C. Edmund Kells Museum

Located at:
Louisiana State University
School of Dentistry,
New Orleans, LA 70119
USA

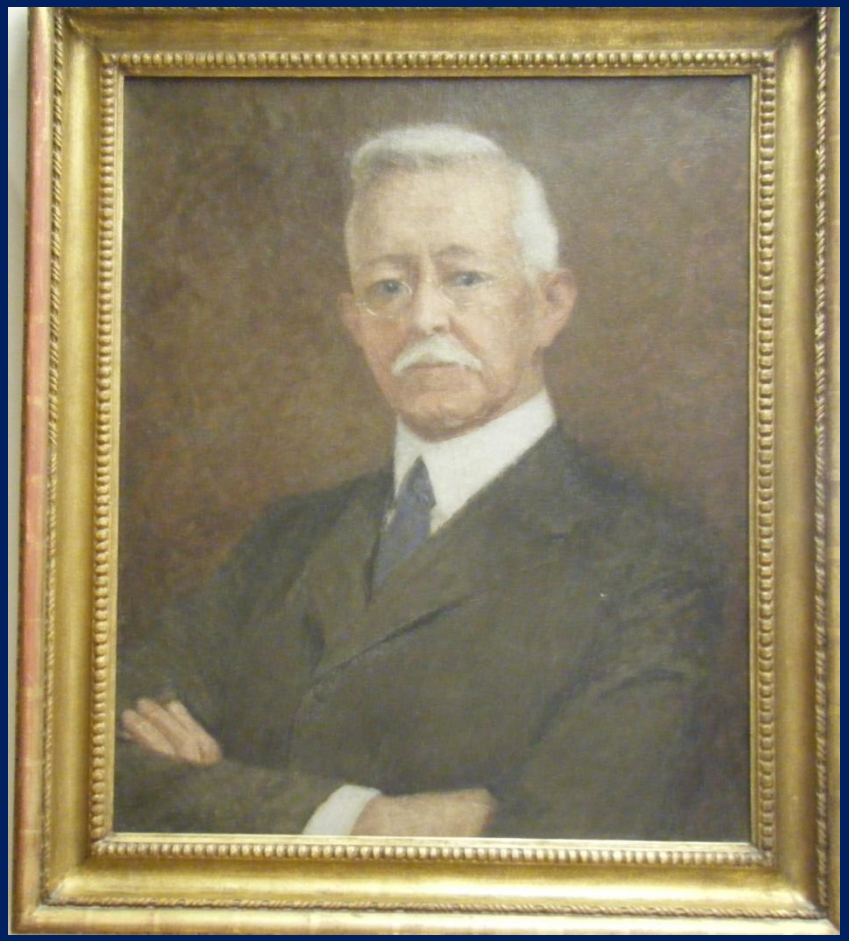
Photographs by Kavas H. Thunthy BDS, MS, MEd

