

# Accessible Archives

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## Medical Care in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America

**Written by  
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**Barbara Chen** has been in the information industry for her entire professional career. Soon after receiving her MLS, she joined the H.W. Wilson Company as an indexer and departed 23 years later as Associate Director of Indexing Services for periodical indexes. In 2001, Barbara joined the Modern Language Association as director of bibliographic information services and editor, *MLA International Bibliography*. MLA took advantage of her large skill set and allowed her to use her creativity to bring this leading humanities database into the 21st century. Barbara has served on several industry association committees including NFAIS Humanities Roundtable, in 2018-2019 as chair, Association of American Publishers Professional and Scholarly Publishing division Committee on Digital Innovation and as well as a Prose Awards judge. She received an NFAIS honorary fellow award in 2019 after her retirement from the MLA. Barbara is currently providing her expertise by consulting, most notably for Unlimited Priorities.

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## *Introduction*

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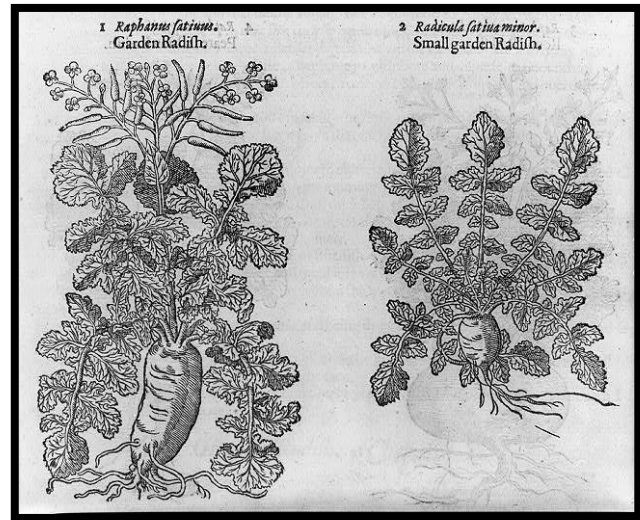
The twenty first century has seen an unparalleled medical crisis with Covid but we are fortunate to have scientific knowledge and technology to provide an array of solutions to aid us in this war against the virus. Other diseases like cancer, diabetes and heart disease have seen improved longevity, quality of life and hope for those afflicted; they are no longer death sentences. In comparison, life was much more fragile for Americans in the country's early days. To get first-hand accounts of the challenges illness presented to this young country, we turn to Accessible Archives databases for in-depth representations of the medical realities found many years ago. These databases supplied rich detail to my research.

At the turn of nineteenth century America, debilitating illness and death were as common for children and young adults as for elders of their community causing life expectancy to hover between 30-40 years of age. Now curable diseases would represent serious threats if left untreated. Accidents occurred frequently and treatment options limited especially if you consider that bandages were rags or old clothes no longer in use. Practicing in cities and towns, doctors were rarely accessible in rural areas and only called when all else failed. Additionally, some medical cures were undeniably questionable.

Without available doctors, family members or neighbors spent many hours trying to ease suffering in any way possible. This included the use of herbal mixtures made up of native roots and plant leaves taken from a family garden with recipes handed down through generations. From ***The Christian Recorder, May 2, 1889***: "Not only was she the adviser in social, affairs but she was the medical

adviser and prescribe for the sick. Often were her hands engaged in the preparation of some healing potion or remedy for the relief of those in ill health. Fully versed in all the bountiful supplies contained in the grand storehouse of Nature she wisely knew how to utilize the curative properties contained in certain roots and herbs and accordingly she transformed them into certain remedial agents which have made the old Log Cabin famous for all time to come". [1]

Many herbal remedies still in use today offered relief from common problems like indigestion, sinus problems, skin irritations, lumbago, headaches, and menstrual cramps. Included here are honey, lavender, chamomile, mint, rosemary, sage, foxglove, wormwood. We are also now going back to some of the age-old treatments like medical marijuana. **The Christian Recorder, October 22, 1874:** "Dr. J. P. Miller, a practicing physician, at 327 Spruce St. Phila. has discovered that the extract of Cranberries and *Hemps* combined cures Headaches, either bilious, dyspeptic, nervous or sick Headache and nervousness. This is a triumph in *medical Chemistry* and sufferers all over the country are ordering by mail. He prepares it in Pills at 50 cts. a box. The Doctor is largely known and highly-respected in Phila." [2]



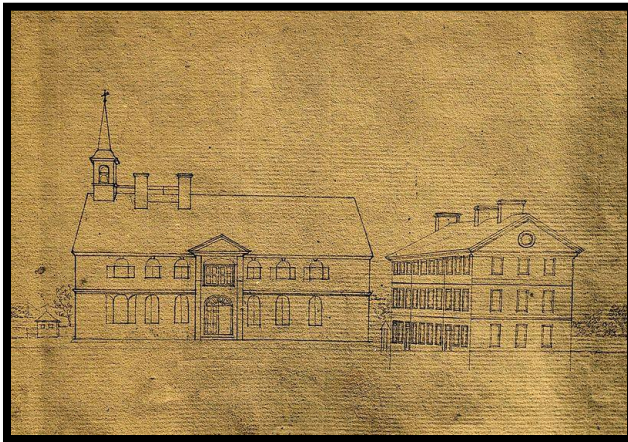
"Garden radish, small garden radish,"  
Library of Congress, [1516].

