On November 22, 1897, Sallie Ellicott visited Dr. Iddings to discuss admitting her nephew to a psychiatric hospital. Before actually examining the patient, Dr. Iddings first discussed the issue with Justice of the Peace, A.F. Fairall. Following his patient evaluation, Dr. Iddings then contacted Deputy Sheriff, Artemus Sullivan, to arrange for the patient's transport the next day. During the night, however, the patient was clearly agitated and someone from Mrs. Ellicott's household visited Dr. Iddings requesting medicine to "quiet his nerves & help him sleep".

The next morning, Harry (Henry James) Featherstone was transported from Sandy Spring to Spring Grove Asylum in Catonsville, Maryland by a Deputy Sheriff and a Justice of the Peace, without family or doctor. One wonders if such criminal-like treatment was typical for patients in psychological crisis in the 1890s or whether Featherstone was of particular danger to himself or others. Did he consent or was he forced against his will?

Trisha Gupta's exhibition, "Neurodiversity: Biodiversity," currently on view at the Museum, explores issues of modern mental health care and calls for celebration of a neuro-diverse world. While we do not know why Harry Featherstone was in crisis, Gupta’s lens of compassion and dignity makes the seemingly heavy-handedness with which he was treated that much more striking.
*Emil’s Pick: [Meeting minutes: Mutual Improvement Association, 1889-1896](#)*

One hundred and thirty one Aprils ago, the Mutual Improvement Association met to discuss aging, animals, partnership, the best way to clean a copper kettle, and perhaps most importantly, their feelings.

The women read together a sermon by British activist and preacher, Laura Ormiston Chant, part of which they transcribed:

> “We have given up the idea of a physical or local heaven, and we are prepared to say in simple, direct words that Heaven is a condition and that hell is a condition too, and that if we choose we can light up the flames of a veritable hell inside of ourselves at a moments notice.”

It’s simultaneously affirming and disquieting to know that, one hundred and thirty one rainy Aprils ago, the Association may have held the same feelings of angst, tension, and collective anxiety that mark the 21st century so far. However, they wisely continued to note the next lines of Chant’s sermon:

> “Heaven is when, in a moment of depression and loneliness - it may be - our brother, man has come to us, needing our pity and our love. And through our great thoughtlessness of ourselves, and to our great thought of him - into his wan face there creeps the light which is the very light of God. The sunshine of gratitude and new hope that is Heaven, and it is ours, here and now.”

Understanding compassion and vulnerability as emotional lifelines out of the “veritable hell inside of ourselves” still feels radical now. Yet, it’s evidently old knowledge that mental health is public health. As we struggle to reconnect this year, reaching out, sharing hard emotions, accepting help, and caring for each other remains a vital challenge -- one that Trisha Gupta's work tackles head on.
Curiosities from the Collection

Undisputed is the fact that the pandemic revived interest in people’s bygone hobbies. While there were the usual suspects like bread baking and gardening, some more arcane pursuits also gained renewed popularity. Among the latter is textile tufting; think chenille blankets, hooked rugs, or similar handmade textiles with a base fabric and continuous looped pile on the front side.

Today’s “tufters” have a binary choice of tools, selecting between a basic, awl-like punch needle or an electric rug tufting gun to execute their designs. Imagine our surprise when we realized that a strange, early 20th century object encountered during the artifact inventory represents an intermediate step of mechanization between these two tufting options.

Admittedly this tool had us scratching our heads for some time, but perseverance and much Googling led us to the Susan Burr Hooked Rug Machine that was popular with tufting enthusiasts over a century ago! Do any you have experience using this elegant device?

New to the digital Archives…

Tax documents: Roger Brooke, 1823-1840

For many people, April’s “to-do” list is anchored by Tax Day and whatever anxiety or relief may accompany it. New to the digital archives -- and highlighted in honor of this annual reconciling of records – is a collection of account records for taxes paid by Roger Brooke (1774-1860).

You may notice these records, which span from 1823 through 1840, show Brooke owing a debt to the various Sheriffs of Montgomery County during this period, rather than to the county itself. Tax collection was among a Sheriff’s the civic duties from which he could receive a commission on certain levies.

In the first example in this collection, we see that Brooke settled a considerable amount – equivalent to over $6000 today – with Sheriff William O’Neal during O’Neal’s three-year term (1831-1833). In addition to county taxes, O’Neal also collected inheritance taxes and money on behalf of some of Brooke’s debtees.

The majority of the debt was paid in either cash or in judicial services as juror, witness, or Justice of the Levy Court. The final payment however, was made with two-and-a-half bushels of potatoes for the equivalent of $28.52. While a barter economy was alive and well during this time, this particular exchange does seem a bit odd by comparison. Perhaps this line item is now but a shadow of a once great story!

Love being transported to Sandy Spring of yesteryear?

The digital archive is your portal, but to keep it open we need your support.
Upcoming Transcribe-a-Thon: Spring into the Archives!

Monday, May 2 from 10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Explore the history of Sandy Spring through transcription!
For this month’s transcribe-a-thon, we are wrapping up the spring season with a few featured items from our collection from the Home Interest and Horticultural Societies, which began in late 19th century and are still active today!

Details and registration

More at the Museum:

Strawberry Festival
Garden Tour
MoCo Apprenticeship Celebration
More Events

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