Charles Edmund Kells, DDS
1865 - 1928

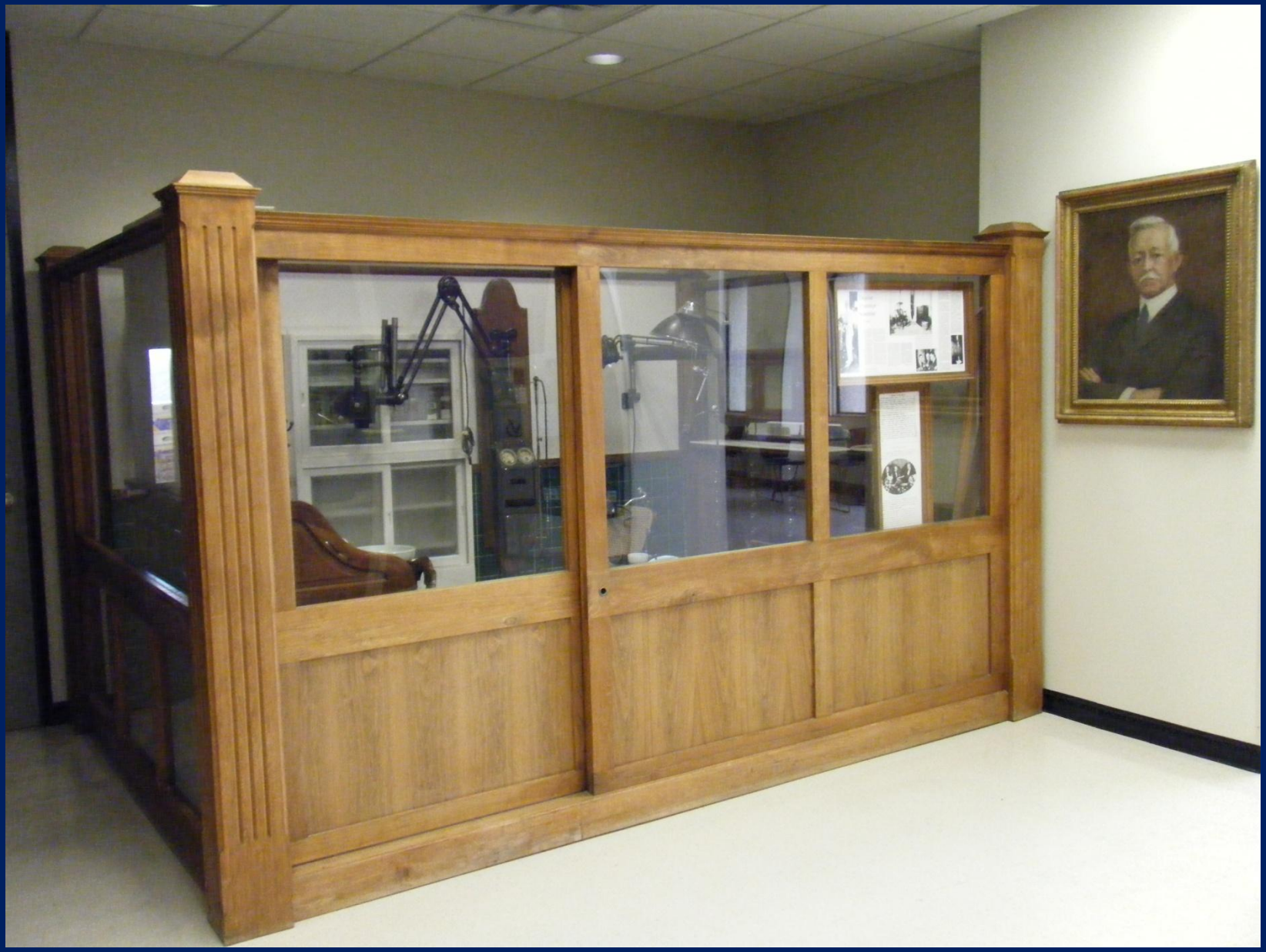
- It will probably never be known who actually made the first dental radiograph in USA.
- It was either one of these three:

  - C. Edmund Kells, DDS, of New Orleans
  - William Herbert Rollins, DDS, MD, of Boston
  - William James Morton, MD, of New York

C. Edmund Kells 1865 - 1928



Kells' dental office was in the old Maison Blanche building, Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA




Dentist—
Inventor—
Scientist
By Ida D. Jeffries
A TRIBUTE TO DR. KELLS

Dentist -- Inventor -- Scientist

By Ida D. Jeffries

Dr. C. Edmund Kells Jr., one of the outstanding pioneers in field of X-ray dentistry, is shown in his office in 1920s.

FORTY years ago, he was hailed nationally as a hero—a pioneer in the field of X-ray dentistry and the developer of many devices which are now standard equipment in modern dental offices. Today, only a few persons living in New Orleans remember him, and C. Edmund Kells Jr. is almost forgotten, like a prophet without honor in his own city.

Kells was born in 1856 in a house on Canal Street near where the Boston Club now stands. He grew up tall, spindly. Even in manhood, his frail appearance would belie the fact that he was constantly at work both mind and body energetically pursuing the wondrous scientific discoveries of his day.

At 18, young Kells entered the office of his father, a practicing New Orleans dentist—perhaps to see what the profession was all about. Liking what he saw, Kells enrolled in the New Orleans Dental College, then attended New York College of Dentistry. When he returned home in 1878, however, it was with more than just a dental education. Frequent visits to the Edison laboratory in Menlo Park had fired an interest in the uses of electricity, so much so that by the turn of the century, the young dentist had patented dozens of inventions including an electric thermostat, fire extinguisher, burglar alarm and electric magneto, clock and engine.