**Godey's Lady's Book, February 1858,** offered a treatment for Chilblains (itchy, painful bumps occurring after exposure to cold, damp weather) "HOUSEHOLD REMEDY FOR CHILBLAINS.— Boil some turnips, and mash them until reduced to a pulp; put them in a tub or large basin, and put the feet in them, almost as hot as can be borne, for a short time, before going to bed. Persevere in doing this for a few nights, and the itching and irritation of the chilblains will be cured. Of course this must be before the chilblains are broken. I have tried many *remedies* , but this is the most efficacious by far." [3]

Consider this cure for corns from **THE Virginia Gazette 2, January 28, 1773:**  
"ROAST a clove of garlic on a live coal, or in a hot ashes; apply it to the corn,

and fasten it on with a piece of cloth, the moment of going to bed. Renew this application for three or four nights successively. It softens the corn to such a degree, that it loosens and entirely removes the core, however inveterate; afterwards wash the foot with warm water; in a little time the indurated skin, that forms the horny tunic of the corn, will disappear, and leave the part as clean and smooth as if it had never been attacked with any disorder." [4]

In early America, medical training was not regulated or required. Those desiring to become doctors utilized apprenticeships, typically following mentors,



*Academy and College of Philadelphia (ca. 1780).  
Sketch by Pierre Du Simitière*

established professionals, for an unspecified time-period. In the 1750s, occasionally doctors like Dr. William Hunter in Newport, Rhode Island or Drs. Bard and Middleton in New York City provided lectures on anatomy or dissection but formal training not available to those in rural areas. The first medical school was created in 1765 in Philadelphia; this institution,

still in existence, is now part of University of Pennsylvania. Kings

College (Columbia University) followed next in 1768 and Harvard Medical School was established in 1782. Enrollment was not mandatory for a professional to be considered a “doctor” and attendance numbers were low. At the beginning of the Revolutionary war, only 200 physicians had graduated from medical school.

The school in Philadelphia was introduced in Accessible Archives' **The Pennsylvania Gazette, September 18, 1766**: “The Doctor takes this opportunity to inform the public, that his first course was read in the year 1762, and was premised by an oration, delivered in the State house, before many of the principal inhabitants of this city; wherein he proposed a plan for the institution of a medical school in Philadelphia, to which he then declared that course of anatomy was introductory. The use of such a Institution, and the practicability and propriety of it at that time, were expressed in these words: "All these (meaning the disadvantages that attended the study of physic, &c.) may, and I hope will soon be remedied, by a medical school in America; and what place in America so fit for such a school as Philadelphia, that bids so fair, by its rapid growth, to be soon the metropolis of all the continent? Such a school is properly

begun by an anatomical class, and, for our encouragement, let us remember, that the famous school of physic at Edinburgh, which is now the first in Europe, has not had a beginning fifty years, and was begun by the anatomical lectures of Doctor Monro, who is still living," [5]

### *Women's Issues*

Women had their own medical issues to struggle through. While the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought all kinds of tonics and cures for female problems, they were expensive and not always as effective as touted. **Weekly Vincennes Gazette, September 8, 1858:** "R. HOOPER'S FEMALE CORDIAL will cure all Female Complaints, such as Excessive, Suppressed, or painful Menstruation . Fluor Albus or White, Barrenness, Sallow Complexion, Headache. Dizziness, Weak Nerves, Cheeked Perspiration, Excesses, Over-Excitement, etc., of the Sexual Organs. Dr. Hooper's Female Cordial is universally acknowledged by the ladies the best remedy ever invented. Price \$1 per bottle, or six bottle for \$5." (FYI a dollar in those days is worth over \$30 today.) [6] Herbal remedies, including blood root, were readily available and much cheaper.

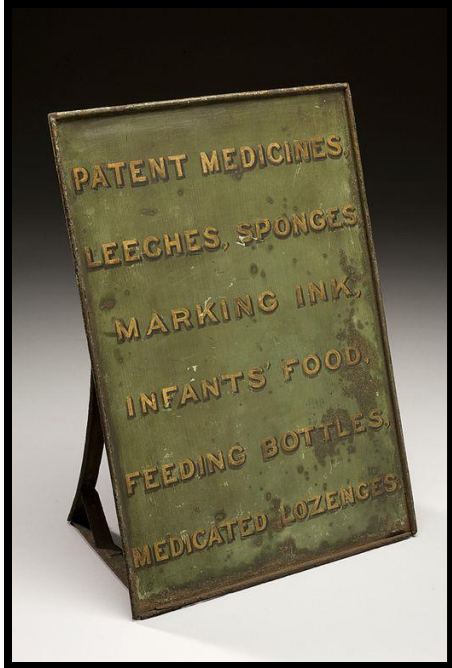
Birth control methods were usually unsuccessful so women who frequently became pregnant had limited delivery options when the time came to give birth - home births assisted by midwives. Like doctors, these midwives learned their skills apprenticing under more experienced mentors. Even so many women and their newborn babies died in childbirth from a variety of causes like hemorrhages, bacterial infections, and obstructed labor. Another more surprising reason was seen in **Frank Leslie's Weekly, October 15, 1870:** "Women after childbirth are most commonly given nothing to eat for three or more days, and this, too, after excessive loss, fatigue, and prostration! They thereby contract diseases, and fall into a debilitated condition, from which they sometimes never recover." [7]



*"The mother"*  
Library of Congress,

Before the development of ether and chloroform for surgical use in 1847, herbal remedies were used to alleviate pain and suffering in childbirth. These new anesthetics were immediately noticed by the practitioners and patients alike.

