyed over to the Museum of Questionable Medical Devices and had a charming presentation by Bob McCoy. Bob also has been gracious enough to send us some interesting material from the Museum of Questionable Devices which is included with this Newsletter.

We have the usual columns included and once again we are grateful to Bill Helfand for allowing us to use a reprint from one of his vignettes in the History of Pharmacy. Also, Eric Kane, has been kind enough to send in a photocopy of a patent with a picture of a medical bag described in the patent from his collection. The patents I find are fascinating in giving us a glimpse of medical practice as it was in the early United States, in this case dating back to 1864, as described by the physicians themselves.

We have had a nice response to, "Can You Identify This" column. We received some material from Henry Gloetzner from the Medical Museum in Norwalk. These photos are included in the Newsletter for your review and comment. John Lewin has also included a page for the, "Can You Identify This," section.

In view of the large amount of reading material included with this letter, I have not abstracted any other publications for this Newsletter. Several other announcements are contained with this mailing which should be of interest to you. Roy Scheuer has sent an enclosure describing the development of a Medical Leech Museum in Charleston, South Carolina which will be open in about one year. J.P. Wayenborgh has sent us an announcement of a new volume on the History of Ophthalmology. Other interesting announcements include the description of the Arabia Steamboat Museum and a forthcoming auction by the auction team Koln. There are also a number of other announcements which should be of interest to all of you including a description of the Civil War Museum and the annual meeting for this group.

Sincerely,

M. Donald Blaufox, M.D., Ph.D.

## CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS?

Submitted By: Jon Lewin

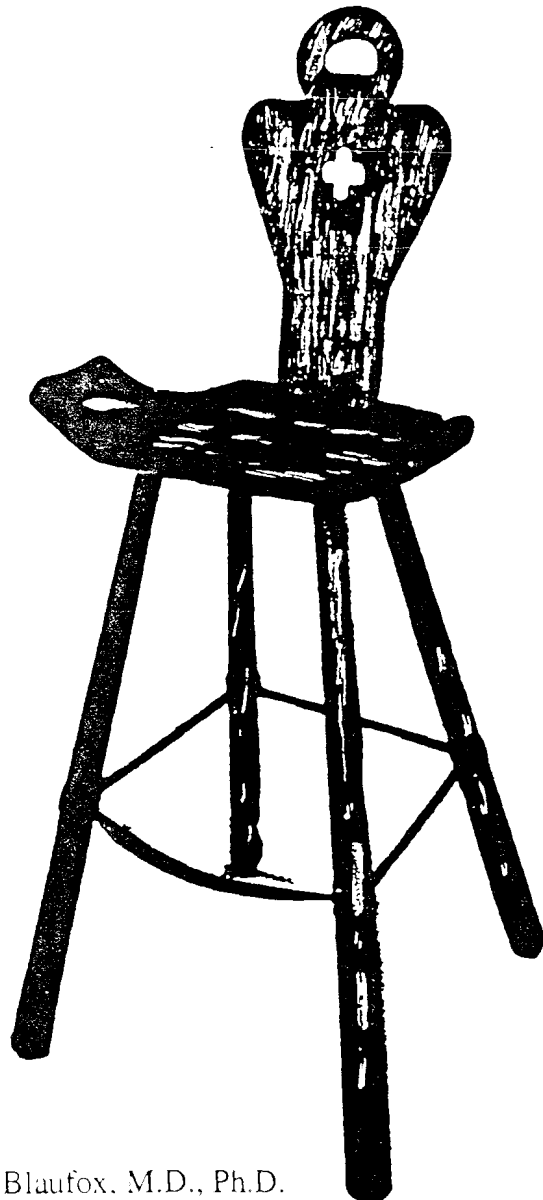
Material: Hardwood, with a hand-forged iron support for the four legs.

Maker: Unknown

Date: Unknown

Presumed Use: "Birthing Chair." The legs unscrew from the seat for easy transport.

I think this is a:



From:

Please Return to M. Donald Blaufox, M.D., Ph.D.

---

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS:

Submitted By: Jon Lewin

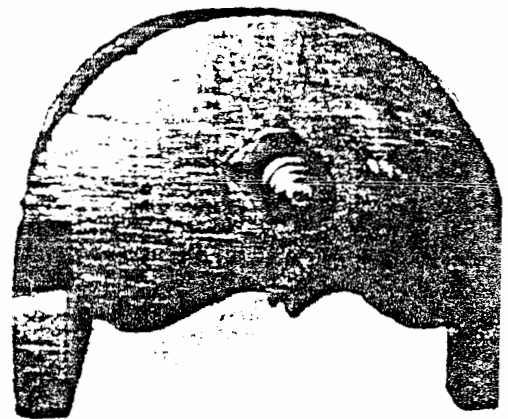
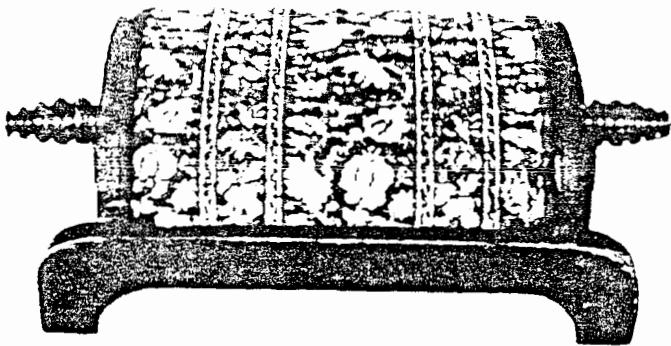
Material: Hardwood and patterned carpet.

Maker: Unknown

Date: Unknown

Presumed Use: Gout stool. Cylindrical shape allowed sufferer to prop foot at preferred angle.

I think this is a:



From:

Please Return to M. Donald Blaufox, M.D., Ph.D.

---

**CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS?**

Submitted By: Henry J. Gloetzner, M.D.