Dr. M. B. Varnado, who began practicing with Kells in 1918, recalls visiting him at home and seeing his electromagnetic clock. "It would trigger the opening of the door downstairs, even the running of warm bath water at an appointed hour."

After marriage in 1883, Kells quickly learned he was the lucky person who had to stop what he was doing every time it rained—so he invented a mechanical window closer. "Darndest thing I ever saw," chuckles Varnado.

THE crowning achievement of Kells' inventing career was an automatic electric suction pump which found use in dentistry and every field of surgery where rapid aspiration of fluids was required to clear the operating field. Dr. Rudolph Matas—one of the models he used. This invention alone is sufficient to immortalize the name of Dr. Kells and has won for him the eternal gratitude of every working surgeon in the land.

A progressive thinker in business, too, Kells instituted a system of monthly settlements of all accounts, installed young women in his office for both secretarial and dental assistant chores—all innovations for Southern dental offices in the early 1890s.

Midway in his career, Kells' genius was especially inspired by an event in Germany in 1895, the discovery of the Roentgen ray. Because dentistry was still in the age of feel and poke, Kells saw wondrous possibilities for exposing the roots of teeth with this X-ray. Immediately after a demonstration of the X-ray in New Orleans by Tulane's Professor Brown Ayres, he set up his own laboratory in the attic of his home. In a maze of wires, coils and tubes, he X-rayed one of his assistants.

Kells described the scene: "The patient was seated in a chair with the film holder in position. With the teeth held together and the mouth closed, she could swallow without causing any movement of the film. With the face leaning against a firmly fixed thin board in order to steady her, the tube was placed on the other side of the board. Then, I unknowingly used a filler, which possibly prevented my patient from being burned during the long exposure."

By July, 1896, Kells felt experienced enough in the use of the X-ray to bring his equipment to the Southern Dental Association meeting in Asheville, N.C. The demonstration clinic he held, taking X-rays of the roots of teeth, is generally acknowledged the first of its kind in this country.

As extravagant claims were made for the X-ray, physicians around the country began using it as treatment for anything from mole to cancer removal. Before 1900, some of these men had become early martyrs of prolonged exposure to X-rays. During these early pioneer years in X-ray work, Kells had used his bare hands for setting the tube. By 1908, the cumulative effect of these short exposures were manifested in malignant growths on the dentist's fingers, hands. During the next 20 years, he suf-

