



Sierra Sacramento Valley Medicine  
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## The Future of Our Past



By F. James Rybka, MD

### A New Venue for the Medical History Museum

ONE OF SACRAMENTO'S GREATEST treasures is its unique and rich history. Our medical society, the oldest in the West, houses the SSVMS Medical History Museum, a legacy that is becoming larger and more valuable each year.

In 1999, the venerated Paul Guttman Medical Library was closed, although its most valuable books were retained. Space thereby became available for this museum which opened in 2001. Since opening, the number and size of the artifacts and educational exhibits has grown so fast that we have reached capacity. Even more impressive is the growth of educational services the museum has made available to the community.

Features and services of the Medical History Museum, which is located at 5380 Elvas Avenue in Sacramento, include :

**Virtual Tour** — Members who have not yet visited the slick, newly-constructed website should do so at [www.ssvms.org/museum](http://www.ssvms.org/museum). We are proud of it.

**Historic Books** — Review the bibliography. A few go back to the 1700s and many 19th century texts are not available online, or in medical libraries.

**Tours for School Children** — The number of 4th grade students from Sacramento area schools who tour the museum annually has grown from 557 in 2005, to 1248 in 2010. Last year, our docents escorted them on 49 different tours. Kaiser Permanente has kindly donated funds to provide school bus transportation for the children.

**Educational Lectures** — Numbering about three a year, these are given by professors, authors and other advocates of medical history. They are free and open to the public.

**Oral History** — Struggles endured by earlier Sacramento physicians have been recorded and videotaped. These are frequently spiked with colorful yarns and are fun to watch or listen to.

**Artifacts** — We are already the largest medical museum in the West, but we are now in a crisis for more exhibition and storage space.

**Showcasing Medical History to Visitors** — We are open to the public almost every weekday. Physician docents are available for pre-arranged tours.

## Challenges Ahead

One of the Medical Society's missions is to promote the art and science of medicine. The museum has certainly accomplished this by entertaining and educating thousands of students and members of the general public over the years. But there are challenges: the museum is not located in the best strategic area for visitors; it's closed on the weekends; its cramped space limits what can be exhibited; and like all museums, it has limited financial resources.



*Dr. Robert LaPerriere shows Historical Committee members a newly-acquired artifact. L to R, Dr. LaPerriere, Dr. Irma West, Dr. Margaret Masters (partly hidden) and the late Dr. Otto Neubuerger.*

The Historical Committee has asked the Board of Directors to appoint a panel to investigate the future of the museum, its location and operations. Some of the options might include:

- Keep the museum, but find a new location and partners to help fund its operation.
- Create a California Health Science Museum. This idea, initiated by Dr. Robert LaPerriere, has sparked the interest of members on the Historical Committee. Our collection would be folded into an expanded new museum composed of a consortium of other health science professional groups such as nursing, dentistry and pharmacy with an augmented mission to include education in the health sciences as well as medical history. Were the area hospitals to join, they could showcase not only their own history, but some of the latest advances they offer.

Some of these associations already have historical collections which, like ours, are too small to thrive independently. The fact that the California Medical Association, the California Nurses Association, California Dental Association, California Hospital Association and the California Pharmacists Association are all headquartered here, renders Sacramento the most logical location for this new entity.



*Wooden immobilization splint circa 1880 used by Dr. Locke of Lockeford, CA*

At present, we are fortunate indeed to have as our non-salaried curator, Dr. LaPerriere, who has devoted years to the growth and mission of the museum. A passionate aficionado of local history, he has become well-known in the Sacramento Area History Network, the Sacramento Association of Museums, the Old City Cemetery, and the Sacramento Pioneer Association. Whatever our next move is, we could not have a better person at the helm.



*The "iron lung," shown here, was a medical ventilator used to enable a person to breathe when normal muscle control had been lost, such as with polio.*

### **Need for new volunteers and ideas**

What better time could be found than now for a new generation of volunteers to join in and help SSVMS take on this community project as it develops from scratch?

***The past isn't dead. It's not even past! —William Faulkner***

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*Comments or letters, which may be published in a future issue, should be sent to the author's email or to [eLetterSSVMedicine@gmail.com](mailto:eLetterSSVMedicine@gmail.com)*

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