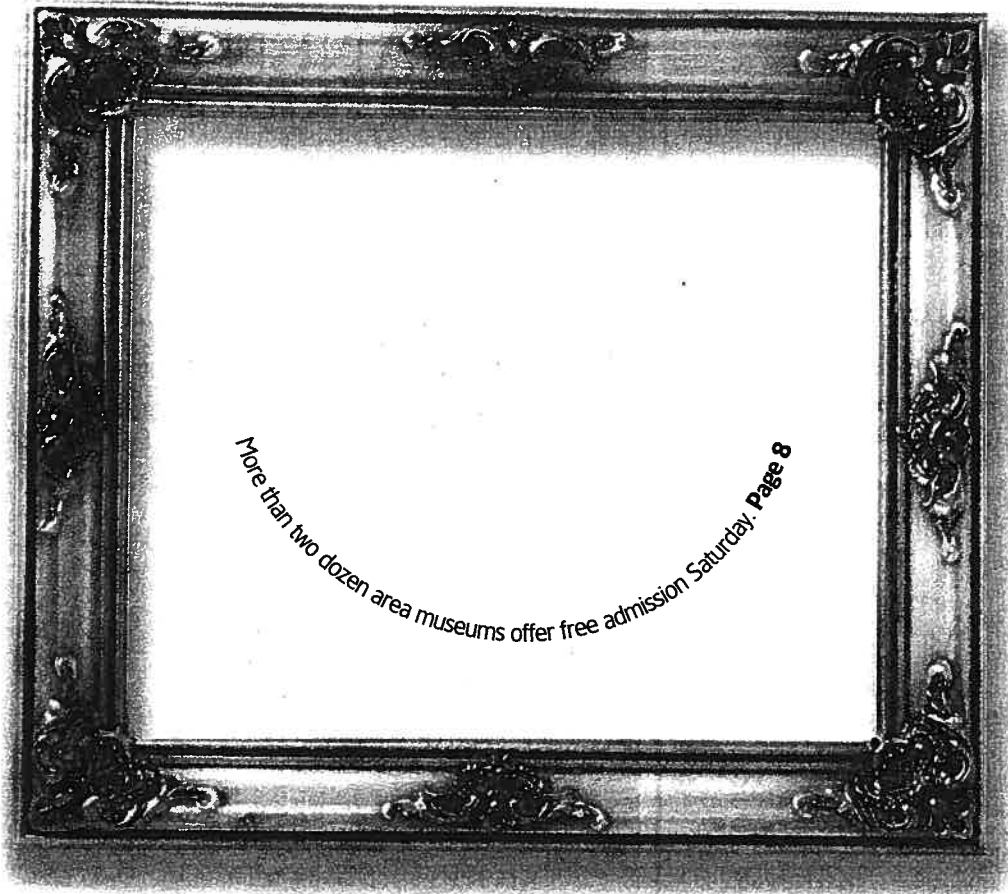


TICKET

weekend

THE SACRAMENTO BEE | ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



More than two dozen area museums offer free admission Saturday. Page 8

Free Museum Day

February 2, 2008

COVER STORY

DAY AT THE MUSEUMS

Medicine to foundries, little-known treasures on view at 25 sites

By Dixie Reid
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It's the iron lung you see first, and the magazine ad showing a mother and her brood standing beside a man entombed in such an artificial respirator.

"They all got the vaccine except Dad," reads the copy.

It's enough to give a person chills.

Before the Salk vaccine became publicly available in 1953, polio swept across this country in epidemic waves, killing and crippling thousands of people, mostly children, each time.

And on that note, welcome to the Sierra Sacramento Valley Museum of Medical History.

It's one of 25 institutions participating in Saturday's Sacramento Museum Day 2008, when admission is free from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (all museums close at 5 p.m.).

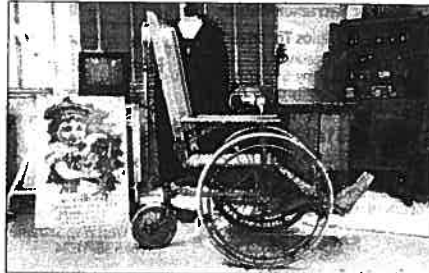
Typically, crowds converge on the same places every year: the Sacramento Zoo, the Governor's Mansion, the Crocker Art Museum (where ongoing construction limits parking), and the two Discovery Museums.

Lines there are usually long, and the wait can be considerable.

Adventurous museum-goers will seek out lesser-known but equally engaging places, such as the California Foundry History Museum (at McClellan Park), the Donald F. Salvatori California Pharmacy Museum (in the Natomas area) and the Museum of Medical History (in east Sacramento.)

All three are "lobby museums," existing in donated space in someone else's building. They never charge admission but welcome donations. They're small yet packed with good stories and plenty of curiosities.

"I think people find the artifacts that



An antique wooden wheelchair is among the health-care items on display at the Museum of Medical History.

Michael Allen Jones/
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represent the last 150 years of medicine fascinating and interesting – and sometimes gruesome – and get a great appreciation for how far medicine has advanced, especially in the last 50 or 60 years," says Bob LaPerriere, a retired Sacramento dermatologist and curator of the Museum of Medical History, 5380 Elvas Ave. It's housed in the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society building.