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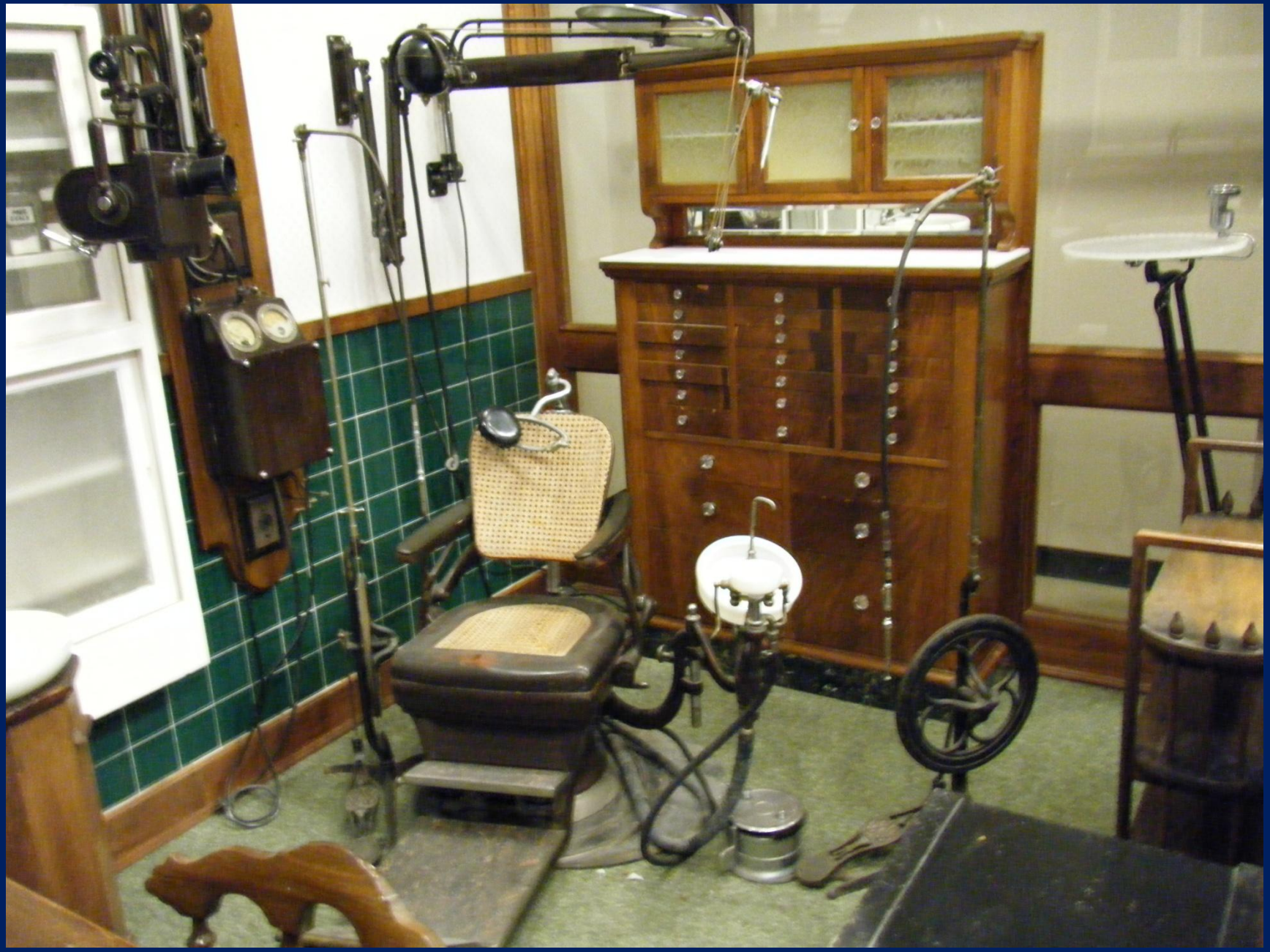
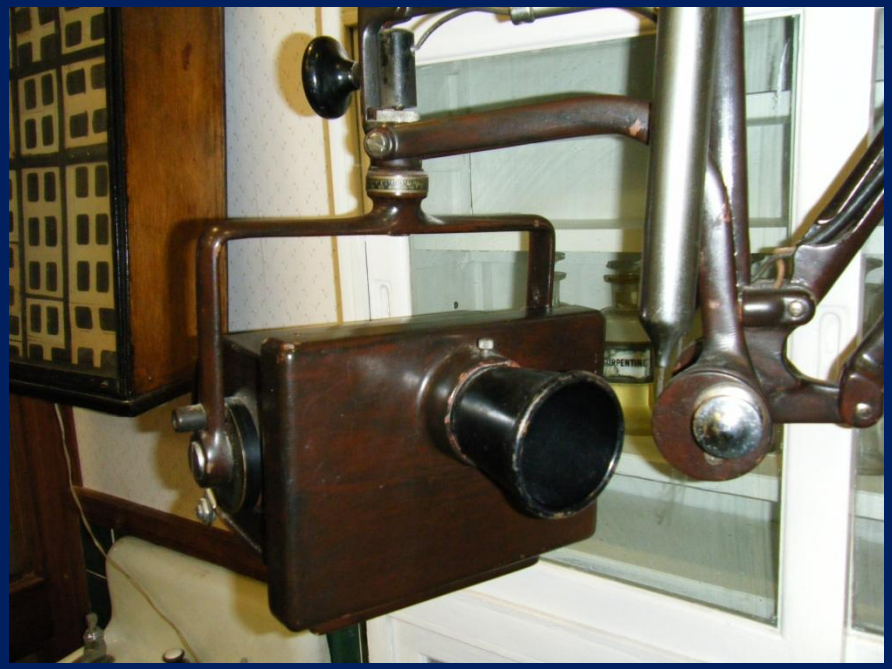
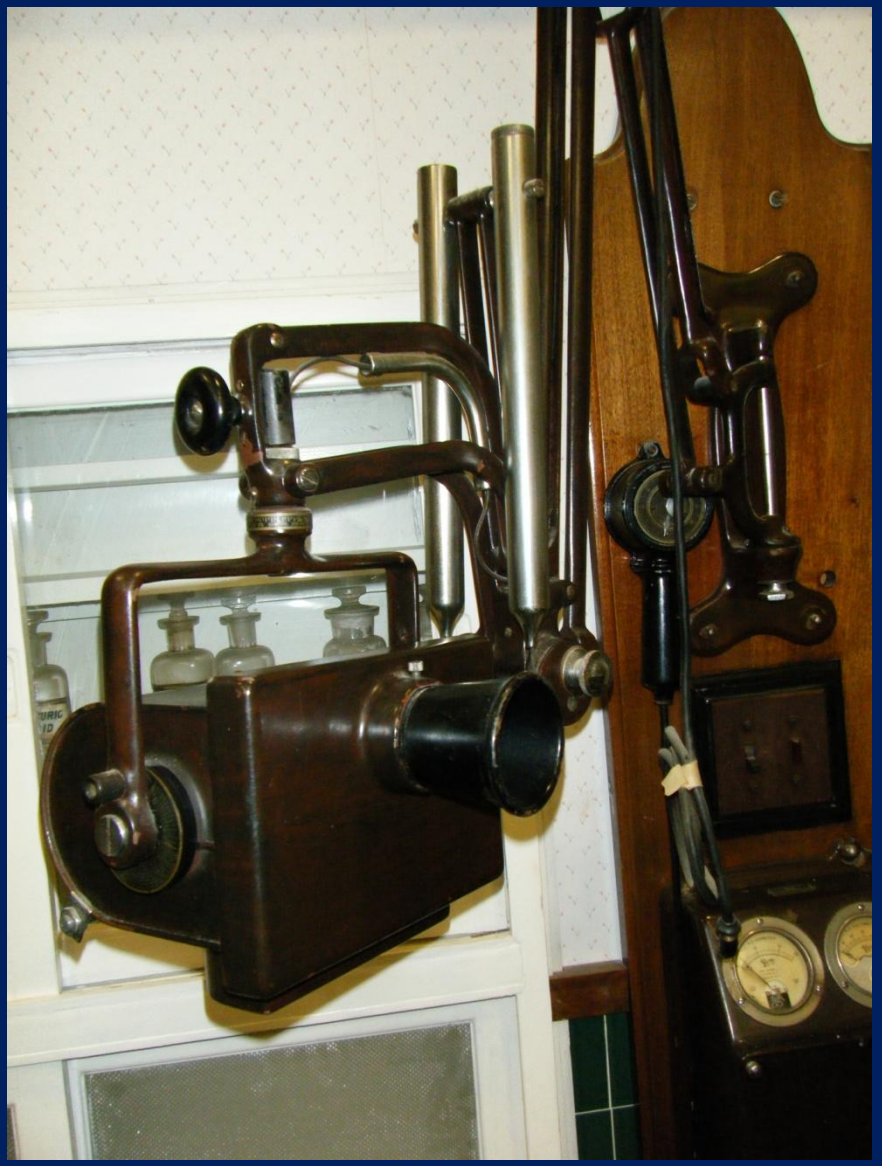
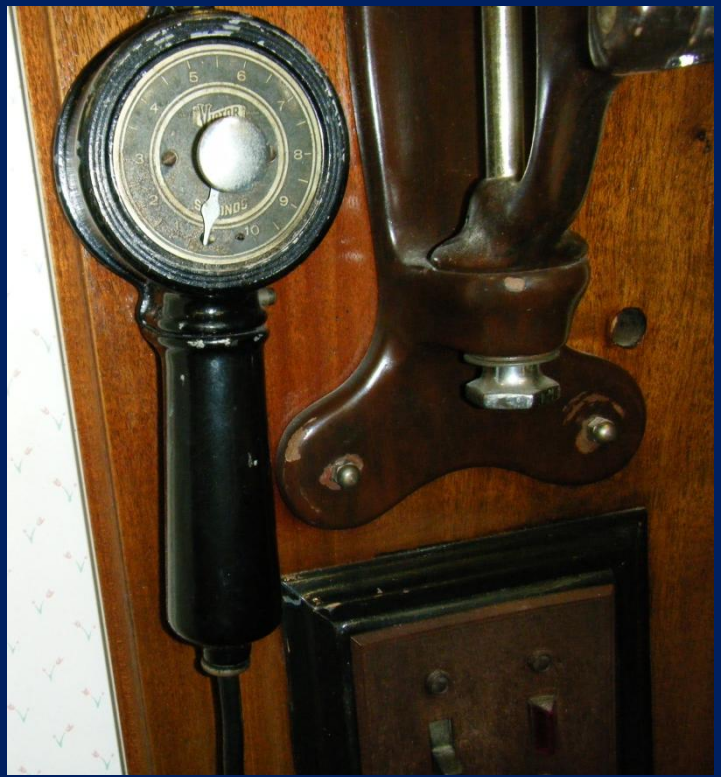
Dr. Kell's up-to-date 1890 office had electric dent
Drill hangs from electric unit control switchboard
Below, at 1956 New Orleans Dental Conference,
Marquer, Dr. M. B. Varnado and Dr. L. G. Ra
over early X-ray tubes used by Kells. Tubes and
memorabilia are now on display at Smithsonian

