

## Shelton Historical Society gets glimpse at 'health care' in 19th century

By Patricia Villers

SHELTON - Imagine having to act as your own doctor. That's what life would have been like if you lived in the 19th century.

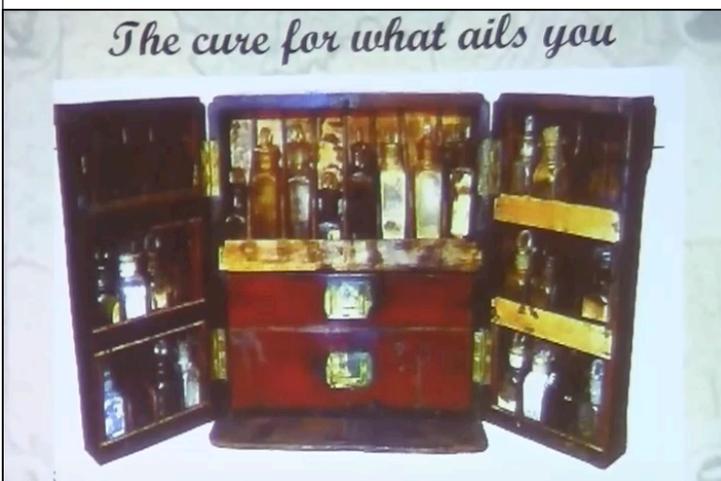
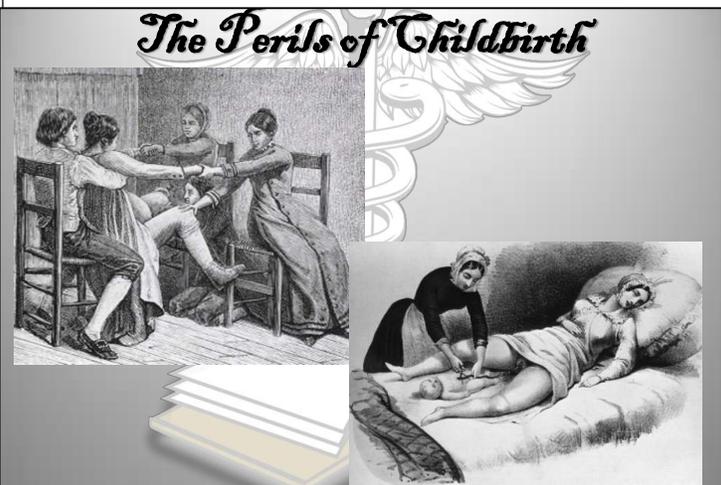
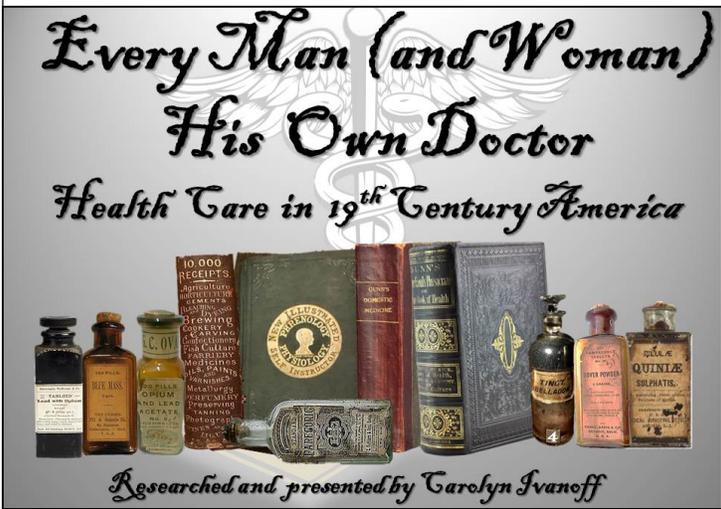
Historian and retired Shelton school administrator Carolyn Ivanoff recently spoke about "health care" in the 1800s at the annual meeting of the Shelton Historical Society at Huntington Congregational Church.

Ivanoff presented "Every Man (and Woman) His Own Doctor," a program that highlighted some of the unique medical practices of the time.

