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# Star of the Republic Museum

Governor's Office  
Texas State Documents

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## Notes

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## "Wond'rous Cures Performed": Medicine in Nineteenth Century Texas

**DR. C. V. GIRARD'S  
GINGER BRANDY**

117 - ROBERTSON, DEBERRY & WILBURN, 30 FULTON ST. N. Y. N. Y.

"A CERTAIN CURE" for Cholera Colic Cramps Dysentery, Chills & Fever, is a delightful & healthy beverage.

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brain. Throughout the nineteenth century mental illness often was seen as a moral failure of the individual and a social disgrace for the entire family. It was seldom openly discussed or even written about in memoirs.

When specifically mentioned, mental illness was often referred to with euphemisms. George Childress, a signer and some would say author of the Texas Declaration of Independence, committed suicide in 1843 by disemboweling himself with a bowie knife. On his death bed, he alluded to his periodic

After being appointed superintendent in 1874, Dr. David Richard Wallace was appalled at the conditions and immediately implemented changes. "The first thing he did was to throw away the straight jackets. Then he said the inmates must be cleaned up and deloused. There being no running hot water he sent his wife to buy all the iron wash pots she could find. The patients were bathed, their old clothes replaced with new ones. Next Dr. Wallace said they must have something to do. A shop was opened where they

barbers, and medical students are the chief operators in this line of dental surgery." Because of the massive doses of calomel routinely prescribed by physicians, (its side effects included destroying the bone around the teeth), tooth loss was very common. Dentures were made of "sea-horse" (walrus tusk) and human teeth. They used to say of a prosperous dentist: "Why he is rich, he has a whole keg of teeth."

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**People believed that a sore tooth had a "tooth worm" (the nerve), and if a red ant were placed in the hollow of the tooth, it would sting and kill the tooth worm, and end the pain.**

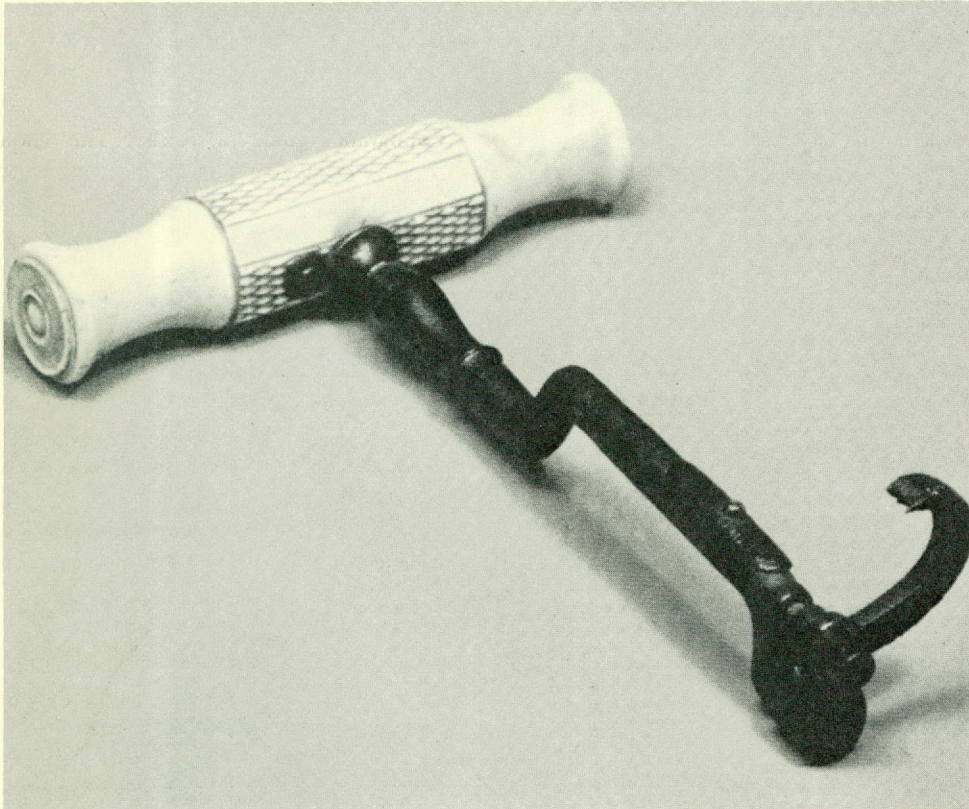
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People were vaguely aware of dental hygiene, and often wiped their teeth with a rag, or used toothpicks and toothbrushes. Purchased brushes were of bone and bristle and cost 25 to 50 cents in the Republic period. Peach tree limbs and other soft woods were used to produce the homemade variety. For cleaning the teeth there were also tooth powders and toothpastes. Republic President David Burnet's recipe for toothpaste consisted of myrrh, sage, and honey.

During this period there was a pervasive superstition concerning the "tooth worm." People believed that a sore tooth had a "tooth worm" (the nerve), and if a red ant were placed in the hollow of the tooth, it would sting and kill the tooth worm, and end the pain.

By the late nineteenth century, professional dentists were more common, and their equipment included chairs with cuspidors attached, and foot engines or dental drills, with laughing gas (nitrous oxide) being used as an anesthesia.