**The National Era, March 2, 1848:** "To the Medical Profession: The undersigned, as chairman of the committee appointed at the last annual meeting of the national Medical Association held in Philadelphia in May, 1847, to make a report to the next meeting, to be held in Baltimore in May, 1848, "on all the important improvements in obstetric medicine effected in American during the past year," begs leave most respectfully to call the attention of the Profession, throughout the country, to the effects of chloroform in alleviating the sufferings of childbirth, and to request that those gentlemen who have tried or may try this potent remedy, would transmit to the subscriber, at Washington, a brief but precise report of its effects in their hands, that the facts thus collected may be presented by the committee to the Association at their next annual meeting." [8] Believe it or not, there was a debate about the use of these



Shop sign advertising goods in a 19<sup>th</sup> century pharmacy

pain relievers because some people had the attitude that women needed to suffer because of the "curse of Eve" in the Garden of Eden.

Doctors searched out medical books to aid in their knowledge of the human body as well as therapies and techniques to cure diseases. Advertisements and reviews for obtainable medical texts were always in the early press. One such review can be found in **THE NATIONAL ERA, January 21, 1858:** "The *American Journal of Medical Science*. Edited by Isaac Hays, M.D. Philadelphia: Blanchard & Lea. Published Quarterly. \$5 a year. We know of no more valuable Medical Journal than this. It is a complete repository of Medical Science, and abounds in very able and interesting discussions. To the subscribers who pays \$5 in advance, the publishers send, *postpaid*, not only the Journal, but their " *Medical News and Library*," a monthly of 32 large octavo pages." [9]

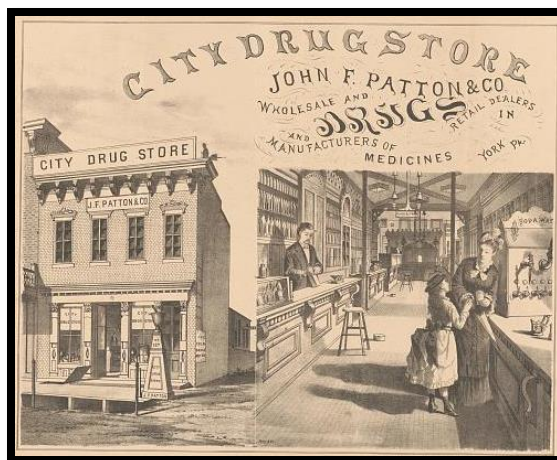
The family also made efforts to better understand medical treatments and sought publications, one of the most popular being *Every Man His Own Doctor: OR, The Poor Planter's Physician*. An advertisement for this reference book can

be found in **The Pennsylvania Gazette, January 23, 1735**: “Just Published, *EVERY Man his own Doctor: or the poor Planter's Physician* . Prescribing plain and easy Means for Persons to cure themselves of all, or most of the Distempers incident to this Climate, and with very little Charge, the Medicines being chiefly of the Growth and Production of this Country. Sold by the Printer hereof, pr. 1 s. with Allowance to those who take a Quantity to sell or give away in Charity.” [10]

Poor Richard's Almanak was also a handy resource as noted in **The South Carolina Gazette, February 26, 1737**: “POOR RICHARD'S ALMANACKS for the Year 1737, containing besides what is usual, a particular Description of the Herb which the Indians use to cure the Bite of that venomous Reptile a RATTLE SNAKE, an exact Print of the Leaf of the Plant, an Account of the Places it grows in, and the Manner of using it, &c. made publick for the general Good.” [11]

### *Dispensaries and Drugs*

As time progressed, consumers went to pharmacies to buy medications developed by doctors, pharmacists, chemists, and others. According to advertisements and articles in the popular press, some of these concoctions were miraculous. There are many examples in Accessible Archives including **Vincennes Gazette, June 6, 1855**: “FEVER AND AGUE. The University of Free Medicine and popular knowledge, chartered by the State of Pennsylvania, April 29th, 1853. mainly to arrest the evils of spurious nostrums; also, to supply the public with reliable remedies, where the best medical advisers cannot or will not be employed, having purchased the invaluable remedy. and in due time will furnish its own remedy for every disease that can safely be treated in this way. Home Dispensary and Office, No. 68 Arch St., Philadelphia.” [12]



*City drug store,  
John F. Patton & Co.*

**The Vincennes Weekly Western Sun, October 12, 1867**: “For the cure of CONSTIPATED and SLUGGISH BOWELS. In these conditions of the alimentary canal, they are GUARANTEED to be perfectly infallible. As a Purgative in all Fevers and inflammatory diseases, in Acute Rheumatism, Inflammation of the Liver, Brain, Kidneys, and Bladder, in Erysipelas, Fever and Ague, Acute