Material:

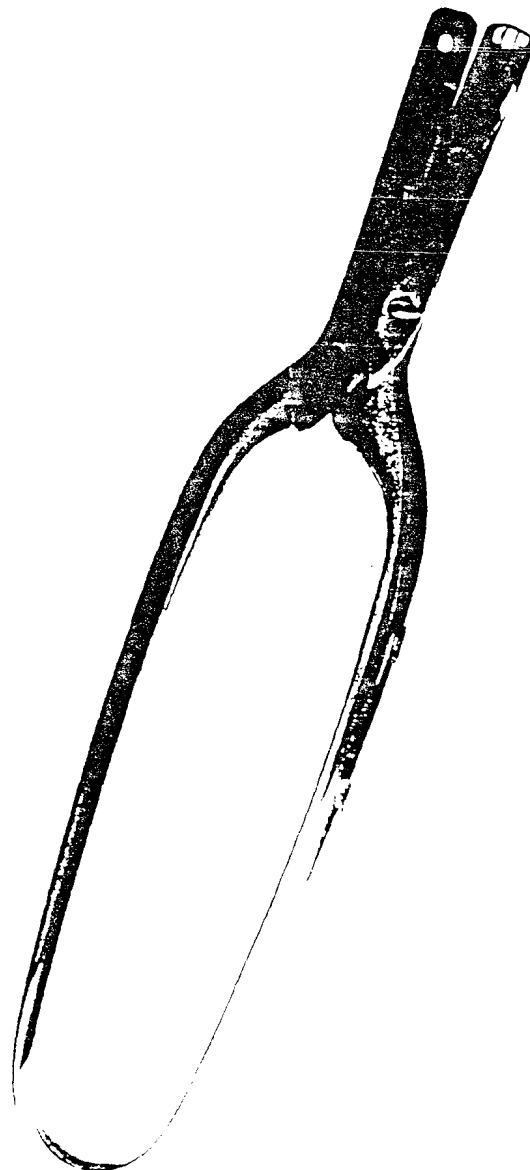
Maker:

Date:

Description:

Presumed Use:

I think this is a:



From:

Please Return to M. Donald Blaufox, M.D., Ph.D.

# CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS?

Submitted By: Henry J. Gloetzner, M.D.

Material:

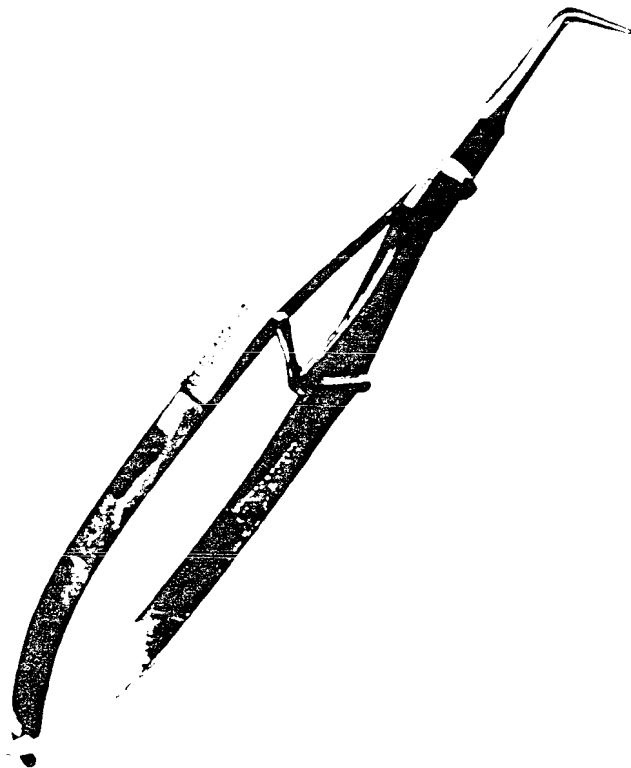
Maker:

Date:

Presumed Use: Unknown

Photo does not show the third blade which is attached to the  
angers mechanism.

I think this is a:



From:

Please Return to M. Donald Blaufox, M.D., Ph.D.

## CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS?

Submitted By: Henry J. Gloetzner, M.D.

Material:

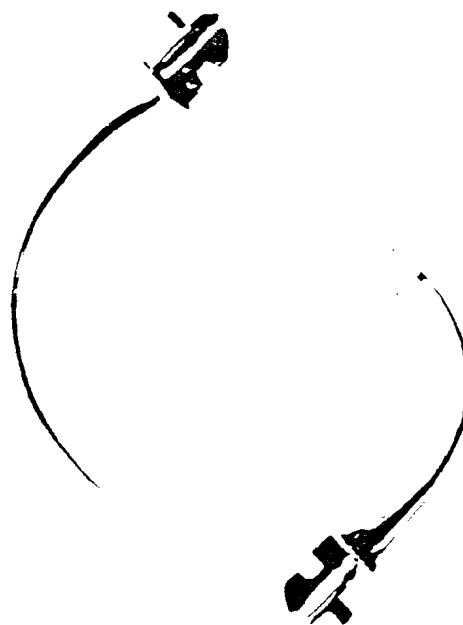
Maker:

Date:

Description: This is an unusual needle holder with specific type needles which lock into the shaft.

Presumed Use:

I think this is a:



From:

From: M. Donald Blaufox, M.D., Ph.D.

# CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS?

Submitted By: Henry J. Gloetzner, M.D.

Material:

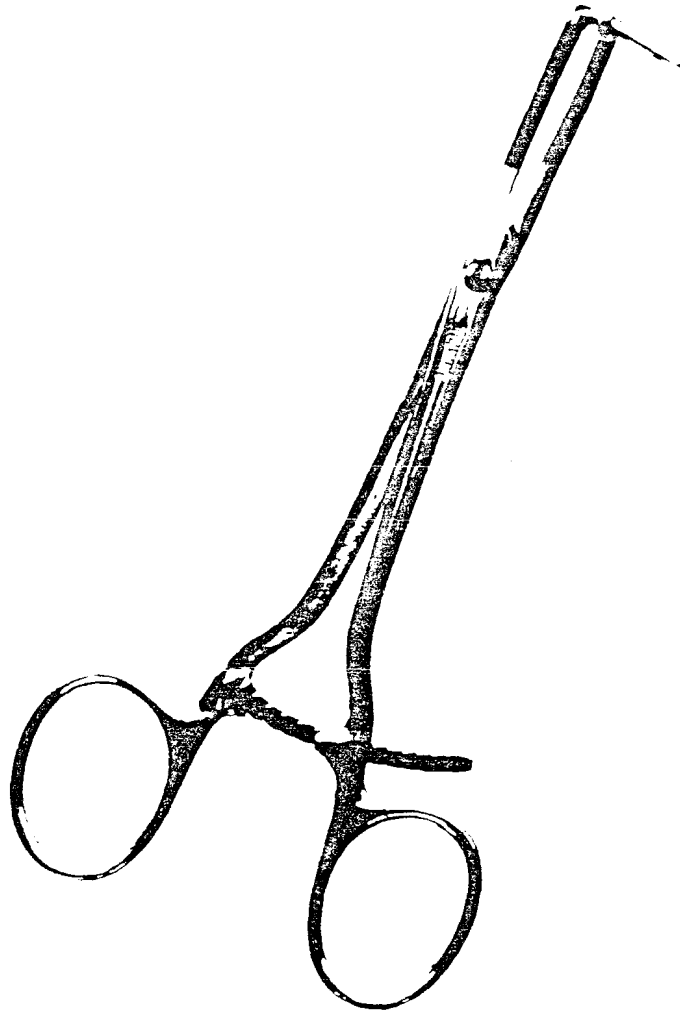
Maker:

Date:

Description: This instrument is a somewhat typical "clamp" except for the distal portion that is flattened and has a sliding bar to control the apposition of the two blades. This is not homemade.

Presumed Use:

I think this is a:



From:

Please Return to M. Donald Blaufox, M.D., Ph.D.

---



## CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS?

Submitted By: Henry J. Gloetzner, M.D.

Material:

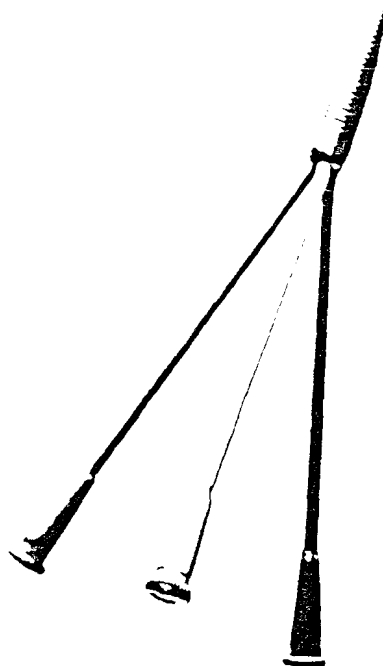
Maker:

Date:

Description: Although this was included in a "package" donated to our medical museum I'm not certain that it is a medical instrument. The "arms" (3) are not hollow; the "caps" screw off and probably are for electrical wires. The distal end is not a screw as all grooves are parallel.

Presumed Use:

I think this is a:





## Historical Images of the Drug Market—XIV

*by William H. Helfand*

PHARMACISTS' prescription volume often has been affected by physician dispensing, and during periods of economic difficulty, the effect has been severe. The reverse side of the coin has been counterprescribing, which has been equally decried by physicians. This activity has also had a distinct impact on proprietary medicine manufacturers, who have fought back by repeatedly advising their clients to "accept no substitutes," "beware of counterfeits," or to observe that there are "none genuine without the 'signature.'" The proprietors of Perry Davis' Pain Killer showed just how one should respond to the pharmacist who would offer

a substitute in this illustration on the back cover of a pamphlet published around 1900 advertising the many uses of its product. The anguished customer's response, in lines below the illustration was quite certain. "No! I did not ask for a bottle any cheaper, or twice as large, or one made by yourselves, that you know all about. I did ask for Perry Davis' Painkiller, and will not have any substitute, for I have used it, my father used it, and I would not be surprised if my grandparents did so, too. There is no imitation that can equal it. Of that I am sure." (*Size of illustration, 3½" × 3½"*).

# UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

R. B. PARKINSON AND J. M. MARIS, OF PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA.

## IMPROVED MEDICINE-CHEST.

Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 45,266, dated November 29, 1864.

*To all whom it may concern:*

Be it known that we, R. B. PARKINSON and JOHN M. MARIS, both of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, have invented an Improved Medicine-Case for Army Use; and we do hereby declare the following to be a full, clear, and exact description of the same, reference being had to the accompanying drawings, and to the letters of reference marked thereon.

Our invention consists, first, in a medicine-case composed of an exterior case of leather or other like material, and an interior box, with spaces between the said box and the case for the reception of bandages, lint, &c., which serve as cushions to render the case more comfortable to carry and to protect the contents from injury; secondly, in certain pouches at the ends of the case for the reception of sponges, which can thus be obtained without disturbing the contents of the case.

In order to enable others to make and use our invention, we will now proceed to describe its construction.

On reference to the accompanying drawings, which form a part of this specification, Figure 1 is a longitudinal section of our improved medicine-case for army use; Fig. 2, a transverse vertical section, and Fig. 3 a sectional plan view.

Similar letters refer to similar parts throughout the several views.

A is a leather case, which is closed at the top by a flap, *a*, the latter being secured by suitable straps and buckles, and at each end of the case is a leather pocket or pouch, B, through openings near the upper edge of each of which passes a cord, *c*. A flap, *d*, is arranged to turn down over each pouch, and is secured in its position by a strap and buckle. On the inside of the flap *a* is a leather strip, *b*, which is secured at three of its edges to the said flap so as to form a pocket. Within the leather case fits an oblong wooden box, C, the sides *e e* of which are somewhat lower than the ends *f f*, the latter being rounded at the top, as shown in the drawings. The interior of the box is separated by partitions into four compartments, D, D', D'', and D''', three of which contain metallic flasks for the reception of medicines. In the compartment D''' is a glass vial or bottle, E, over the top of which is inverted a graduated measuring-glass, F.

Upon the tops of the flasks in the box rests a cylindrical case, G, which is adapted for the reception of plasters. The case is secured to the box C at the ends of the same; but at the sides and bottom of the box the case is so much larger than the latter that there is a space between the two. Pockets or pouches are thus formed for the reception of lint, bandages, or other suitable soft or yielding materials needed by surgeons on the field. The space between the bottom of the box and that of the leather case is filled with hair, which forms a yielding cushion, and in each of the pouches at the end of the case is a sponge. The pocket at the under side of the flap *a* is employed for the reception of lint or bandages, and a towel is placed on top of the flasks and between the latter and the flap. To each end of the case is riveted one end of a belt or strap, H.