"Most medical care was provided in the home," she said. "There were no nursing classes until after the Civil War." Ivanoff cited an interesting example of home health care. She said President Harry Truman's mother Martha underwent surgery on the family's kitchen table.

Ivanoff said one in 30 women died in childbirth, and before the Civil War one in five pregnancies was terminated.

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Forms of birth control in Victorian America (Queen Victoria reigned from 1837-1901) such as abortion, pills, and barriers “were readily available and legal,” she said.

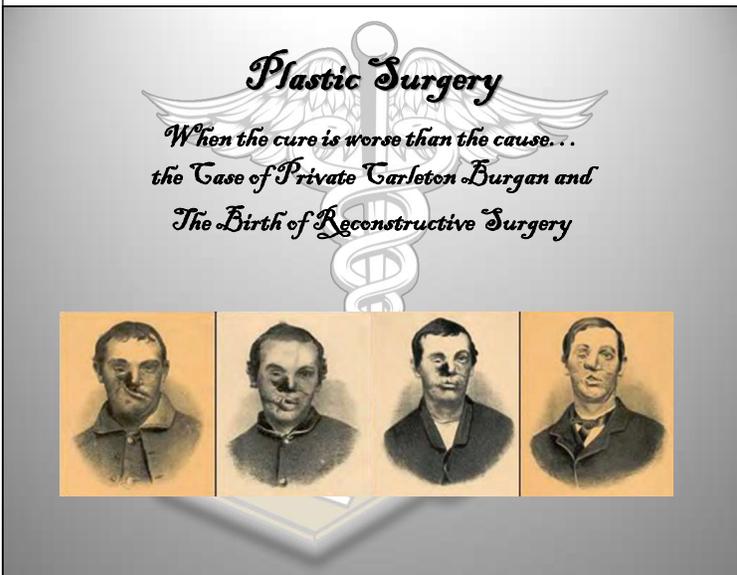
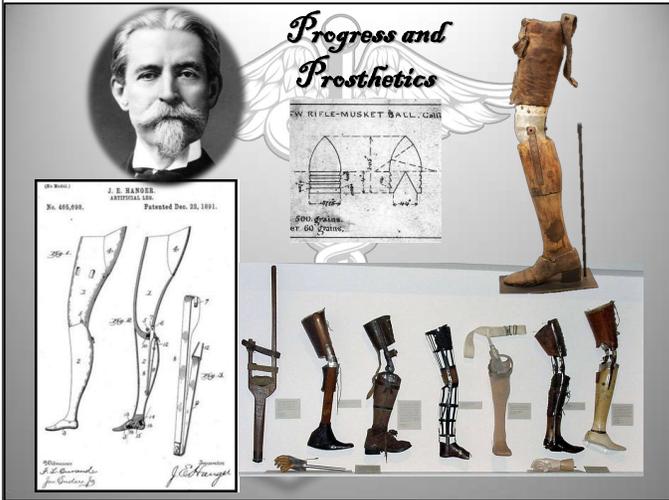
Ivanoff noted a newspaper article stating pregnancy started with a “quickening.” That is the belief that the movement of a child dictated the beginning of a soul.

With a nod to present-day disagreements over abortion and when life begins, Ivanoff pointed out how history often repeats itself. “There were anti-vaxxers from the beginning,” she added.

Vaccinations were mandatory during the Civil War. Each summer there were outbreaks of cholera, which Ivanoff said would kill a person in a day, while typhoid would “take a while to kill you.” President Lincoln’s son, Willie, died of typhoid in 1862.

Consumption, known as “the white plague,” ran in families and killed one in seven of all people who had ever lived, she said.

During the Civil War medical personnel learned from wounded soldiers. The war gave birth to the nursing profession, the triage method of caring for the wounded, and reconstructive surgery.



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Directory of the Borough of West Chester for 1855

## When a birthday bouquet almost doesn't bloom

By Robert C. Pollack

It happened Saturday before last when I decided to send a birthday present to a friend who had celebrated my birthday with me in November.

I called a well-known online florist that I have ordered from for several years. After the usual keypad menus, someone named Roxanne came to the phone -- and my adventure began.