Ophthalmia or Sore Eyes, Fullness of the Head, Vertigo, Dizziness, Blindness, &c., they cannot be excelled. These Pills will be found on trial, to be far superior to any other known combination of medicines in the rapid and certain cure of the above diseases. They should be taken with Edward Wilder's Sarsaparilla and Potash in the diseases in which that remedy is recommended; and with Edward Wilder's Compound Extract of Wild Cherry in Coughs, Colds, etc.; and with Edward Wilder's Stomach Bitters for Chills and Fever and Fever and Ague." "REMEMBER that these Remedies have all been tested in the Family circle, by Chemical Analysis, and at the Dispensaries throughout the country, for each and every Disease for which they are recommended, and that in no single case has any of them ever been known to fail in giving instant relief, followed by certain and permanent cure. Their medicinal virtue and power is attested alike by the ablest medical men, and by the Ministry, and all, in a word, say of them that they are truly the FOUR GREATEST MEDICINES OF THE AGE, and that no family ought to be without them. They compose the best Family Medicine Chest that can be made." [13]

Opium and morphine were widely available in drug stores and doctors' offices. With the reality of growing addiction statistics, doctors eventually realized the detrimental effects of these wonder drugs and took a stance to regulate their use. Without medical access, some users took to frequenting opium dens.

***The Christian Recorder, August 17, 1893:***

"Narcotics are substances having the physiological action, in an healthy animal, of producing lethargy or stupor, which may pass into a state of profound coma or unconsciousness along with complete paralysis, terminating in death. This definition in itself should serve as a warning to those who, in violation of nature and natural laws, puff the deadly cigarette and find comfort in the death-fumes of the opium-laden cigar. A few common members of this class, which are among the most deadly substances known to science, are opium, morphine, and nicotine; all of these poisons act upon the nervous system. A small dose not unfrequently acts, as a stimulant; there is a sense of vigor, a capability of severe



*Small walnut medicine chest with two hinged front sections*



exertion, and endurance of labor without fatigue. A larger dose often exerts a calming influence, a dreamy state in which images and ideas pass rapidly before the mind without fatigue - the person may never awaken; the pupils are strongly contracted, the face flushed and purplish, the skin dry and warm, respiration dead and slow - and thus the victim wrapped in the horrible opium slumber, with that terrible rattle in his throat, passes from the unconscious sleep of nature into the eternal sleep of death. This is but a pen picture, but an unadorned description of Narcotism as it steal with its catlike tread upon its victim; moderate at first in its effects but eventually chaining its captive in the vilest slavery the human mind can conceive." [14]

### *Alternative Treatments*

Bloodletting (with leeches) was still practiced at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to ***HISTORY OF COOK COUNTY ILLINOIS —BEING A GENERAL SURVEY OF COOK COUNTY HISTORY, INCLUDING A CONDENSED HISTORY OF CHICAGO AND SPECIAL ACCOUNT OF DISTRICTS OUTSIDE THE CITY LIMITS; FROM THE EARLIEST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME - VOLUME II, J. THOMAS SCHARF, AND THOMPSON WESTCOTT. THE GOODSPEED HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION:***



*Self-administered Bloodletting  
with Leeches*

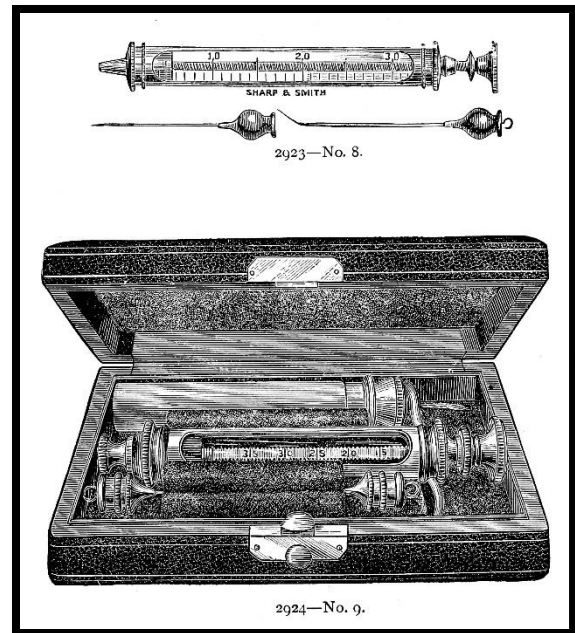
“Probably as early as 1829 Dr. S. G. J. De Camp became post surgeon at Fort Dearborn. It is from his report that the facts in the table below are derived. He must have been post surgeon during the cholera epidemic in 1832, because he reports that 200 cases were admitted to the hospital in the course of six or seven days, and that fifty-eight cases terminated fatally. All of the cases except those administered by Doctor Harmon were treated with calomel and

bloodletting . Doctor De Camp reported that this treatment was so efficacious that the disease was “robbed of all its terrors.” [15]

Other arcane treatments were described in ***Frank Leslie's Weekly, May 16, 1907:*** “Some seven or eight years ago there was a movement in the direction of the *treatment* of inoperable cancers by hypodermic medication, and many experiments were made with the cacodylate preparations. Merck, of

Darmstadt, brought out a new agent, iodopin—a combination of iodine and sesame oil—which could be administered subcutaneously without producing what is known as iodism, and it was eagerly seized upon for the treatment of fibroid tumors and menorrhagia. Producing noticeable relief in tumors, it had a vogue in cancer treatment, but without encouraging results. Among other preparations thus used may be mentioned a ferrous salt with arsenic, held in great favor in Italy, various preparations of mercury, a solution of benzoate, strychnine and spermin, chian turpentine, sodium-oleate, glycocholate, ox gall, and finally trypsin. This list might be further extended, but to do so might lead us into the domain of medical charlatany—never quite so far removed from the ethical area as to permit the erection between them of a separation as distinct as the great wall of China.” [16]

