

Collecting the progression of medical equipment

BY LOIS BELL
SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

SHERIDAN — The name on a brass plate on the walnut box reads in a script style, “Chas. F. Williams, M.D.” Inside, the maroon velvet-lined box holds the medical instruments for a field surgeon.

This medical kit most likely belonged to a Civil War field surgeon. It is a prized item in a collection of medical equipment owned by Dave Schwaiger, a registered nurse.

The kit holds some interesting pieces.

“There’s a trepanation that was used to bore a hole in the skull to take pressure off from bleeding as the result of a brain injury,” Schwaiger said.

Some other pieces in the kit are a cloth and metal tourniquet and a bone saw. The tourniquet would be placed before amputation with the saw. Both would be used by a military field surgeon, especially when irreparable damage was caused to the bone from a musket or cannon ball. Amputation would be necessary to prevent gangrene.

“This equipment is antiquated by today’s standards but probably saved a lot of lives,” Schwaiger said. “Some of the equipment looks like torture devices. These surgical tools had to be incredibly valuable to the people who used them.”

Medical equipment would often come in cases with brass clasps and velvet lining.

“The pride in the workmanship is really something,” Schwaiger said. “Could you imagine a doctor coming into your home, opening this beautiful box, and all these precision instruments coming out?”



COURTESY PHOTO

Dave Schwaiger models the use of a cloth tourniquet that would be applied by a field surgeon prior to amputation with a bone saw. Schwaiger, a registered nurse with the Sheridan Senior Center, has a collection of medical equipment spanning almost 150 years.

One of the first pieces Schwaiger acquired was a cherry wood dental cabinet. He converted it to an armoire and built in felt drawers with divisions that

he uses to house some of his other collectibles.

Schwaiger’s collection includes a doctor’s bag with obstetrical equipment. Doctors carried their medical bags during an era when they made house calls and delivered babies at home. That time period makes the doctor’s bags antiques. Schwaiger discovered a hidden compartment with a metal drawer in the bottom of a doctor’s bag. The drawer looked like a small safe deposit box that held sterilized equipment.

“They would sterilize their equipment in an autoclave and reuse them,” Schwaiger said.

His collection includes medical drapes made of cloth and not disposable material as today. Syringes were glass not plastic. Needles were metal.

“Needles had to be sharpened after so many uses,” Schwaiger said.

Schwaiger’s collection also includes clamps, retractors, towel clips and other equipment needed for exploratory surgery during the days when doctors had to open a patient to explore.

He also has an eye surgeon’s kit.

“I’m not sure how old it is. The scalpels are so fine,” Schwaiger said. “You probably would want them that fine when you’re working on someone’s eye. Much of the surgical equipment was made in Germany.”

Schwaiger’s collection also includes lab equipment. One piece he has is a balance scale.

“You would put your weights on one side and measure your medicine on the other side,” Schwaiger said. “It’s a really cool piece.”

Schwaiger estimates that his collection marks the progression of medical equipment and supplies for almost 150 years.

“Back in the old days, medicine was in tablets,” Schwaiger said. “You’d dissolve the tablets in sterile water and then inject them.”

Schwaiger can speak to the changes in medical equipment over the decades.

He has worked in the medical field for more than 42 years as an ambulance attendant (now called emergency medical technicians), an orderly, a licensed practical nurse and a registered nurse.

His path brought him to the Sheridan Veterans Affairs Medical Center in 1986. He retired from the VA in 2013.

Today, Schwaiger is a registered nurse for the Sheridan Senior Center. “Since I’m in the field itself, I’ve seen the evolution of equipment over time,” Schwaiger said. “Like glass intravenous bottles where now we use plastic bags.”

Schwaiger received the collection from his father who had a career as a pharmacist.

“He would buy up supplies from doctors’ offices that closed,” Schwaiger said. “Then he branched out to dentist offices. Dad acquired some interesting things.”

Construction update – We’re in the home stretch

What started as a dream six years ago is becoming a reality before our eyes. In 2011, we completed a needs assessment gathering information from our customers and the community. We asked what was needed to serve older adults and their families in the years to come and the community responded.