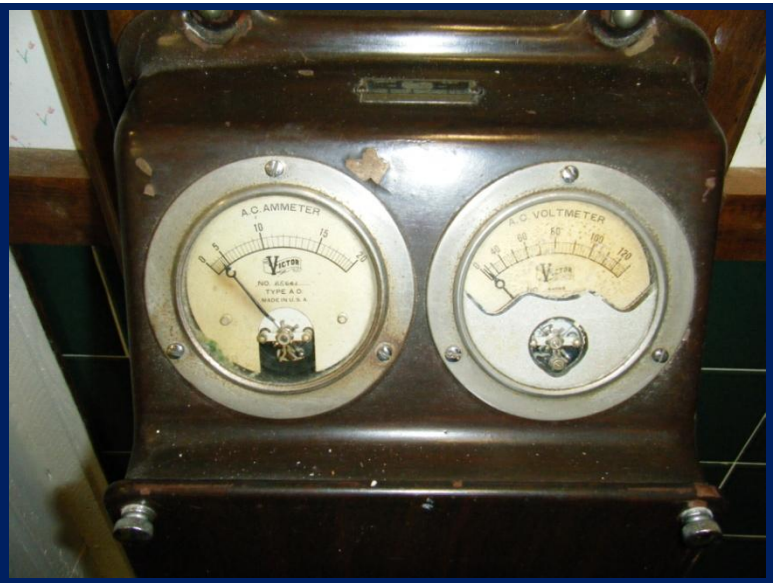


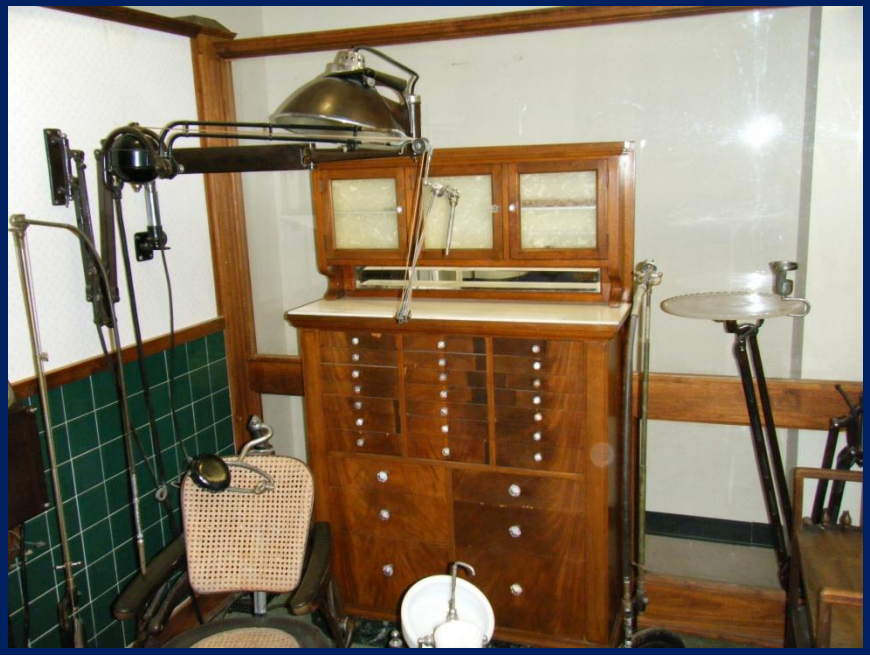


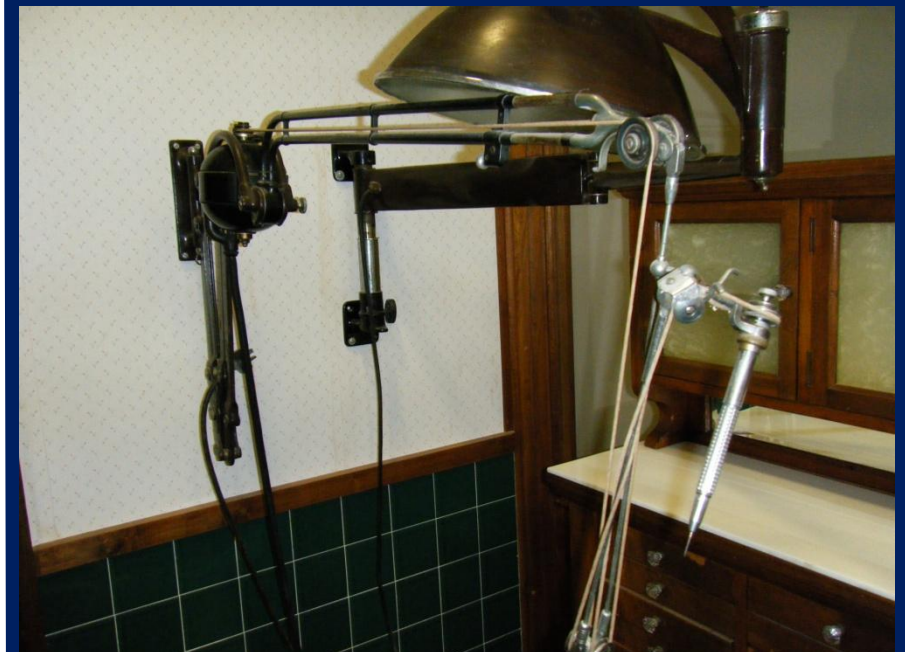