A peculiar cure for skin cancer was written about in ***The Vincennes Weekly Western Sun*, October 15, 1870**: “A Milwaukee paper states that some eight months ago, Mr. T. B. Mason, of that city, ascertained that he had a cancer on his face the size of a pin. It was cut out by Dr. Wolcott, and the wound partially healed. Subsequently it grew again, and, while he was in Cincinnati on business, it attained the size of a hickory nut. He has remained there since Christmas under treatment and is now perfectly cured. The process is this: .A piece of sticking plaster is put over the cancer, with a circular piece cut out of the center a little larger than the cancer, so that the cancer and a small circular rim of the healthy skin next to it were exposed. Then a plaster made of chloride of zinc, blood root , and wheat flour was spread on a piece of muslin the size of this circular opening and applied to the cancer for twenty-four hours. On removing it, the cancer will be found burst in two and appear of the color and hardness of an old shoo sole, and the circular rim outside of it will appear white and parboiled, as if scalded by hot steam. The wound is now dressed, and the outside rim soon separates, and the cancer comes out in a hard lump, and the place heals up. The plaster kills the cancer, so that it sloughs out like dead flesh,



1889 Sharp & Smith Catalog  
(Chicago, Illinois.)

and never grows in again. The remedy was discovered by Dr, Fell, of London, and has been used by him for six or eight years with unfailling success, and not a case has been known of the re-appearance of the cancer when this remedy has been applied.” [17]

Some alternative medical treatments like osteopathy were developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A description of its inception can be found in **Frank Leslie's Weekly, February 25, 1922**: “In 1874 Dr. Andrew Taylor Still , an old school physician of Missouri, an army surgeon during the Civil War, announced to the world “that all diseases are mere effects, the cause being a partial or complete failure of the nerves to properly conduct the fluids of life.” (Autobiography of Andrew T. Still, page 108.) In his youth Dr. Still had been subject to headaches, and during one of these spells he lay down on the ground and used the rope of a swing for a pillow.”

“Thus, I lay stretched on my back, with my neck across the rope,” he said in explaining afterward his first lesson in osteopathy. “Soon I became easy and went to sleep. I got up in a little while and my headache was all gone. After that discovery I roped my neck whenever I felt those spells coming on. I followed that treatment for twenty years before the wedge of reason reached my brain, and I could see that I had suspended the action of the great occipital nerve and given harmony to the flow of the arterial blood.”

“After devoting years to the study of the body as a machine, Dr. Still promulgated the doctrine that many organic disturbances were caused by spinal lesions, and that relief in such cases could be obtained by a proper adjustment of the vertebræ. He asserted that the body is naturally immune to disease, when all its parts are in a state of normal relationship.” [18]

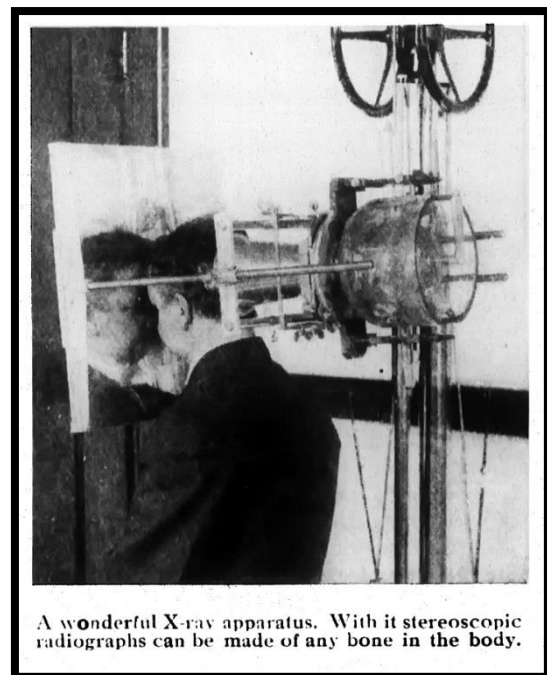
Hydropathy was practiced to mixed results as is noted in **The National Era, March 2, 1854**: “MRS. SWISSELM ON HYDROPATHY . The celebrated editress of



the Pittsburgh Family Visitor says: "In '1776,' a patriotic fever broke out in this country, which became epidemic. Our father-in-law, then a youth, had a prolonged and severe attack of the disease; and once, he was, with a large number of the afflicted, on the banks of the Delaware, under the charge of Doctor George Washington. One night, he knew by the symptoms that all his patients would have a gunpowder paroxysm in the morning, unless some measures were taken to prevent it; and he ordered them all a plunge in the Delaware, a rigorous rubbing with ice cakes, to swim to the other shore, and then had them 'packed away' in wet blankets until next morning. Some died from the effects of the treatment; but to the patient in whom we were most particularly interested it resulted in a confirmed asthma, which descended to his children. So, our bigger half gets up a coughing and wheezing spell almost every evening. Lately, when it begins, he takes a few drops of Ayer's Cherry Pectoral, which gives him immediate relief. Thus, we have a present experience in our family, which says that, although water is all the medicine we require, other people may need something else."

