

LIFE & STYLE



BAILEY STOVER bstover@sacbee.com

Dr. John Vallee, a retired OB-GYN, shows a tour group of UEI College students an iron lung at the Museum of Medical History in Sacramento on July 25. Vallee said the medical respirator could help a polio patient breathe by creating a vacuum around the patient's body.

Iron lung on display at Sacramento medical history museum

At the museum, you'll find a collection of artifacts that documents the history of medicine and a large library containing early medical textbooks and journals.

Here are seven artifacts you can't miss:

IRON LUNG

The first thing you'll see when you walk in is the iron lung — or tank respirator — placed next to the entrance of the lobby. The coffin-like cabinet treated polio patients, who were paralyzed in their upper bodies and needed the help to breathe.

The patient was encased in the cylinder with their head exposed.

The iron lung cycles air pressure inside the machine to facilitate inhalation and exhalation. In the museum's iron lung, the patient is represented by a doll.

The museum's iron lung, which still functions, operated in the Sacramento County Hospital, LaPerriere said.

"The arms were in the iron lung, so the patient could not lift up a glass if they were thirsty. They could not hold up a book to read it — and this was before the days of television," LaPerriere said. "It had to be a very difficult life, particularly for people who spent their entire life in there."

The devices were mainly

SEE MUSEUM, 2D

BY JESSICA MA
jma@sacbee.com

Iron lungs are considered obsolete, but you can still find a functioning one, among other medical marvels, in a Sacramento office building.

The Museum of Medical History occupies the first floor of the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society's building, at 5380 Elvas Ave. The museum operates under the society, the oldest membership association for physicians in California, formed in 1868.

The museum's artifacts, from the past 150 years, highlight developments in medicine, focusing on the Sacramento region. It is the only medical museum in Northern California — and one of two in the entire state.

About 23 years ago, Bob LaPerriere helped start the museum. The museum began as exhibits displayed in the lobby but has since expanded



BAILEY STOVER bstover@sacbee.com

UEI College student Yareli Cabrera points to an artifact in a display case exploring the history of syringes at the Museum of Medical History last month. A museum docent said medical students used to be responsible for sharpening and sterilizing syringes.

into multiple rooms.

All artifacts are donated, including a few from LaPerriere's personal collection.

"I'm a retired dermatologist

after 26 years," LaPerriere said. "As a kid, I collected all kinds of things and started collecting medical things when I could afford to collect them."



BAILEY STOVER bstover@sacbee.com

Dr. Hanns Haesslein, right, speaks to a group of UEI College students about how dental practices have evolved over time at the Museum of Medical History in East Sacramento on July 25. Haesslein, a docent at the museum, described the detrimental effects amphetamines can have on oral health.

FROM PAGE 1D

MUSEUM

used in the 1940s and 50s — and helped hundreds of individuals survive polio. The first successful vaccine was licensed for use in 1955, leading to a nationwide immunization campaign.

In 1959, according to the National Museum of American History, 1,200 iron lungs were in use.

COCAINE-INFUSED WINE

On a glass shelf in the lobby, visitors will find a cocaine-infused red wine called Mariani, which was popular in the 1800s. French chemist Angelo Mariani invented the concoction of coca leaves and

wine.

He marketed the beverage as containing “remarkable sustaining, stimulating and invigorating powers.” A 1898 advertisement in the Sacramento Bee claimed the wine cured ailments, like malaria, lung disease and depression.

“The Pope was a big fan. His Holiness Pope Leo XIII awarded a gold medal to the wine,” LaPerriere said.

SNAKE BITE FIRST-AID KIT

The museum also has first-aid kits in metal tins to treat snake bites. At the start of the 20th century,

people would carry the kits with them on walks.

First, users would wrap a device called a tourniquet around a limb to stop bleeding or prevent blood flow. Then, they would make an incision over the fangs and use the syringe to suck out the venom.

But this technique is no longer recommended. In the modern day, “you drive as fast as you can to the emergency room and get the antitoxin,” LaPerriere said.

FIRST-RAY TUBE IN SACRAMENTO

The first x-ray tube in Sacramento is on display at the museum. It has a hand-powered static generator used to run the machine.

“You could turn and create high voltage elec-



BAILEY STOVER bstover@sacbee.com

UEI College student Aajanayh Griffin looks at a display of X-rays at the Museum of Medical History in East Sacramento last month. Griffin, who is studying to be a medical assistant, said she was interested in seeing the nursing portion of the museum.

tricity to power the tube,” LaPerriere said. “When the tube is powered, it emits x-ray.”

But to see the image, the X-ray had to hit something fluorescent, like a glass plate or a handheld fluoroscope. To use the fluoroscope, the radiologist would press the device on the patient and look through an opening.

But early types of such fluoroscopes offered no protection to the operator. Radiologists were prone to cancer, particularly in the hands, LaPerriere said.

“Some of these X-rays took 10, 20, 30 minutes to take,” he said. “Radiologists might be helping to hold the patients quiet and getting the X-ray at the same time.”

BLEEDING INSTRUMENTS

During the 19th century, bleeding was a common medical practice — one that dates back to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates’ explanation

of health, called the “four humors,” consisting of phlegm, blood, yellow bile and black bile. If the humors were imbalanced, people would get sick, he theorized.

People used bleeding instruments to rebalance their four humors. These instruments included sharp surgical tools, but also leeches.

Leeches suck about 1 to 2 teaspoons of blood. They are still used today after reconstructive surgery to remove excess blood.

CHINESE SLIPPER

Visitors will find a Chinese slipper, removed from the bound foot of a young woman from around 1900. The slipper was taken off by Dr. Cronmiller, a Sacramento doctor who practiced during that period.

Foot binding is a Chinese custom of breaking and tightly binding young girls’ feet, which changed the shape and size of them. It was painful prac-

tice that could result in lifelong disabilities. Regardless, the altered feet, called “lotus feet,” were considered a status symbol during imperial China, according to the Smithsonian Magazine.

The custom started during the tenth century and was outlawed in 1912 during the Chinese Revolution. But, foot binding did not truly end until the creation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.

MEDICAL BOOKS

The museum has about 1,000 medical textbooks from the 1800s and early 1900s, as well as 800 reference books in medical history.

A California State Journal of Medicine from 1910 is notable for its advertisements. One for the Colfax School for Tuberculosis takes up half a page and features a black and white picture of a cabin in a forest.

“Each patient has separate cottage, lighted by electricity, with bath, toilet, and hot and cold water,” the advertisement reads.

MUSEUM HOURS AND COSTS

The museum is free and open to the public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays. No reservations are required, and museum tours are available.

“We’d like to be a resource center for the public if they’re interested in a specific topic, but in general, for students who are working on projects,” LaPerriere said.

Jessica Ma: JessicaGraceMa