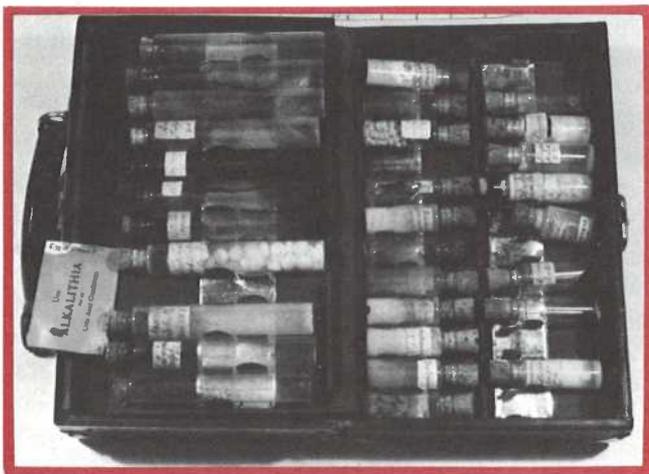


WHEN DOCTORS MADE HOUSE CALLS

- April 1 *Sleighting good this morning. Jonathan C. Campbell died two o'clock this morning.*
- April 2 *Gideon Goodspeed's child born three o'clock p.m.*
- April 3 *Jonathan C. Campbell buried today.*
- April 4 *Philander Riford's child died at Warren half past seven o'clock in the morning, aged thirteen months.*
- April 5 *James Campbell's boy died of croup, aged nineteen months. Sleighting poor but an abundance of snow left.*

Early **jottings** like these from a Waitsfield doctor's 1852 diary show the frequency of death in Vermont communities. Like the weather, it was an accepted part of life.

Whatever the cause, Vermonters fell victim to a wide assortment of ills whose names sound odd to us today. Old medical journals mention dropsy, green sickness, gravel, St. Anthony's fire, scrofula, the king's evil and a host of other **ailments**. **Epidemics** like spotted fever, influenza, and the dreaded small pox which scarred, blinded and killed people, swept through towns.



Doctor's case of assorted drugs

Vermont cemeteries record the **premature** death of many Vermont children who lived during the 1700s, 1800s and early 1900s. **Scores** fell victim to diseases like whooping cough. Lucille Depot remembers when it struck her family. "I must've been about five. We had whoopin' cough going around. There were nine of us and there were three after me that were three, two and a baby. They got whoopin' cough and the three of them died the same day. They choked to death."* Persons strong enough to survive beyond the age of five might expect to live a long life. The average life span one hundred years ago was about forty years. Certainly many people lived to be much older, but the great number of child deaths brought the average way down. Those who did make it to old age died mostly of the same things elderly people die of today.

Compared to the present, when most doctors are specialists and serious illnesses are diagnosed in hospitals using modern techniques, the practice of medicine in early Vermont was very different. The fact that germs cause disease was not well understood. Some persons believed that their illnesses were punishments for their sins. Others felt as did Dr. Gallup of Woodstock, who in 1815 thought many epidemics resulted from "the **conjunction** of the planets and the general **morbid** state of the atmosphere."

Doctors **diagnosed** diseases as best they could. They relied heavily on what the patient told them, as no X-rays or other tests existed. The color of the eyes and tongue or the presence of fever were all they had to go by. Physicians examined patients in their bedrooms or in the kitchen where the table served as an operating surface and the tea kettle as sterilizer. On hand, as active spectators, was the whole family watching the doctor at work and occasionally lending a hand.

Physicians were also druggists. Since no laws controlled the sale or distribution of drugs, doctors

*Excerpt from Shunpike Folk, p. 17

prescribed and dealt out a wide variety of treatments. Many contained poisons like mercury and arsenic. It was commonly believed that the larger and more **foul** tasting the dose the better it was for you.

Hundreds of other remedies and patent medicines were advertised in newspapers and sold by peddlers. Down's Elixer, Bate's Electric Inhalers, Kendall's

<p>Winter Arrangement RUT. & BURLINGTON RAIL ROAD.</p> <p><i>Leave,</i></p> <p>1st Train, 8.45 A.M. 2d Train, 6.00 P.M.</p> <p><i>Arrive,</i></p> <p>1st Train, 8.34 A.M. 2d Train, 5.40 P.M.</p>	<p>THE Attention of Purchasers and the community at large is respectfully invited to the STOCK OF MERCHANDISE, to which additions are weekly made, for sale by THEODORE A. PECK, AT THE OLD STAND, Court House Square, BURLINGTON, VT.</p>	<p>Winter Arrangement VERMONT CENTRAL RAIL ROAD.</p> <p><i>Trains Leave,</i></p> <p>For the East, 7.25 A.M. For the North, 10.45 A.M. For the East, 1.33 P.M. For the North, 6.15 P.M.</p> <p><i>Arrive,</i></p> <p>From the North, 8.20 A.M. From the East, 11.25 A.M. From the North, 2.25 P.M. From the East, 7.10 P.M.</p>
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Where will be found in large assortments,