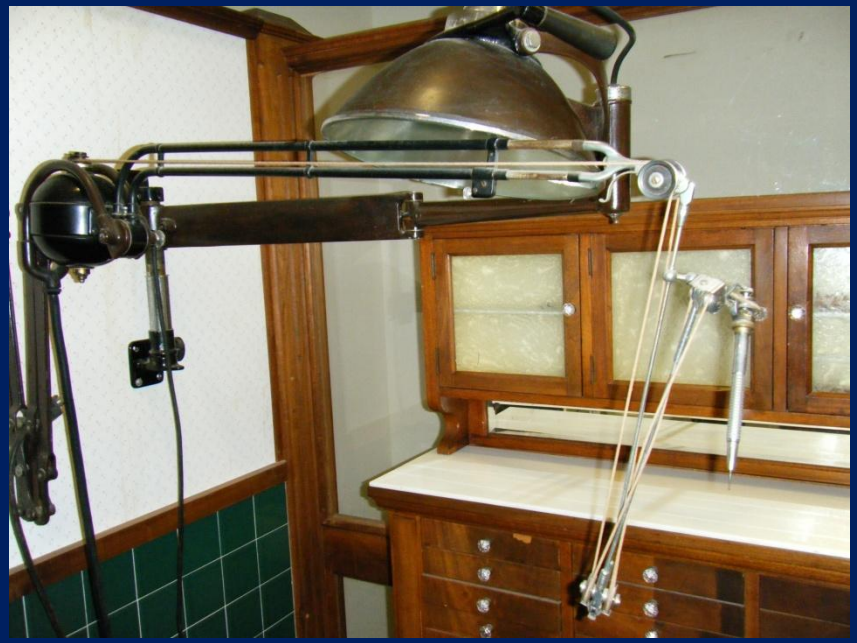

Victor

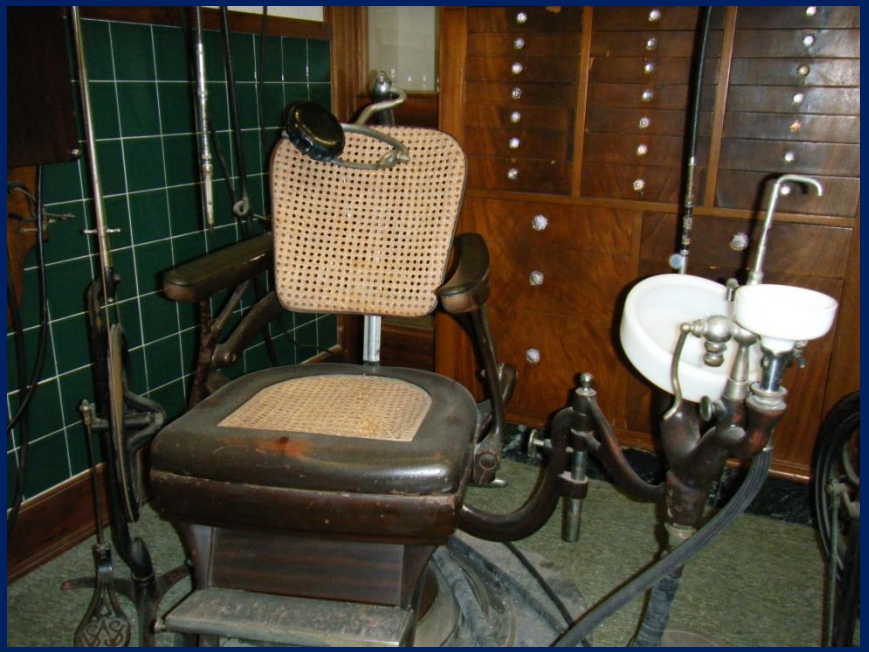

PREC. CHALK