The medical cases heretofore constructed for army use have proved objectionable from their weight and from the improper distribution of their contents, which makes them inconveniently bulky. Being composed of hard unyielding materials, they are very uncomfortable to carry, and consequently are frequently thrown aside by the attendant, or purposely dropped, so as to damage the contents, thereby rendering them unserviceable.

The above-described case is light, (weighing but nine and one-half pounds when filled,) and the contents are so disposed that any one of them may be obtained without needlessly disarranging the others, and the soft yielding materials which are interposed between the outside of the box A and the case, as well as the sponges at the ends, form cushions, so that the case is both comfortable to carry and is serviceable as a pillow at night. There is consequently no inducement for the attendant to dispose of it, while if accidentally dropped the shock will be broken by the cushion and damage to the contents be thus prevented. As sponges are most frequently used, it will be seen that they are placed in such a position as to be readily obtained without disturbing the other contents of the case.

We claim as our invention and desire to secure by Letters Patent—

1. A medicine-case composed of the exterior case or cover, A, of leather or other like

material, and the interior box, C, with spaces arranged between the two, substantially as and for the purpose herein set forth.

2. The combination of the said case with the pouches B B at the end of the same, for the purpose specified.

In testimony whereof we have signed our

names to this specification in the presence of two subscribing witnesses.

ROBT. B. PARKINSON.

JOHN M. MARIS.

Witnesses:

CHARLES E. FOSTER,

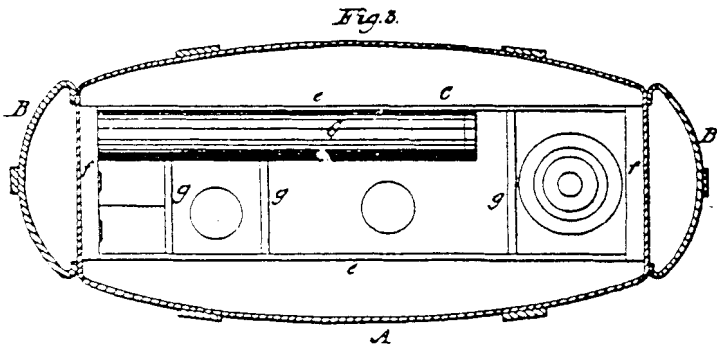
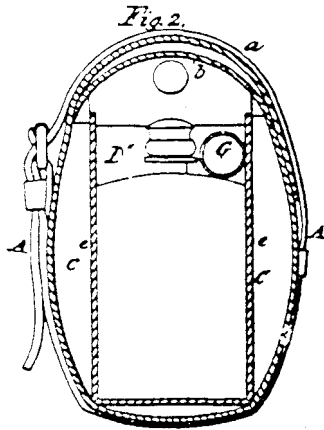
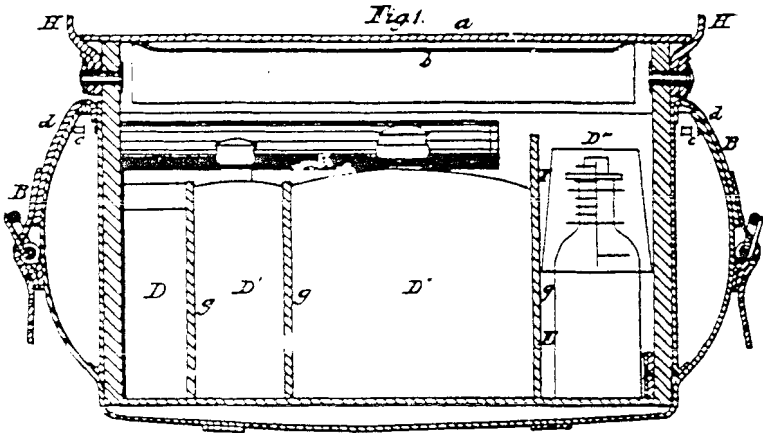
J. EMLIN MARIS.

# Parkinson & Maris,

## Medicine Case,

No. 2,66.

Patented Nov. 29, 1864.



Witnesses:  
Wm. West Hill,  
Charles Howard

Inventor  
Henry Houdon  
Atty for Parkinson & Maris

# Museum stuck on leeches

By ROBERT BEHRE  
Of The Post and Courier staff

Charleston's newest museum will display hundreds of surgical tools, but its founder knows the main attraction will wiggle.

"From the public's point of view, it will be an opportunity to observe live leeches," said Roy Sawyer, president of Biopharm, which sells laboratory-grown leeches to hospitals across the world.

During his years researching the medical history of these parasites, Sawyer has amassed an extensive collection of medical artifacts, including paintings, lancets, bowls, bleeding cups, ceramic leech jars, barber poles and leech tubes that doctors would use to carry leeches on house calls.

Some are more than 1,000 years old. Sawyer even has a set of Etruscan toga pins shaped like a leech that date back to the 9th Century B.C.

"We've got a larger collection of bloodletting and leeching antiques than the Smithsonian," he said.

His next step is to find a suitable place to display them. Sawyer is poised to buy the historic Greek Revival single house at 329 East Bay St. in downtown Charleston, and the city of Charleston is expected to sell Sawyer the small office building behind it for \$55,000.

The museum's entrance will be through the office building at 28½ Alexander St.

As soon as those deals are finished, Sawyer will get started. "The bulk of the collection is sitting at the London airport waiting to be

shipped over here." It is expected to open to the public early next year.

Visitors also will be able to see dozens of species of leeches, including the Amazon leech, which can grow up to 18 inches long.

"In certain cases, we would let people hold a leech. Of the 650 species, there is one that doesn't bite," Sawyer said. "But our museum is more than a leech museum. It's a surgical history museum, and surgery meant bleeding. "This was the primary medical treatment for hundreds of years, if not thousands."



Staff Photo by Wade Spees

The photo above shows 329 East Bay St., the possible site of Charleston's newest museum — this one dedicated to a collection of surgical tools and live leeches.