The electroshock unit, once used to "treat" depression, is straight out of the movie "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." The 1940s skeleton-in-a-box came from an English medical school. The fancy silk top hat and gold-handled walking stick belonged to Dr. Alexander Butler Nixon, who came to California in 1849.

Among the oddities on display are a suppository-maker, numerous laxatives, a bottle of Prohibition-era whiskey (it must have cured what ailed, since the bottle is empty) and assorted bedpans.

An excellent companion to the Museum of Medical History is the California Pharmacy Museum, named for the late Southern California pharmacist who dreamed of such a place. It's in the California Pharmacists Association Headquarters, 4030 Lennane Drive, between Truxel Road and Northgate Boulevard, off Interstate 80. (It's tricky to find; look for helpful signs on Museum Day.)

It showcases pharmacies from three eras: turn of the 20th century, 1940s and modern times. One of the oldest artifacts is a "show globe" that warned of epidemics.

"It would hang outdoors, at the edge of a town, filled with colored liquids, indicating if there was a contagious disease in the town. Stagecoach drivers would know to stop or keep on going," says Mike Negrete, chief executive officer of the Pharmacy Foundation of California, which owns the museum.

In sparkling displays, visitors will see bottles once filled with powders and

liquids, used by pharmacists to compound medications before pills and syrups were mass-manufactured. There is a wide assortment of old-time cures, from mustard plasters to asthmatic powders and 666 Cold Preparation.

One of the strangest items is the "New Star-Rite X-Ylarator: Beauty's Greatest Aid," a small metal box with a handle and an electrical cord, marketed sometime in the '40s.

"I have no idea what it's for," Negrete says.

The packaging shows a smiling model holding the metal casing against her chin.

Speaking of metal, a visit to the Foundry History Museum will have most folks thinking differently about anything from frying pans to trains. If it's made of metal, it probably was cast in a foundry.

The museum is oddly laid out and has poor lighting, but is worth a visit. On display are historic photos – particularly interesting is the San Francisco Bay Bridge under construction – foundry patterns and metal castings.

It's housed in the research facility Technikon, 5301 Price Drive in McClellan Park, where scientists search for ways to limit exhaust emissions during the casting process. That part of the building is off-limits to visitors.

"This is the only company in the U.S. that does it full time," says museum docent Bob Gooding. "We had the Army here the other day. They wanted us to bid on something for rocket launchers."

As a machinist during World War II, Gooding finished metal castings at a Southern California shipyard. Now he teaches people about foundries.

"Foundries are the oldest industry in California, and the history of California is all wound up in the foundry industry," he says. "Everything is made from castings. Every home has about 200 castings."

Anyone who has sweated through a Sacramento summer can appreciate the hard life of foundry work after reading

Museum Day sites

Sacramento

Aerospace Museum of California, 3200 Freedom Park Drive, McClellan Park

California Foundry History Museum, 5301 Price Ave., McClellan Park

California Museum for History, Women & the Arts, 1020 O St.

California State Capitol Museum, 1303 10th St.

California State Indian Museum, 2618 K St.

California State Military Museum, 1119 Second St., Old Sacramento

California State Railroad Museum, 1111 St., Old Sacramento

Crocker Art Museum, 216 O St.

Discovery Museum's Gold Rush History Center, 101 I St., Old Sacramento

Discovery Museum's Science & Space Center, 3615 Auburn Blvd.

Donald F. Salvatori California Pharmacy Museum, 4030 Lennane Drive

Fairytale Town, 3901 Land Park Drive

Governor's Mansion State Historic Park, 1526 H St.

Leland Starford Mansion State Historic Park, 802 N St.

Old Sacramento Schoolhouse Museum, 1200 Front St.

Old Sacramento State Historic Park, Front and I streets

Sacramento Historic City Cemetery, 10th Street and Broadway

Sacramento Zoo, Land Park Drive near Sutterville Road

Sierra Sacramento Valley Museum of Medical History, 5380 Elvas Ave.

Sutter's Fort State Historic Park, 2701 L St.

Towe Auto Museum, 2200 Front St.

Wells Fargo History Museum, 1000 Second St., Old Sacramento

Out-of-town sites

Explorit Science Center, 2801 Second St., Davis

Folsom History Museum, 823 Sutter St., Folsom

Heidrick Ag History Center, 1962 Hays Lane, Woodland

the words of Carl Blakkolb posted on a wall. In 1937, Blakkolb worked at a local foundry, earning 59 cents an hour: "I started in July, and it was about 110 degrees outside, but when we walked out of the foundry, it would feel cool."

Call The Bee's Dixie Reid,
(916) 321-1134.

Sacramento Museum Day 2008

WHEN: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday
(last entry at 4 p.m.)

WHERE: 25 locations in Sacramento, Woodland, Folsom and Davis

COST: Free (Free shuttles to some museums depart from the California Museum, 10th and O streets, near the Archives Plaza light-rail station.)

INFORMATION: (916) 808-7777,
www.sacmuseums.org