Thankfully, many of these treatments and prescriptions went out of favor as doctors were better educated in chemistry, biology, scientific research methods and more dependable therapies became available. They also were able to receive certification through medical societies as well as consult and rely on other medical professionals including medical specialists, nurses, and pharmacists. In 1895 X-ray technology was developed to provide doctors with more accurate diagnoses; this was a game changer. From **Frank Leslie's Weekly, April 11, 1912:**

"REMARKABLE advances have been made in the science of surgery during the past decade, and no small degree of the success attained is due to the marked improvements in X-ray photography. A vacuum tube, which is the real source of X-rays, is simply a glass bulb into which are sealed two metal electrodes and from which the air has been exhausted.... When Roentgen discovered the X-rays, it required an exposure of nearly two



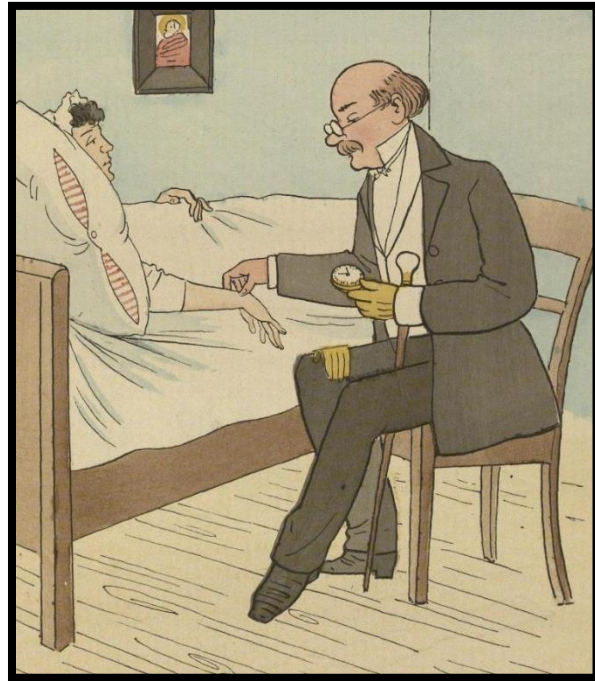
hours to obtain a photograph of the pelvis; now it can be done in less than two minutes.” [20]

### *Doctors in the Community*

Throughout the century doctors were well-respected members of the community and served many paternal roles for their patients and families. Much has been written affectionally about them in many Accessible Archives publications. This description was found in **YORK COUNTY NEBRASKA AND ITS**

**PEOPLE: TOGETHER WITH A  
CONDENSED HISTORY OF THE STATE -**

**VOL. II:** “The modern generation, who can step to the telephone, call the *doctor* , await a few anxious moments while the physician's automobile speedily brings him to the bedside of the sick person, is very apt to overlook the prime importance of the country *doctor* of some forty years ago. Then it was a long wait, a period of intense suspense, while the *doctor* , sitting half awake in a buggy, with the faithful horse steering the course would be slowly ambling toward his destination. To make a good fraction of as many calls, visits and examinations as the modern physician can dispense with in a regular day's work, his predecessor of a generation ago had to put in many more tedious, tiresome hours. Words cannot begin to record the credit due to the earlier *doctors* of York County or any other community. The least we can do at this time is to compile a memorial roster of these faithful servants of the public health.”



“The historian of south York County mentioned in an article published last week the valuable services rendered early settlers by Dr. Deweese, who proved a good friend to many sick and suffering ones. The northern portion of the county was also fortunate in having a pioneer physician in the person of Dr. S. V. Moore, whose home has been in York for a number of years. Though his days of strenuous effort are long since ended and failing health keeps him by his fireside during the winter days, he has a very keen memory of the time when cold and

storms had no terrors for him, and he willingly braved the worst blizzard to respond to a call for help. Doctor Moore came to York County in 1869. He took a homestead north of the present site of Bradshaw and built his sod house on a hill about a half mile from Lincoln Creek. He had both studied and practiced medicine in his former home in Illinois but had not expected to continue to follow the profession in Nebraska. But the need of his neighbors was so great and their wish for the medical treatment he alone could give so urgent, that he gradually yielded to their demands and soon found himself practicing medicine over the most of York County and parts of Polk and Hamilton. If a call to a sick bed came in plowing time the plow must be left in the furrow till the sick were visited, and if a winter storm was brewing the wife and children must be left to care for themselves and the stock as best they could until the father-doctor could reach home again.” [21]



*Country Doctor Making House Calls  
Underwood Archives*

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### *The Rise of Hospitals*

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The first American hospital was founded in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Thomas Bond in 1751 to take care of the poor and mentally ill who had nowhere to go during their illnesses but the streets. Most people, especially the wealthy, preferred to be treated at home by family members away from a lower class of individuals who had been institutionalized. It wasn't until 1860

when hospitals were finally accepted by the general public. From **A STANDARD HISTORY OF SPRINGFIELD AND CLARK COUNTY, OHIO: AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE OF THE PAST, WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE MODERN ERA IN THE COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL, EDUCATIONAL, CIVIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:**

“The hospital is a sort of an auxiliary to the medical doctor, and the surgeon frequently makes of it a life-saving station. It was Florence Nightingale, born May 12, 1820, who gave to the world the idea of scientific nursing; she is the mother of hospitals. The names of Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton, the Red Cross



*Hospital: - Children in bed  
Library of Congress, [between 1915 and 1923]*

army nurse, cannot be too highly honored in any community. The popular understanding of the word hospital is different from the dictionary definition. Webster says it is a building appropriated for the reception of sick, infirm, and helpless paupers who are supported and nursed by charity, but that phase of life is not emphasized in Clark County hospitals. While there are public and private charities, the hospital is not necessarily a charity. It is a place where those in need of medicine and nursing receive attention. The Christian Science practitioner, the osteopath and

chiropractic “doctors” alike recognize the advantages of good nursing, and the hospital serves an excellent purpose in the community.”