Many items in the collection shows that the roots of today's hospital bowls and barber poles extend back for centuries.

For instance, Sawyer marvels at how an 11th-century barber bowl is very much similar to today's hospital sputum bowls. "There's nothing

new under the sun, and nothing totally dies. People don't appreciate that there is this connection to the past."

The origin of modern barber poles can be found in signs that old fashion barbers, who also acted as surgeons, used to identify themselves to illiterate customers. The pole design evolved from bloody bandages wrapped around a white pole.

"People recognize the barber pole but don't have any idea where it came from," he said.

Other items, such as a 1720 Japanese barber bowl and an 1850 French Masonic barber bowl, have elegant patterns and beautiful craftsmanship that has survived more than 200 years.

"Most people don't consider medical antiques as being artistic, but some are," he said.

Sawyer said the museum likely will be private, but he is not opening it solely as a money-maker.

"It's for public relations and the education of the medical professional." The museum's opening may not cause leech sales to rise, but Sawyer figured, "It's got to be good for us."

Biopharm currently has about 18 employees, all but two of whom work in Europe. After the museum opens, Sawyer said he plans to gradually move the company over here.

Sawyer hopes not only to play up the historical value of his exhibits, but of the property itself. The house at 329 East Bay is known as "The Gadsden House" because Philip Gadsden — son of Revolutionary War hero Christopher Gadsden — first lived there.

However, Sawyer said he also

hopes to find out more about another former resident, Dr. B.B. Simmons moved in after Gadsden, and he was recognized as "the leading surgeon of the South," according to Joseph I. Waring's book, "A Medical History of South Carolina 1670-1825."

"He undoubtedly bled people. He was not only a doctor, but a surgeon," Sawyer said.

And the house also stands several blocks north of a similar business.

An advertisement in the May 27, 1828 edition of "The Charleston Courier" said a merchant at 173 East Bay St. was selling leeches.

"Leeches were sold widely in Charleston before," he said. "What we're doing is not new. It's an old, established practice."

# MUSEUM OF THE STEAMBOAT ARABIA

June 19, 1995

M. Donald Blaufox, M.D., Ph.D.  
Medical Collectors Association  
1300 Morris Park Ave.  
Bronx, NY 10461

Dear Mr. Blaufox:

Six years ago, a treasure hunting adventure of five Kansas City area families resulted in one of the most significant collections in the country--the excavation of the Steamboat *Arabia*, a side-wheeler that sank in the Missouri River in 1856 as it journeyed to the frontier carrying 200 tons of supplies.


Three years after the excavation of the steamer's cargo, the doors to the *Arabia* Steamboat Museum were opened. The exhibit showcases the tons of precious artifacts removed from this sunken "time capsule," and provides insight into the nostalgic past of the steamboat era and its role in opening up the western frontier. The collection is the largest pre-Civil War collection in the country.

Among the many items found in the sunken boat were medicine bottles and other medicine items. Most of the bottles retained the original contents. Some of the medicines include Mexican Mustang Linament, Dr. J. Hostetter's Stomach Bitters, Nerve and Bone Linament, and Maguire's Elixir. Some small tin pill boxes still have pills inside. We also have lice combs and lancets.

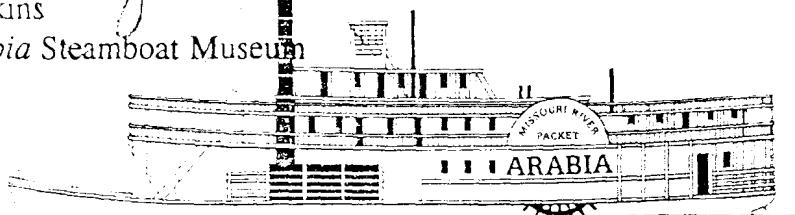
I believe your readers would be interested in the story of the excavation and the museum. I have enclosed some information of the *Arabia* Steamboat Museum that I hope you will find interesting.

Please call me at (816) 471-1856 if you need additional information or would like to talk to one of the excavators.

Sincerely,



Lynn M. Jenkins  
Curator, *Arabia* Steamboat Museum



## Time Capsule of 1856 Frontier Cargo

On August 3, 1856, during the Golden Age of steamboating, the *Great White Arabia* was loaded in St. Louis with 220 tons of cargo for what would be her last voyage. The packet side-wheeler traveled with supplies for general stores in towns along the Missouri River. The *Arabia's* precious cargo, however, would not be unloaded for 132 years. On September 5, about six miles north of Kansas City, she rammed into a submerged tree snag and immediately sank. The passengers and crew survived the wreck; only a frightened mule perished.

Overnight the river bottom of the "Mighty MO" swallowed up the *Arabia* and her cargo. Although out of sight, the *Arabia* was not forgotten by people who had heard rumors about her large stock of whiskey and gold. Over the years, determined treasure hunters attempted excavations to no avail.

Tides would turn, however, when the *Arabia's* legend reached the ears of five adventuresome families in the Kansas City area. Using 19th-century newspaper accounts, strong metal detectors called magnetometers, and their own funding, the families found and uncovered the steamboat in the winter of 1988. Instead of finding the legendary barrels of whiskey and gold, they found an entire time capsule of 1856 frontier cargo. New pre-Civil War merchandise, the largest collection of its kind, was uncovered in remarkable condition. The artifacts, now displayed at the *Arabia* Steamboat Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, tell a rich story about frontier life.

The excavation crew found hundreds of thousands of items on the boat's main deck and in the hull. Cargo including bottles of medicine, wagon wheels, and wood-working tools were necessary items to continue westward expansion. The *Arabia* also carried important stock to build settlements, such as shovels, axes, picks, square-headed nails, lumber, glass panes, and even two prefabricated houses.

The steamer also carried household and personal supplies to the frontier which included clothing, razors, hair pins, brushes and combs, bolts of material and skeins of yarn, sewing pins and needles, lamps, and pots and pans. For children, the boat carried tiny shoes, school slates and other school supplies such as pencils, brass pens, ink wells, and grammar books. For their parents, the boat carried Wedgwood dishware, brooches and earrings, books, silks, and French perfume. The beauty of these artifacts suggests that life on America's rugged frontier was sometimes quite elegant.

