

To be released later this spring
**NEVADA VETERINARIANS:
PROFILES OF DOCTORS IN A
CARING PROFESSION**
By **Richard G. Pugh**

Nevada Veterinarians tells the story of a group of contemporary men and women with expert training, who treat our dogs, cats, cattle, horses, and exotic pets and return them to health when they are sick. Their skills and research have helped practicing physicians achieve miraculous results. This book also delineates the history of veterinary medicine in Nevada. This book is dedicated to Nevada veterinarians, a caring profession.

***Frontier Surgeon and
Georgetown Medical
School Dean:
Reminiscences of George
Martin Kober, M.D.,
LL.D. (1850-1931)
Volume II***
Edited by **Anton P.
Sohn**

This book was written by Dr. Kober, who died before it could be published. It tells the story of life, Indian warfare, and healthcare in the Old West during the last years of the 19th century. Dr. Kober practiced medicine, ranched, and was involved in the community of Fort Bidwell-Cedarville, which is just east of Alturas, California. In 1901 he became dean of Georgetown Medical School and was involved in its move to prominence.

**Henry Bergstein,
One of the Most
Important
Doctors
in Early Nevada**

Most of the information in this article is taken from research by John P. Marschall, Ph.D, and Professor Emeritus at UNR, for a book he is writing on a comprehensive history of Jews in Nevada. According to Dr. Marschall, "No physician in

Nevada's early history was more influential than Henry Bergstein. His years of service to the state as a physician, legislator, organizer, and superintendent of the State Mental Hospital spanned the period from 1872 beyond 1920. Although he had left the state briefly in 1900 upon his second marriage to the widow of his political associate, C.C. Powning, he returned to Reno where he struggled to make a living. Sam Davis called upon Bergstein to contribute to Davis' forthcoming book, *History of Nevada*, with an essay on the history of medicine in the state. Bergstein was a natural choice for the project in view of his long tenure as a physician and his several administrative positions.

Henry Bergstein was born in Virginia in 1847 to German speaking parents. At an early age he came west and enrolled in the Medical College of the Pacific in San Francisco. He graduated in 1872,¹ and that same year he moved to Pioche, Nevada, where he was instrumental in forming an association of physicians. It appears that the primary reason



Photograph of State Mental Hospital late 1890s. Bergstein is back right.

for their meeting was to set or control fees. Some of the fees they agreed upon were as follows: office visits \$5, night visits \$10, delivery \$100, and operations \$100 and up.

Bergstein astutely observed that most Pioche citizens died from accidents, gunshot wounds, and knife injuries. He noted that of 108 “denizens” in the local graveyard, only three died of natural causes. He was even more alarmed that a local druggist treated miners with quicksilver (mercury), when they presented with constipation due to lead poisoning. The druggist “succeeded in giving them a [quick] passage to the grave.” At that time there were no licensing laws in Nevada, and because of an “everyman is his own doctor attitude,” few of these laws had been passed anywhere in the nation. To remedy the situation, Bergstein ran for the legislature in 1874. After being elected, he moved to Virginia City in 1875 with the intent of initiating legislation to limit the practice of medicine to qualified persons.

His law had several sections,

but most importantly, it required doctors to have a diploma from a chartered medical school and have it recorded with the county recorder.² Not only did Nevada not have a method to verify the diplomas, but there were no uniform requirements for medical schools in the U.S. Anyone could start a medical school and issue a diploma. Furthermore, many doctors graduated from foreign schools, which could not be verified. This included a plethora of Chinese doctors with diplomas written in Chinese script. Governor L.R. Bradley forced through a 10-year grandfather clause that permitted unqualified doctors to continue practice.

Doctors Bergstein, John Van Zant, and Benjamin Robinson were the leaders in forming the Nevada State Medical Society, which enforced the new law. The law was short lived, as it was later declared unconstitutional by the Nevada Supreme Court.

