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Medical museum looking for a home

Antiques stored in Fort Myers office

BY MICHELLE L. START
Correspondent

Patent medicine bottles line the walls and an old wicker wheel chair sits in the middle of the room, gathering dust. They represent healthcare from days past and are intended to be shared with the public, but instead remain shut up in a small office on Fowler Street in Fort Myers.

In 2000, some doctors decided to start a medical museum that would let the public see the progress of medicine locally. They intended to raise the money to rent or pur-



PHOTO MICHELLE L. START

Dr. Roger Scott peers into a display case filled with medical memorabilia. Scott and others have been searching for a place to display their antique medical equipment.

chase a permanent home, but that dream has yet to come true.

The Fowler Street office does not meet codes for public gathering locations.

"You have to have certain safety measures, so we're basically working-storage instead," said Dr. Roger Scott, one of the museum's co-founders. "It's just a matter of time, though. They say it takes about 10 years from when you start to have a home."

While Lee Memorial Hospital and Edison College have both promised space to display objects, neither will donate a permanent, public exhibition area.

Scott dreams of a day when local children can wander through the museum, marveling at the differences that time has wrought. But, first the museum needs a permanent home and someone to provide the funds to support it.

Like an excited child, he scurries from one object to another, delighted to show off each. Some of the items came from Scott's own personal collection, including a manual typewriter and the desk he had in his first office in 1958. He also has chairs from both his "colored" and white waiting rooms.

"I've had these all of these years," he said. "Our museum starts with something from yesterday. I can spend all day talking about one case or one instrument."

In one area, there is a turn of the cen-

tury operating table under a large set of old operating lights. In another, there's a birthing chair from the early 1900s. Scott reaches to the top of a book shelf, pulling down a 1862 leather bound copy of Henry Gray's Anatomy and then flips through it, showing off old illustrations of deformities.

In the back of the storage area, Scott has compiled an array of books, items and other military medical memorabilia. One book describes how doctors handled those who died from poisonous gases during World War II.

Perhaps the museum's most prized possession, though, is a pigskin medical license issued to Dr. Otis D. Brungard in 1897. In a file cabinet in the back of the office, Scott has stored Brungard's Florida medical license. It was the third license issued in the state of Florida and it was issued when Brungard retired from practicing up north and moved to LaBelle, only to find the town without a doctor.

When Brungard's daughter, also a doctor in LaBelle, died a few years ago, she left the museum much of her family's collection of memorabilia, including a desk and various items used by both father and daughter between 1897 and 1977.

All of the items have been donated and still more are coming in. Scott has limited resources and depends on volunteers to clean and catalogue all of the donations. ■

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