Passengers' belongings help illustrate the distinct class differences of the travelers. One passenger was bringing only a tin plate and cup to the West, while another one was bringing a complete set of fancy gold-rim china and cut-glass goblets.

The *Arabia's* contents were preserved so well because of the environmental conditions 45 feet underground. Deep in the earth there is no light, oxygen, or temperature change. These conditions were so optimum that the champagne is still bubbly, the perfume is still exquisite, the butter is still creamy, the cherries are still red, and the pickles are still green.

In addition to cargo, parts of the steamboat, including the stern, were also recovered and are displayed at the museum. Large wooden structures receive nightly treatments to preserve the water-logged wood. Smaller wooden and leather artifacts are also treated then freeze-dried in the museum's laboratory.

The artifacts recovered from the *Arabia* represent a precise moment suspended in time. This collection of American history details the western expansion movement and offers numerous possibilities for rediscovering our past.

The *Arabia* Steamboat Museum is located in the historic River Market area in downtown Kansas City, Missouri. It is open every day of the year except for New Year's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Call (816) 471-4030 for information.



# No device yet to kill quack remedies

## Medical shams survive test of time

By MARTHA PURDY  
Pantagraph staff

In 1919, a Peoria firm was manufacturing a device to relieve pain and strengthen the heart which it called the Electreat.

In 1938, it became the first device the government seized as a sham.

The instrument looked somewhat like an aluminum flashlight handle topped with a horizontal grater-like roller. When rolled across the body, it gave an electric shock that was said to strengthen the heart.

It was one of a variety of devices Bob McCoy discussed for the McLean County Medical Society's meeting and installation of officers at Lakeside Country Club last night.

McCoy, curator of the Museum of Questionable Medical Devices in Minneapolis, said quackery has flourished since before Albert Abrams used a radionics machine to analyze blood samples in 1920.

### Grandfather of quackery

Abrams, whom McCoy dubbed the grandfather of quackery in the United States, put blood samples submitted by unsuspecting patients into a machine he said used radio waves to get a vibration rate that told him what malady the person suffered.

Abrams' patients appear to have suffered a deplorable rate of syphilis, for which Abrams had the \$300 cure.

Radio waves were common components of "cures" in the 1920s and '30s, McCoy said, because they were new.

Dr. Crum's coetherator, for example, promised to regrow amputated fingers and toes with radio waves.

People who didn't happen to be missing any digits were not excluded, however, because the device also would kill insects within a 70-mile radius if a photo of the infested field was smeared with insecticide and inserted into the machine.

Psychology was made simple 70 years ago, when phrenology machines measured people's heads and printed out tapes analyzing their character, all in about 30 seconds.

Phrenology, which held that personality traits could be identified through bumps on the skull, was based on such hard evidence as the fact that Mozart was pictured composing music while leaning his head on a hand with one finger curled near his temple.

Collier's released the first media expose of quack remedies in 1905, writing that patent medicines contained opiates, alcohol and cocaine and were not the cure-all their promoters claimed.

The battle continues.

"People are still dying because they are relying upon false hopes," McCoy said. "The more preposterous the claim, sometimes, the more believable it is."

In 1989, McCoy found an advertisement for a duplicate of Dr. Crum's insecticide machine in a catalog put out by Lord Industries.

Something had happened in the interim, however, because the new device worked only in a 50-mile radius.

Other frauds, old and new, that McCoy discussed were:

- The Ruth Drown radio therapy machine, which analyzed saliva and then emitted healing rays. Ms. Drown claimed to be a chiropractor in Los Angeles, and found 35,000 people to subscribe to a three-year service in the 1960s.

- An eye exerciser, a 1930s device that promised to allow the user to discard eyeglasses after a regimen of eye massages. Because the regimen also required users to sunbathe in the nude each day at either 11 a.m. or 2 p.m., sleep outdoors in the moonlight and walk like a bear to relieve the abdominal pressure that caused poor eyesight, it was less popular in winter months.

- A duplicate, called the aerobic eye exerciser, was being marketed last year.

- The Spectro-Chrome, a device invented by Dinshah Gadiali that purported to break down the curative rays of the sun.

Users were required to sit in front of the machine in the nude facing north during certain moon phases, for which Dinshah provided a monthly calendar.



The Pantagraph/MARC FEATHERLY

Bob McCoy, curator of the Museum of Questionable Medical Devices in Minneapolis, demonstrated the phrenology machine. The device purported to analyze the patient's character by measuring his or her head. A diagnosis came out of the machine on paper tape in about 30 seconds.

He sold 10,000. During his trial, he called 65 witnesses in his defense. One, a man who claimed to have been cured of epilepsy, had a seizure on the stand and required the attentions of the doctors in the audience.

- Acu-Dots, which were magnetized Band-Aids. Said to magnetize the iron in the blood, the bandages were touted as effective in healing rheumatism. They were sold in 1983.

- Royal Rife machines, which are said to send out rays that will destroy cancer viruses and the AIDS virus.

AIDS has caused a proliferation of scams, McCoy said, adding that the Royal Rife machine is said to have been suppressed

for 50 years because its maker refused to sell one to the then-president of the American Medical Association.

Rife was the chauffeur for Mrs. Timkin of the Timkin Bearing family.

- Gaylord Wilshire's magnetic belt sold for \$58 cash or \$63 credit in 1920 in Southern California. Said to increase health and beauty by magnetizing blood and allowing it to absorb more oxygen, the device made its manufacturer extremely wealthy.

Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles is named after him.

- The Toftness device, a radiation detector made of common PVC pipe that sold to chiropractors for \$2,400 in 1988.

Located Downriver in St. Anthony Main behind Tuggs Bar

Try the radionics machine — or that radithor

## Fake medical cures, devices find a cozy home in museum

**M**INNEAPOLIS, Minn. — You can go to an art museum if you want to gaze at paintings. To a natural history museum if dinosaur bones turn you on. To a science museum to learn how electricity works.

But where can you see a genuine Foot-Operated Breast Enlarger Pump? Or an authentic Omnipotent Oscilloclast, which diagnoses and cures illness by using vibrations? Or a full-scale MacGregor Rejuvenator, guaranteed to reverse the aging process for anyone who climbs inside?