Drugs, Medicines, Leeches,
SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS,
Mineral Teeth and Dental Articles, Saline or Mineral Waters,
PATENT MEDICINES GENUINE,
Soda Fountains & Syrups, Brushes, Combs, Perfumes, Soaps,
Inks, Blackings,
FANCY AND DOMESTIC ARTICLES,
Foreign & Domestic Cigars, Ground Spices, Glass-Ware, Dye-Stuffs,
Camphene, Burning Fluid, Candles, Bird Seed,
and everything directly and indirectly belonging to this business. As to Trusses, Shoulder Braces, Lace Stockings, Surgical and Dental Appliances generally, especially the late improvements, the variety will be constantly sustained. The articles of Sarsaparilla Water, Burning Fluid, Camphene, &c., whose quality depends upon freshness, the Proprietor will guaranty, as well as

ALL WARRANTABLE GOODS,

Ladies will find in the departments of
Brushes, Combs, Perfumes, Hair Oils, Culinary Articles, &c. one of the best assortments
to select from out of the Cities.

Physicians' Prescriptions
AND FAMILY RECIPES.
Put up with neatness and despatch, and medicines dispensed at all hours of night.
The Proprietor would here remind keepers of Hotels, Boarding Houses,
and All who buy largely, that he can give them advantages which will overcome inducements to purchase in the Cities.

Spavin Cure, Mrs. Morse's Celebrated Vegetable Compound and many, many more promised relief from whatever ailed man or beast. Addiction to some of these "quack" medicines was due to their high alcohol and **opium** content.

Doctors treated whole families, their servants and in many cases their animals as well. They performed minor surgery, delivered babies, and worked to heal infections and diseases of all kinds. Patients could not call doctors by telephone when needed. Nor could doctors make visits by car for neither the phone nor the automobile had been invented. To carry out their duties they traveled far, often on foot, through mud

and snow. Their fees were small by present standards: \$.50 for most visits, \$.25 for tooth extractions and \$2.00 for setting bones. **Barter** was often the mode of payment, frequently in the form of goods or services that the patient could offer. Cutting firewood, mending shoes, or weaving a bolt of cloth might be fair exchange for a doctor's help delivering a baby or attending a sick aunt.

In the old days anyone who could find persons willing to be their patients could call himself a doctor. Not until 1876 did Vermont law control the practice of medicine.

But Vermont did have medical schools. In 1818 the state's first medical college was founded in Castleton. Five years later the University of Vermont organized its medical school. Woodstock followed in 1827. Of these only the University of Vermont's College of Medicine still operates.

It was not long before institutions opened to look after the ill and needy. In 1879 the state's first hospital established itself in Burlington. Its name was Mary Fletcher Hospital and its doors are still open today to care for the sick. St. Johnsbury was the site of Vermont's second hospital and the list grew and grew.



UVM Medical students dissecting a cadaver, circa 1900

A large problem of medical education was the lack of **cadavers** for research. In 1830 a group of angry farmers raided the Castleton Medical College to **retrieve** the body of a resident who had been dug up

from a fresh grave for dissection. Such raids took place from time to time.

In recent years medical research has helped scientists make breakthroughs in our understanding of disease and its cure. Many ailments that contributed to our ancestors' high death rate, such as small pox, diphtheria, tuberculosis, and poliomyelitis are now almost entirely wiped out in this country. Our life span is practically double that of one hundred years ago.



Barre's ambulance, circa 1900

But despite these great advancements there is still much we do not know. Heart disease, cancer and stroke are the top three killers in the United States today. Researchers continue to work so that maybe some day these too will join the ever-growing list of preventable and curable diseases.

VOCABULARY

abundance - a large quantity

jottings - hand written notes

ailment - illness

epidemic - diseases that spread easily affecting many people at once

premature - happening before the usual time

score - twenty; "scores" refers to an indefinite large number

conjunction - joining together in time or space

morbid - disease related; horrible or gruesome

diagnose - to identify a disease from its symptoms

foul - terrible or rotten

opium - addictive drug

barter - to trade one set of goods or services for another

cadaver - a dead body usually intended for dissection

retrieve - to bring back

