

The Dawn of Modern Medicine: Selections from the Medical Artifact Collection of M. Donald Blaufox, MD, PhD

Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut
November 24, 2018 – April 7, 2019



A Lister Spray machine, developed around 1880 by Arnold and Sons. From the M. Donald Blaufox Collection.
Photo courtesy of the Dittrick Medical History Museum.

GREENWICH, CT, November 1, 2018 – A new exhibition opens on November 24 at the Bruce Museum that presents a thought-provoking examination of how far medical technology advanced across the nineteenth century – and how once-revolutionary concepts and instruments became commonplace.

The exhibition will showcase approximately 100 artifacts from the collection of M. Donald Blaufox, MD, PhD, ranging from surgical tools to quack patent medicines to early x-ray tubes, telling the story of how various branches of diagnostic and therapeutic medicine evolved.

“*The Dawn of Modern Medicine* exhibition will open our visitors’ eyes to the remarkable history of medical instruments,” says Dr. Daniel Ksepka, Curator of Science at the Bruce Museum. “Early in the nineteenth century, doctors were still bleeding patients, and electricity and radioactivity were thought to have great health benefits. By the beginning of the twentieth



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century, we had sterilization, x-rays, blood pressure measurement, and countless other medical tools that we take for granted today.”

As new discoveries and inventions transformed the field of medical practice, the appearance of diagnostic and surgical instruments changed dramatically. Before the Germ Theory of Disease was accepted, medical instruments were ornately crafted from beautiful materials but could not be sterilized. Post-operative infection killed many patients. As the concept of sterilization became understood, stainless steel tools replaced instruments made of wood, ivory, and ebony.

One intriguing instrument to be displaced was the Lister Spray machine. A brass boiler with weighted valves, rubber tubes, and a glass jar on a wooden base, this device was invented in 1870 by Joseph Lister. It sprayed a carbolic acid solution to sterilize instruments and wounds during surgery.

“The concept of sterilization changed the look of medical instruments forever,” says Dr. Ksepka. “Viewers may be impressed with the meticulous craftsmanship of early instruments but will surely be thankful they live in the modern era of anesthesia, antiseptics, and high-tech equipment.”

Says Dr. Blafox of the unmatched collection of historic diagnostic instruments he has assembled over the past four decades: Some objects “were acquired simply because they have some medical significance, others for their beauty, but all of them because they help to understand the evolution of medicine over the centuries.” More of the collection can be viewed at the online Museum of Historical Medical Artifacts, <https://www.mohma.org>, created by Blafox.

Dr. Blafox is Professor and University Chairman Emeritus of the Department of Nuclear Medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine as well as a former Chairman of the American Board of Nuclear Medicine. He is the author of 292 peer reviewed articles and book chapters on Nuclear Medicine, Hypertension, and Medical History. He has authored or edited 25 books; His latest books are *Blood Pressure Measurement: An Illustrated History*, and *An Ear to the Chest: The Evolution of the Stethoscope*.

The Dawn of Modern Medicine: Selections from the Medical Artifact Collection of M. Donald Blafox, MD, PhD, will be on display in the Museum’s Science Gallery through April 7, 2019. The Bruce Museum is grateful for support of this exhibition from the Charles M. and Deborah G. Royce Exhibition Fund and the Connecticut Office of the Arts.

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About the Bruce Museum

The Bruce Museum is located in a park setting just off I-95, exit 3, at 1 Museum Drive in Greenwich, Connecticut. The Museum is also a 5-minute walk from the Metro-North Greenwich Station. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm; closed Mondays



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and major holidays. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and students with ID, and free for members and children less than five years. Individual admission is free on Tuesday. Free on-site parking is available and the Museum is accessible to individuals with disabilities. For additional information, call the Bruce Museum at 203-869-0376 or visit brucemuseum.org.

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