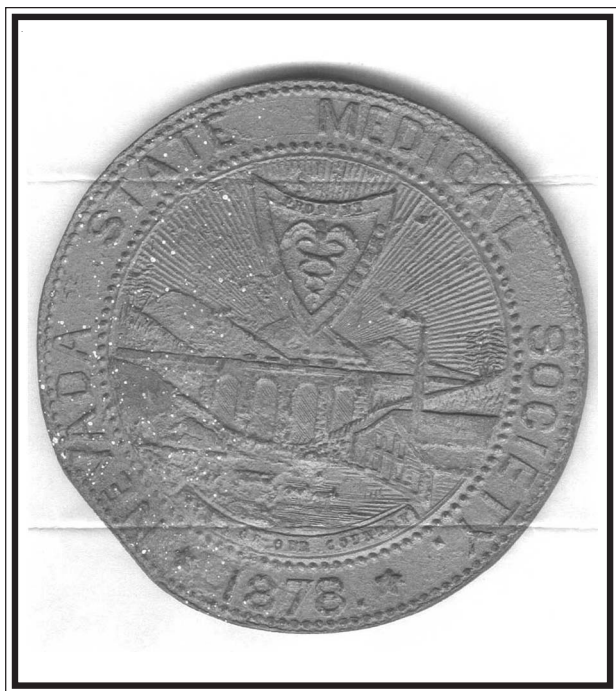
Medical practice aside, in 1880 Bergstein married Pauline

Michelson in San Francisco. Later that year he became entangled in a law suit with D.L. Brown, editor of *Footlight*, a Nevada newspaper, for an article that Bergstein claimed was derogatory to him as a physician. The case was dropped, but Bergstein continued to be controversial. In 1883 he was associated with Dr. Simeon Bishop, the second superintendent of the Nevada Hospital for Indigent Insane in Sparks. He accused Bishop of misappropriation of funds.

On the political side, Dr. Bergstein was lifelong member of the Democratic Party, but in 1892 he stepped down as chairman of the Washoe County Democratic Party to join the Silver Party.

Bergstein was instrumental in re-establishing the Nevada State Medical Society in 1894. As a result he was elected president of the society and state delegate to the American Medical Association. After 1895 the state society met regularly and members presented scientific papers. Bergstein’s contribution was a paper in 1912 on “Criminal Abortion from a Moral and Business Standpoint.”

His next controversial episode resulted after he succeeded Dr. Simeon Bishop as Superintendent of The Hospital for Indigent Insane in Sparks. Bergstein held this position from 1895 until 1898, when his term of office expired. Psychiatry was in its infancy, but Dr. Bergstein was in the forefront of humane care for the mentally ill. He stopped the “custom of placing the inmates on exhibit for the amusement of and to gratify the morbid curiosity of visitors,” and he changed the name to Nevada Hospital for Mental Disease.



Photograph of 1878 Nevada State Medical Society medallion. Dr. Bergstein and others formed the society in the 1870s. The medallion was found in the Virginia City dump in the 1930s by Adele Reed. It is now owned by Dr. James Jacobitz, San Francisco, who will present it to the School of Medicine later this year.

Bergstein would have been held in high esteem for these actions, but his feisty nature continued to get him in trouble.

In 1897 Bergstein fired his business manager, who retaliated by charging him with “performing unauthorized autopsies on patients, then throwing parts of their bodies in the nearby Truckee River.” At a hearing of the State Mental Hospital Commission, “Bergstein defended himself by arguing that the patients were deceased and without families, [sic] what he did with their bodies made no difference.” It appears from witnesses and by his statement that he disposed of human remains, including brain tissue, in the Truckee, but the Board of Commissioners dismissed the charges.

By this time his domestic life was becoming chaotic. He “deserted and abandoned” Pauline and divorced her two years later. She was to receive \$100/month for support of

their three children and a dwelling at Second and Chestnut (Arlington) in Reno, which is now the site of St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral. Court fights between the two would continue for years and were remarkable for Bergstein’s lack of paying support.

Bergstein was unable to establish a successful practice in Reno after his 1900 marriage to Clara Poor Powning, so the couple moved to San

Francisco. In spite of the move, financial problems continue to plague Henry. In 1907 hotelier J.M.

McCormack seized his surgical instruments (worth \$275) for an unpaid bill. By this time, he was separated from Clara, and he described himself as “...an old and broken man, with his earning capacity very much limited, and without any resources except his practice....” He also noted that his three sons had assumed the name Michelson, his ex-wife’s maiden name. That year her brother, Albert, received the Nobel Prize for Physics. Apparently Henry was paying some alimony, but Pauline accused him of being “addicted to gambling,” which resulted in his inability to pay full support.