Sheridan has always embraced and valued its older citizens. The Celebrating Generations and Building Community Campaign demonstrated this support in terms of dollars to expand and renovate the space. Funds were also donated to add to our endowment fund. We are so grateful for the community’s support. Thank you!

Our kitchen and dining room at 211 Smith St. are now under construction. It is unrecognizable to those who dined there just a month ago. Noon dining and home-delivered meals are being prepared and served at Sheridan Junior High School,

which has been a wonderful alternative. We appreciate everyone’s patience, flexibility and good old-fashioned effort in making all of this happen.

In order to clear out in time for school we will be moving back to 211 Smith St. at the end of August. Details on this will be coming soon. Finishing touches and completion of the project will be done in September and we are planning for a grand opening celebration in mid-September.

Watch for news on this too in the coming weeks.

What have I learned through this project? First and foremost, I have learned that the stereotype that “old people are set in their ways” is simply not true. The changes for some during construction have been big as the senior center is “the hub” of activity and their day. We have witnessed firsthand however that people are stepping up to try new things, change schedules and start new routines. People are volunteering for the first time and creating new relationships. We have been spending time in new places and spending more time outdoors. Some people are quick to embrace the changes and some need some time. This is true of people at any age, don’t you think?

Actually, I have been seeing older people doing new things every day for a long time now. Moving to a brand-new town and a new home, starting a new job, taking a new class, singing a solo in choir, acting in their first play, learning to dance, falling in love, making new friends, taking on new roles in their family and, yes, even being excited and learning about new technology.

Set in their ways? No, it just isn’t so. In fact, older people as a whole really deal and adapt to more change, not less.

About myself I have learned that despite the disruption, I really do like construction projects. They are exciting because every day you see change and progress.

I have a tremendous respect for the skills and talents of the people working on these projects from start to finish.

The architect starts the process and the construction contractors, electricians, plumbers, roofing, heating and air conditioning contractors, landscapers and many more get it done. I think I will really miss the activity and the great people I get to see every day.

As we move closer to completion of the project please keep posted for updates and new information through the Sheridan Press and other local media. The fall newsletter that will be out in September will have a lot of important information. Changes in our operations and the flow of activity will undoubtedly be different too. So even though construction will be winding down there will be more new and exciting things ahead.

Please stay tuned!

GUEST COLUMNIST CARMEN RIDEOUT is the executive director of the Sheridan Senior Center. Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan Community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.



CARMEN RIDEOUT

Welcome to the 2017 Sheridan Rodeo!

Sheridan Senior Center
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www.sheridanseniorcenter.org

Fun and Food

BUILD YOUR OWN SALAD Mondays - Fridays
Entrees and kiosk include sides, dessert and drink.

Entrée Choice*	or	Soup Kiosk
Tue – ½ Turkey Sandwich		Salad Bar Available
Wed – Chicken Enchilada w/Salsa		While Lunch is At Junior High
Thu – Beef Stroganoff		
Fri – BBQ Pork Sandwich		
Sat – Baked Potato Bar/chili or ham & Cheese		No Salad Bar Available on Saturday or Sunday
Sun – Hot Turkey Sandwich		
Mon – Stuffed Peppers		Salad Bar Available

*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals

Activities in the new Fitness Room at the Senior Center ACCESS NORTH DOOR ONLY

Tue – Tai Chi	8:30 a.m.	Fitness Room/Senior Center
Wed – Gentle Yoga	10:30 a.m.	First United Methodist Church
Thu – Inspired Walkers	9:00 a.m.	Lobby Senior Center
Fri – Conversation Pit	8:00 a.m.	Day Break Building
Mon – July 17 Happy Feet!	8:00 a.m.	Fitness Room/Senior Center
Mon – July 17 B.A.M.!	9:30 a.m.	Fitness Room/Senior Center
Mon – July 17 Table Tennis	1:00 p.m.	Fitness Room/Senior Center

Lunch Service Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., 365 days a year
Join us for lunch in our temporary lunchroom at Sheridan Junior High, 500 Lewis St
Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079

Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240, 211 Smith Street:
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Mondays – Fridays. Closed weekends and holidays during the 2017 summer.
Help at Home Services, 675-1978, 232 North Brooks: Mondays – Fridays.
Day Break Adult Care Services, 674-4968, 241 Smith Street: Mondays – Fridays.

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