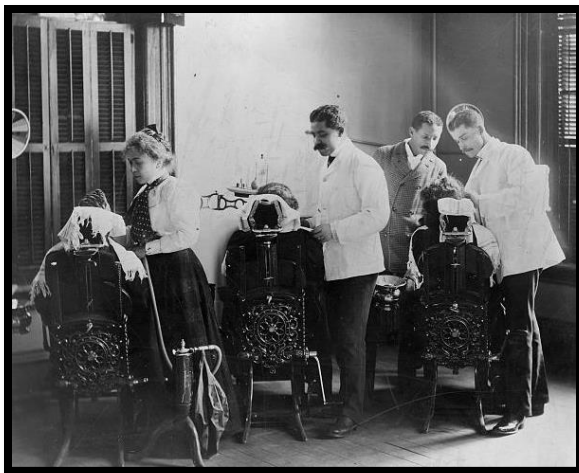
“While it costs money to have appendicitis, or to be a victim of the surgeon’s blade, nevertheless the hospital is the helping hand held out to, for and by society. While enterprising citizens sometimes operate hospitals on a basis of profit, the idea is an outgrowth of the Christian religion, and under present working conditions both doctors of divinity and doctors of medicine pay professional visits to Clark County hospitals, and sometimes the lawyer is consulted there. While the true meaning of the hospital—its primary mission—is first aid to the injured, excellent nursing is available and sometimes the homes are unable to supply it. Physicians recommend efficient nurses, and they get their training at the hospital. It is only public spirited men who take of enterprises that do not pay dividends, and the Springfield hospital is operated on a

humanitarian basis, rather than as a profit-sharing institution; the trend of popular thought on the subject of disease renders the hospital a necessity.”

“Although it is a homely adage: “An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure,” it is truthful and people are learning to anticipate and prevent diseases—whether of the will, or of the flesh. There is a growing appreciation of the hospital, and recognition of its value in the community. The modern hospital building is X-shaped, giving outside exposure to all of the rooms; men and women now turn to the hospital with confidence and gratitude because of the service it performs for humanity. The foremost philanthropists in the community foster and promote the hospitals.” [22]

## *Dentistry*

What about dentists? Home remedies were helpful to ease suffering but did little to save teeth. **Godey's Lady's Book, April 1856**: “RENDERING TEETH INSENSIBLE TO PAIN.— The "Dublin Hospital Gazette" states that diseased teeth have been rendered insensible to pain by a cement composed of Canada balsam and slaked lime, which is to be inserted in the hollow of a tooth, like a pill. It is stated that such pills afford immediate relief in all *toothaches* but chronic cases of inflammation. This remedy for *toothache* is simple, safe, and can easily be tried by any person.” [23]



*Dentistry at Howard University, Washington, D.C.  
ca. 1900 Library of Congress*

Over the counter dental medications were also available. From **The Christian Recorder, May 10, 1894**: “Toothache is a little thing in the books, many physicians would rather meet a burglar at the door on a dark night to be called to cure a bad toothache , especially one of several days continuance. The old-time liquid remedies only postpone the evil day, and usually the patient is respectfully referred to the dentist. Now to avoid all this trouble keeping the house a bottle

of Dent's Toothache Gum, so handy to use, does not spill or dry up, always ready. In value it represents a small amounts, \$.15, putting good results untold



pain and loss of sleep and rest. For sale everywhere by responsible druggists, or direct upon receipt of price.” [24]

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century America was a leader in dental science. Even so, training was akin to doctors with apprenticeships the usual route to practice. However, since no licenses were required, anyone could open a practice. Organized practices began in the 1830s. The first American dental school was founded in Baltimore in 1840. In 1859, the American Dental Association was established with 26 dentists.

**The Liberator, June 19, 1840:** “A Desideratum Supplied.— Dr. Mann, a respectable Surgeon Dentist of this city, in connection with Dr. Thomas Womersly, has succeeded in discovering, or manufacturing a cement for filling and restoring decayed teeth, which appears to possess many advantages over any other kind of metal in use. It is called Litheodeon, and bears a resemblance in its external appearance to pewter. When applied to the tooth, it is so soft that it may be moulded by the fingers into any form, and made to fill any crevices in the tooth, but in a few hours it becomes hard, and in twenty-four hours its consistency is so firm that it cannot be out with a knife. The advantages of this cement are obvious, and one, perhaps not the least important in the minds of some persons, is that the application inflicts no pain. Several highly respectable physicians have expressed their gratification at this discovery, which they consider to be of a valuable discovery.— Mer. Journal”. [25]

## Conclusion

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As we see by the popular press, 19<sup>th</sup> century medicine was a mixed bag but definitely moving in the right direction. Doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists did their best to treat their patients using the education, skills and therapies that were available to them. By the start of 20<sup>th</sup> century, life expectancy of Americans had grown to over 50 years of age. With increasing developments in technology, the practice of medicine made significant improvements in care. As a comparison, it is now 78+ years. To quote Loretta Lynn, “we’ve come a long way baby.”