By 1908 Bergstein was practicing again in Reno, and the 1910 census listed him as widowed. His private life difficulties apparently did not damaged his professional reputation, and he became prominent in Nevada’s medical circles. His responsibilities included Reno

City Physician, Reno City Health Inspector, and member of the Reno City Board of Health. Henry’s knowledge and position in the medical community prompted Davis to ask him to write Nevada Medical History which was published in 1913.

In 1920 Doctor Henry Bergstein was practicing at 117 North Virginia, but in 1921 there is no mention of him in the City Telephone directory. Apparently he died in 1920 or 1921, but there is no record of his death in Nevada vital statistics.

(Footnotes)

¹ Dr. Samuel Cooper founded the school in 1858. In 1882 it became Cooper Medical College, and in 1912 it became Stanford Medical School)

² I have personally reviewed the diplomas in each county seat, and many were bogus.

In Memoriam

With this issue we reverse our policy of not publishing obituaries. *Greasewood Tablettes* was founded in 1989 to preserving medical history and to recognize individuals who have devoted themselves to better the lives of their fellow citizens.

Unfortunately, we do not have the means to keep abreast of the lives of all health practitioners. If we inadvertently miss a particular obituary, we invite you to send us a one-paragraph memoriam.

William M. Pelter, MD

Dr. Bill Pelter passed away October 23, 2006, in Reno, Nevada. As is the case with so many good people, it was much too early. He was born in 1926 and raised in Reno. His marriage in 1954 to his fourth-grade sweetheart, Andrea, lasted over 52

years. He attended the University of Nevada and received his medical training at the University of Washington and Stanford University. He spent eight years in the armed forces serving his country. Bill retired in 2000 after 40 years of anesthesia practice. His contributions to the community through many fine organizations are well documented. His passion was fishing, having had a commercial license in the state of Washington for many years. Bill's finest quality was what a fine gentleman he was and the effect he had on his patients and people in general. He radiated a sense of confidence and caring that produced a calming effect on all those around him. Never upset, always in control; that was the way he practiced medicine and lived his life. We should all have such compassion

and composure.

Bill was a colleague, a friend and will be dearly missed. (Ron Cudek, M.D.)

Gene A. Llewellyn, MD

Dr. Gene A. Llewellyn passed away December 13, 2006, in Reno, Nevada. He was born in 1924. He attended DePauw College in Greencastle, Indiana, and went to medical school at the University of Southern California. He served in the U.S. Armed Forces. He practiced in Reno at the Veterans Administration Medical Center and was in a private surgical practice at the Ralston Street Clinic. Gene had a rare sense of humor and was a fine doctor. His daughter, Amy, is a pathologist with the University of Nevada School of Medicine.

Noah Smernoff, MD

Dr. Noah Smernoff died on Christmas 2006 after a career in medicine that spanned 75 years. He was born Dec. 31, 1904, in Colorado and attended the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Dr. Smernoff came to Nevada in 1929 where he worked for Kennecott Copper Corp. in White Pine County for 23 years. He moved to Reno in 1953 to provide more educational opportunities for his children. He was loved by all of his patients and continued to see them after he retired. His life is chronicled in the book, *Noah Smernoff: A Life in Medicine*, which was the first book in our series, the Golden Age of Medicine in Nevada.

GREASEWOOD TABLETTES © is a quarterly publication of the Department of Pathology, Great Basin History of Medicine Division, University of Nevada School of Medicine. Anton P. Sohn is our editor. Teresa Garrison is the associate editor. Lynda D. McLellan and Gussie Burgoyne are our production assistants. The newsletter is printed by the University of Nevada Printing Shop. **The cost of publication is paid for by a grant from Parks, Ritzlin and Sohn, Ltd.** The editor solicits any items of interest for publication. Suggestions, corrections and comments are welcome. Please feel free to write or call us. The address is Department of Pathology/350, University of Nevada School of Medicine, Reno, NV, 89557. Our telephone is (775) 784-4068. The name GREASEWOOD TABLETTES © is derived from the greasewood plant or creosote bush, a plant that was used by Native Nevadans for medicinal purposes. It is still the subject of pharmacological research today.