Sending flowers remotely is not new. In this 1955 newspaper advertisement, you could order flowers by phone through FTD. We wonder about the accuracy of many customers' messages to the recipient. The human element has not changed over time...

of 'Pollack'. I calmly corrected her. Then she got my address wrong. Less calmly, I again corrected her. Finally, she got Elise's address wrong.

I screamed the right address into the phone. Twenty-five minutes had passed. Finally, she changed screens to process my order. After a long pause, she came back and said: "I'm sorry, sir, but this order cannot be delivered until Tuesday."

"Tuesday?" I screamed into the phone. "Her birthday is Monday. They *MUST* be delivered Monday."

"We cannot do that with this order," she replied in her best business voice.

"What can I do for you, sir?" she began sweetly.

"I would like to send a dozen roses Monday to a friend in Cheshire on her birthday," I replied matter of factly.

She quoted a price and then I realized for only a little more money, I could send two dozen roses, which I decided to do. I gave her a message I wanted affixed to the card that would accompany the flowers.

I am a retired journalist and have been trying to get Elise -- a talented writer -- to put her life story into novel form and get it published since she has a great story to tell.

"From one writer to another," my message read. "Happy Birthday. Bob P.S.: May the years ahead see you become a published author."

I had Roxanne repeat the message to me. "Happy Birthday. From to another."

"No," I interrupted. "Not from to another. From one writer to another." She corrected it and read back. "P.S."

"PS what?" I barked back, my voice rising. "Just P.S., sir," she replied.

I was starting to crumble as I again repeated what the P.S. should say.

Now, finally, she asked for my full name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and my credit card information.

With grim determination, I asked her to read the information back to me.

First, she spelled my name 'Pollick' instead

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## When a birthday bouquet almost doesn't bloom

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My crumbling was complete. I asked her what she COULD send Monday and she finally presented me with a beautiful floral arrangement that cost more than double what the roses did.

"I don't *care* about the money," I growled into the phone. "Send them."

Now -- to my disbelief -- I had to repeat all my information from scratch. Finally, 45 minutes after I had made the call, the order was complete. She assured me the flowers would be sent Monday.

I hung up the phone, exhausted. And then wrote a less than glowing account of my experience with Roxanne when the florist sent me an e-mail asking for my comments on my experience.

Monday arrived and I was getting nervous so I called the florist to check on my order. Someone named Conroy took my call and he couldn't have been nicer. He was appalled at how I had been treated and assured me he would track my order down and make sure it would be delivered as promised.

But he couldn't find my order. My hands were shaking. But he finally found it. Roxanne had spelled my name on the order form 'Pollick'.

"Then how could the credit card have been approved?" I shouted into the phone. "Well, perhaps she got your name right when she got it approved," he calmly replied. "Don't worry, I am tracking your order right now and am on the phone with the florist."

I waited as the minutes ticked by. "Great news," Conroy's voice came back. "Your flowers are being delivered as we speak." It was 2 p.m. Monday. "Thank God," I gasped.

He repeated Elise's address to me to be on the safe side. The number and street name were correct. The name was correct.

And then he identified the town. "Van Nuys," he said. "California."

"California? California?" I screamed into the phone. NO. NO. Wrong town. Wrong state.

"Cheshire, Connecticut. Connecticut. Connecticut." I was babbling now.

"Oh my god," Conroy responded. "Don't worry. I *WILL* fix this."

He called the California florist and cancelled the order. Then spoke to a florist who delivers to Cheshire and said she was arranging the flowers as we spoke. But then came the bad news. They did not deliver after 6 p.m. and her delivery man was on the road.

"Tell her I'll pay extra to have them delivered this afternoon," I screamed into the phone.

Conroy returned with an additional charge. "Do it. Do it. Do it," I barked like some deranged parrot. Conroy assured me the flowers would be delivered and I hung up the phone.

The hours passed. No word from Elise.

Until finally, I got the following text: "The flowers are lovely, but I'm confused," she wrote. "Today is not my birthday."

I started to laugh. And have been laughing ever since.

*Robert C. Pollack was the long time Managing Editor of the Evening Sentinel. He resides in Ansonia.*