One place — the Museum of Questionable Medical Devices.

And while you're there, you can marvel at the suckers who put their faith in such wonders.

Known affectionately as the Quackery Hall of Fame, the two-room museum in a quaint old area of this city harbors more miracle-cure machines, drugs, devices and gadgets than a person could hope to soak up in a single visit.

Founder and curator Robert McCoy will happily help you try. An engaging man who's a ringer for W.C. Fields, McCoy will talk your ear off about each exhibit, then wait for your requisite chuckles or moans.

Most of the collection — the world's largest of quack medical devices — is on loan from the American Medical Association, the US Food & Drug Administration, the St. Louis Science Center, Bakken Library, National Council Against Health Fraud and the Phrenology Co.

Many were seized from physicians — real or bogus — by the Federal Drug Administration, which started regulating drugs in 1906 and medical devices in 1938.

You could start your visit on a light note by having your head "read." For \$2, McCoy or an assistant will place a wire contraption on your head and, with a series of clicks, measure the "bumps" of your skull. The end result: a readout describing your personality under some two dozen mental faculties, including benevolence,

humor and "sexamity."

"It works mechanically," McCoy said of the phrenology machine, circa 1905. "It just takes a little leap of faith to accept the principle."

From there you can check out whatever catches your eye. Be sure to take time to read the placards displayed with each artifact. In most cases, you can't begin to tell by looking what their intended healing purpose was.

Consider the radionics machine (1921). This boxlike device used tiny colored lights to diagnose illness (if they flickered, you tested positive). An imitation of the machine even claimed to kill insects in a farm field within a 70-mile radius.

Then there's the shoe-fitting X-ray unit. This was a common shoe store sales promotion device in the late '40s and early '50s. Customers could slip their feet into a pair of holes at the bottom

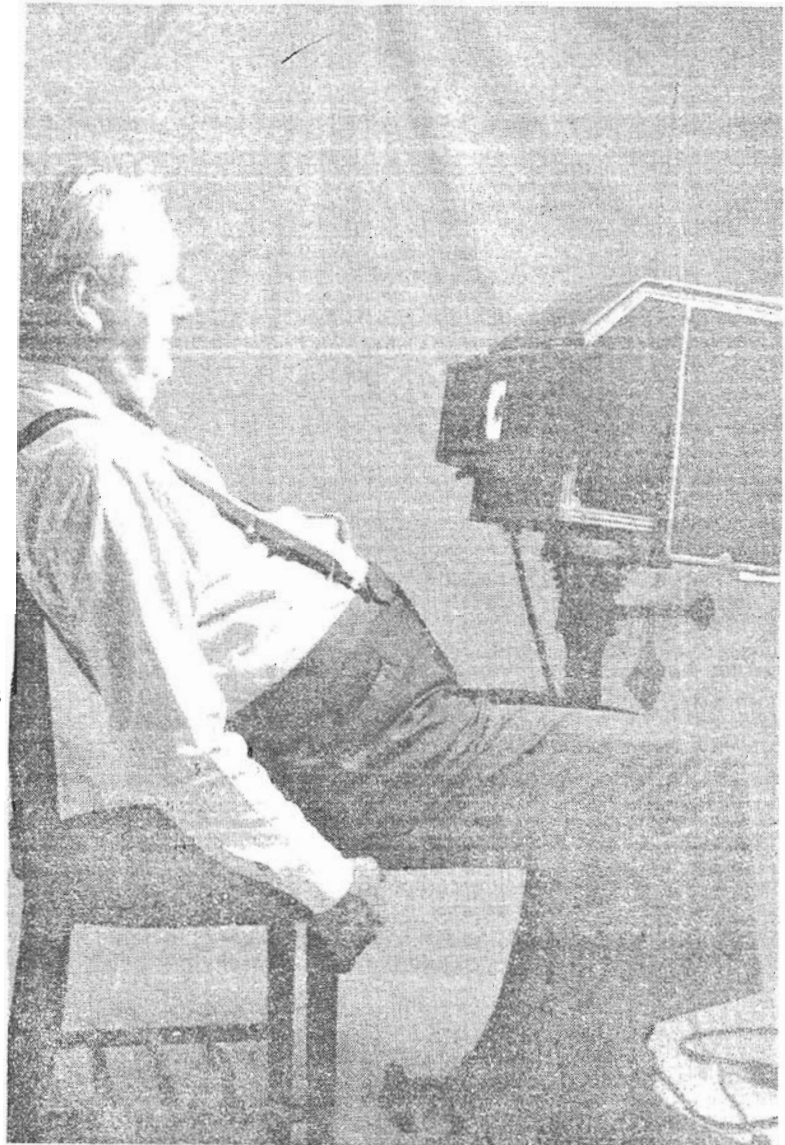
The problem: rampant radiation leakage. By 1970 the machine was outlawed or effectively banned in all 50 states. Yet the model in McCoy's museum wasn't removed from a shoe store until 1981. That particular model was one of 10,000 manufactured by a now-defunct Milwaukee company.

It is not the only machine in McCoy's notorious collection with a Milwaukee tie. The Specto-Chrome (circa 1920) used colored lights to "cure" diseases as serious as cancer. The patient sat in front of the machine naked, facing north under certain moon phases, while the light — red for heart problems, purple for cancer, green for intestinal disorders, amber for psychological problems — bathed him. Inside was nothing more therapeutic than a 1,000-watt light bulb. The device sold for \$150.

The Milwaukee company serving as national distributor thought why should someone else get all the profits? It came up with its own, cheaper version (\$125), downscaled with a 500-watt light bulb.



**THE PHRENOLOGY** machine, shown here by Robert McCoy, "reads" your skull.



**ROBERT MCCOY** slouches in front of the Specto-Chrome, which used colored lights to "cure" diseases as serious as cancer.

of the machine and look inside through a viewing device at the top of the bones of their feet

*The Museum of Questionable Medical Devices is at 219 S.E. Main St. in a shopping-entertainment district called Riverplace, across the Mississippi River from downtown Minneapolis. It is open from 5 to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, from 5 to 10 p.m. Friday, from 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free.*

A number of devices in McCoy's collection did their work long distance. The Omnipotent Oscilloclast (1920s), for example, diagnosed illness from the "vibration rate" given off by samples of blood, urine or saliva — even a signature — sent in by patients. That vibration rate then was multiplied millions of times and focused by radio tubes on a vial of distilled water. The water was sent to the patient to drink as a cure.