In 1857, Don Egbert Erastus, the author of *Information about Texas*, commented on the state of Texas medicine: "I would further caution new-comers who desire peace, prosperity, and health, to avoid lawyers, *doctors*, *quack medicines*, and all other unseemly monsters."



Tooth extractor, or 'toothkey,' with bone handle

bouts of depression by noting that he "suffered from the effects of an over-sensitive mind."

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**"He suffered from the effects of an over-sensitive mind."**

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During the early nineteenth century, the insane went to jail if they were violent, or were kept at home if harmless. If the family could afford it, they employed a private keeper. In Texas, public care for the mentally ill began in 1861, with the opening of the "State Lunatic Asylum" at Austin.

could work with their hands and soon the therapy began to show its effects. Investigation uncovered some musicians among the patients, so a band was organized and Dr. Wallace arranged for weekly dances." For his efforts, Dr. Wallace was given the title, "Father of Modern Psychiatry in Texas."

Another aspect of Texas medicine was dentistry, although early in the nineteenth century it was not usually practiced by professionally trained dentists. In the 1840's, one commentator noted: "It seems to be common opinion that anyone can pull teeth, who has a turnkey, and sufficient physical strength to use it; accordingly, blacksmiths,

## ***PREMIERING AT THE MUSEUM:***

On March 5, 1989, the Star of the Republic Museum will present a major new exhibition, *'Wond'rous Cures Performed': Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Texas*. Produced by Sherry Humphreys, the Curator of Exhibits, this exhibit will examine the mainstream 'heroic medicines' of the Texas frontier, from 'therapeutic vampirism' (bleeding), to folk remedies and patent medicines. *'Wond'rous Cures Performed'* will also depict the quackery and pseudo-sciences of the times, including Thomsonian medicine, phrenology, 'electro-magneto' devices and the 'Medicine Show.' The exhibit contains a fascinating collection of artifacts, from medical instruments, such as lancets used in bleeding, and folk artifacts like a 'madstone' for curing rabies, to a dental 'toothkey' and a 'phrenology skull.'

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Included in the exhibit will be a 25 minute video on the medicine show, entitled, *Prometheus Proud's Miracle Medicine Show*. Produced by the Navasota Theatre Alliance, with funding provided by a grant from the Arts Council of the Brazos Valley, the video will be performed as a live play several times in the Park Auditorium on Sunday, March 5, as part of the Texas Independence Day Celebration.

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The Museum will also premier a new orientation audio-visual, *The Republic of Texas*, in the Museum theater. Bill Moyers, presently with Public Affairs Television, New York, will provide the narration. A graduate of the University of Texas, Mr. Moyers served as President Lyndon Johnson's Press Secretary in the 1960's, was a commentator on the CBS evening news, and has been responsible for several television documentaries, including 'A Walk Through The 20th Century,' and most recently, a series of interviews with the philosopher, Joseph Campbell, entitled 'The Power of Myth.' *The Republic of Texas* includes an original musical score by the historical musicologist, Charles Davis. Mr. Davis produced the music for the new IMAX movie, *The Alamo*, in San Antonio, as well as music for the commercial television movie, *Sam Houston*. Funding for the project was provided by a grant from the Meadows Foundation of and for Texas. Using a laser videodisc format and stereo sound system, this 20 minute presentation will vividly portray a dramatic period in the history of Texas.

P. O. Box 317 Washington, Texas 77880

## Notes

## Star of the Republic Museum

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On Sunday, March 5, 1989, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park will officially celebrate the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence. This year's special guest will be Mr. Clayton Moore, or 'The Lone Ranger.' At 1:30 p.m. there will be a free concert by the Houston Pops, ending with the 'William Tell Overture' which will introduce 'The Lone Ranger.' The Navasota Theatre Alliance will perform 'Prometheus Proud's Miracle Medicine Show' several times during the day in the Park auditorium.

In addition to the concert and play, there will be numerous other activities occurring in the Park. At 12:00 p.m., the awards ceremony for the Republic of Texas Art Contest will be held in the Museum theater. The contest is sponsored by the Museum between the fourth graders at the John C. Webb Middle School, Navasota, and the Brenham Intermediate School, Brenham. Reenactment groups, including the 'Texas Army' and the 'Brazoria Militia,' will be dressed in period costumes while demonstrating military skills, early firearm techniques, and portraying historical events. The Blinn College Concert Band and the Brenham High School Band will provide additional music. There will also be cloggers and other traditional art and craft demonstrations, along with a Texas-size birthday cake. You are welcome to join us as we wish Texas a 'Happy Birthday.'

Last year the Museum's education programs operated at capacity levels, especially in the spring. To be sure of obtaining a tour reservation, you should schedule your visit as soon as possible. For further information on reservations or the Museum's school outreach programs, please contact the Curator of Education.

A portion of the Museum's general operating funds has been provided through a grant from the Institute of Museum Services.

**EXHIBIT SCHEDULE**  
**"Wond'rous Cures Performed"**  
March 5 through October, 1989

**MUSEUM SCHEDULE**  
Open Daily  
10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m

*Administered by Blinn College, Brenham, Texas*

Director . . . . . Houston McGaugh  
Curator of Exhibits . . . . . Sherry B. Humphreys  
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