## Notes

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[24] "Treatment of Toothache." *The Christian Recorder*, May 10, 1894, African American Newspapers Collection, Accessible Archives.

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### *Accessible Archives Collections Used in Preparing this White Paper*

#### **African American Newspapers**

This collection of African American newspapers contains a wealth of information about cultural life and history during the 19th and early 20th century and is rich with first-hand reports of the major events and issues of the day. The collection also provides a great number of early biographies, vital statistics, essays and editorials, poetry and prose, and advertisements all of which embody the African-American experience. Publications included are: *The Christian Recorder*; *The Colored American*; *Frederick Douglass' Paper*; *The Freedmen's Record*; *Frederick Douglass Monthly*; *Freedom's Journal*; *The National Era*; *The Negro Business League Herald*; *The North Star*; *Provincial Freeman*; *Weekly Advocate*.

#### **American County Histories**

These large county volumes have long formed the cornerstone of local historical and genealogical research. They are encyclopedic in scope and virtually limitless in their research possibilities.

These books include chapters with detailed coverage of local history, geology, geography, weather, transportation, lists of all local participants in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, government, the medical and legal professions,

churches and ministers, industry and manufacturing, banking and insurance, schools and teachers, noted celebrations, fire departments and associations, cemeteries, family histories, health and vital statistics, roads and bridges, public officials and legislators, and many additional subject areas.

### ***Anatomy of Protest in America***

This database delivers a unique opportunity to investigate through newspaper articles and editorials and books the people, places, events, organizations, and ideas, so important to Americans that they took action, exercised their rights, and stood up to protest. From colonial exploitation and revolution to slavery and abolition, to political rights and suffrage, and economic and industrial disturbances, this series will guide the user through almost 225 years of American protest history.

### ***Civil War Collection***

Coverage in relation to the Civil War is both informative and eclectic. Slavery is an important topic, and countless editorials discuss pre- and post-war attitudes from both sides, as well as troop movements during the war. Newspaper and e-book content is subdivided into these parts: A Newspaper Perspective, The Soldiers' Perspective, The Generals' Perspective, A Midwestern Perspective, Iowa's Perspective, Northeast Regimental Histories, and Abraham Lincoln Library Abolitionist Books.

### ***Frank Leslie's Weekly***

*Frank Leslie's Weekly*, later often known as *Leslie's Weekly*, actually began life as *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Founded in 1855 and continued until 1922, this full run of issues includes articles on: slavery and abolition; politics, elections, and political parties; the Civil War; industrialization and technology; business, commerce, and commodities; society and culture; women's rights and suffrage; African American society and economics; immigration; the world in conflict; labor and radicalism; religion; and featured columns on music, the stage, fashion, fine arts, sports, and literature.

### ***Godey's Lady's Book***

This magazine was intended to entertain, inform, and educate the women of America. In addition to extensive fashion descriptions and plates, the issues included articles on entertainment, health and hygiene, recipes, remedies, morality, gems and jewelry, handcrafts, marriage, education, suffrage, "hearth

and home," dating and marriage, African American and immigrant women, the role of women in foreign countries, brief biographies of leading personalities, literature, and more. Includes the full color plates as they originally appeared.

### ***The Liberator***

*The Liberator* was a weekly newspaper published by William Lloyd Garrison in Boston, Massachusetts. Garrison was a journalistic crusader who advocated the immediate emancipation of all slaves and gained a national reputation for being one of the most radical of American abolitionists. After the end of the Civil War in December 1865, Garrison published his last issue of *The Liberator*, announcing "my vocation as an abolitionist is ended." After thirty-five years and 1,820 issues, Garrison had not failed to publish a single issue.

### ***The Pennsylvania Gazette***

*The Pennsylvania Gazette* was one of America's most prominent newspapers and was published in Philadelphia from 1728 until 1800. Subdivided into four parts: "Benjamin Franklin's Newspaper" (1728–1750), "The French & Indian War" (1751–1765), "The American Revolution" (1766–1783), and "The New Republic" (1784–1800). Includes articles, editorials, letters, news items, travel stories, classified ads, employment notices, lost and found goods and advertisements, covering the Western Hemisphere, from the Canadian Maritime Provinces through the West Indies and North and South America

### ***Quarantine and Disease Control in America Series***

This database will give researchers an unparalleled look at administrative and community responses to diseases devastating to public health as found in the press from colonial America through World War I. This database provides a vivid picture ripe for essential historic exploration to compare past outbreaks, civilian and governmental reactions, and disease control practices to what is happening today.

### ***The Virginia Gazette***

Published weekly in Williamsburg, Virginia between 1736 and 1780, *The Virginia Gazette* contained news covering all of Virginia and also included information from other colonies, Scotland, England, and additional countries. Articles on colonial culture, slavery, commerce and trade, agriculture and plantation life, land disputes, relations with Native Americans, upland migration, indentured

servitude, immigration, and includes notices of births, deaths, marriages, estate auctions, and advertisements, including those for runaway slaves. Comprises all three versions of The Virginia Gazette published between 1736 and 1780 in Williamsburg.

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