The radio therapy machine of the same decade practiced an even more remote form of treatment. Placing a blood sample on a plate in the machine, the doctor tuned in her device to broadcast healing rays to the patient, wherever he or she was at home.

Not all of McCoy's artifacts are large, or electrical. Among the smaller (but no less devious) healing aids you'll find:

**THE POLIZER (1957):** A glass tube containing mercury, this was alleged to "pol-ize" the oxygen in drinking water, producing "remarkable results" in treating arthritis, diabetes, constipation and many other diseases. It also claimed to make bad wine taste good.

**PROSTATE GLAND WARMER (1918):** This device claimed to furnish constant heat to the rectal area. In the process, it was said to excite the so-called "abdominal brain" to relieve disease and — if used long enough — restore the user's sex drive. (Many of McCoy's mail-order artifacts addressed sexual problems in an era when people were too shy to discuss them with a physician.)

**ULTRAVIOLET RAY DEVICE:** A hand-held device with attachments that employed ultraviolet rays for a myriad of uses. A rake-like attachment, for example, made it a miracle comb claiming to cause hair to grow on bald heads.

Bogus drug cures make up another dimension of McCoy's collection. Among them: Diet pills that contained tapeworm eggs. Sure, you'd lose weight, but at what a price! Also: a substance called radi-thor, which claimed to improve one's romantic life (among other things).

If you think you have a suitable object in your attic, or spot one

cheap at a flea market, it might pay to give McCoy a call at (612) 545-1113 or at the museum at (612) 379-4046. In fact, this whole project of his began with the gift of two phrenology machines in the '70s.

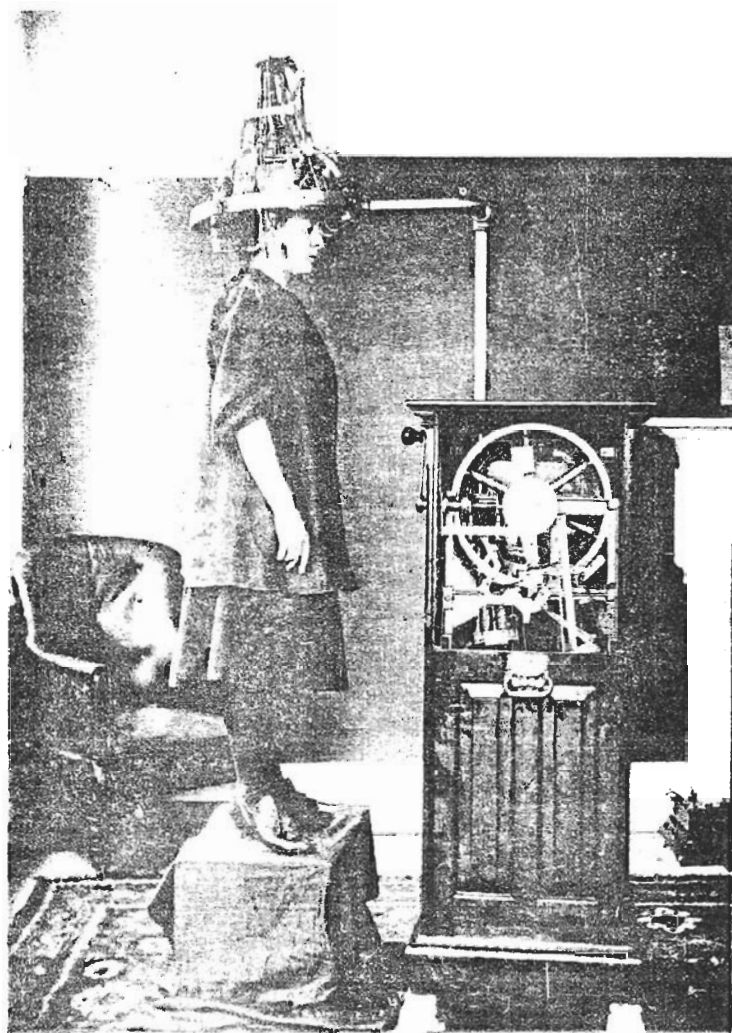
The father of a friend of McCoy's had gotten the sales pitch for the phrenology machines during a train ride to Milwaukee early in the century, McCoy said. By the time the Minnesotan got to Beer Town, he'd agreed to sell all of his 3M stock to invest in the company, located in Superior, Wis. "The family never forgave him," McCoy said. When he died, the son found himself in possession of 12 such machines.

Unlike many of his devices' inventors, McCoy isn't in this for the money. Except for the phrenology reading, and some postcards and posters for sale, the museum is free. His main source of income for the venture comes from presentations he makes at medical gatherings. (He's also appeared in "The Today Show" and "Late Night With David Letterman.") He gets his space in the mall rent-free.

"I'm trying to educate people on the dangers of medical fraud," said McCoy, who is retired from the steel business. Those dangers persist today. Not all of McCoy's devices are from "the bad old days."

Take that breast enlarger pump. In 1976, 4 million women responded to an ad offering it for \$9.95 plus postage. (The pump produced a strong suction when operated, but all change — including bruises and discomfort

— was temporary.)



Antique Phrenology Machine — 1905

## You Ought To Have Your Head Examined

Just a few weeks ago, a Minnesota man was arrested for using and selling a radionics machine not unlike McCoy's relic of seven decades ago. This one claimed, among other miracles, to cure AIDS.

Not surprisingly, a fair amount of traffic through McCoy's museum consists of doctors and other health professionals. His wife, Margaret Horrobin, is a pediatrician.

Once McCoy was asked to play doctor himself, donning white coat and making a phony presentation of his Toftness Radiation Detector, which used PVC-like pipes to "draw noxious energy from the body." He was halfway through his presentation to a class of University of Minnesota medical students, enjoying the looks of respectful bewilderment, when a teacher burst out laughing.