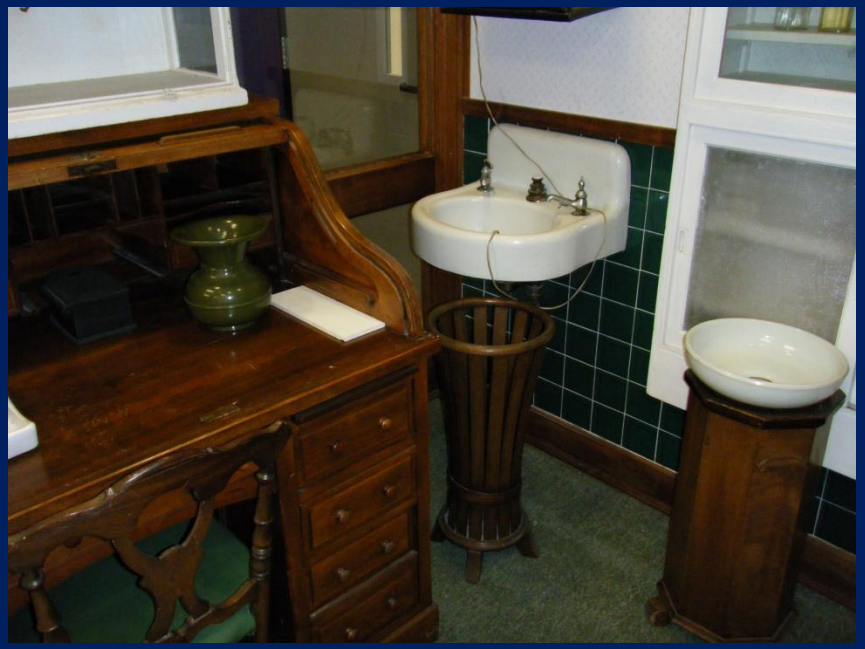

A.C. AMMETER
A.C. VOLTMETER
VICTOR

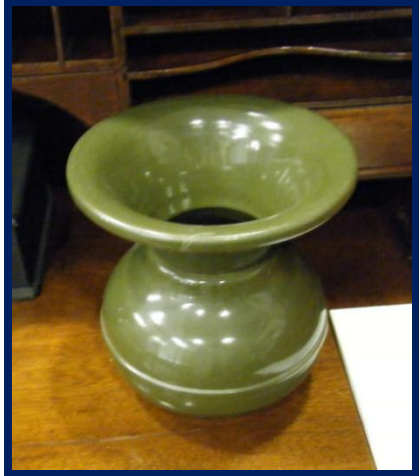


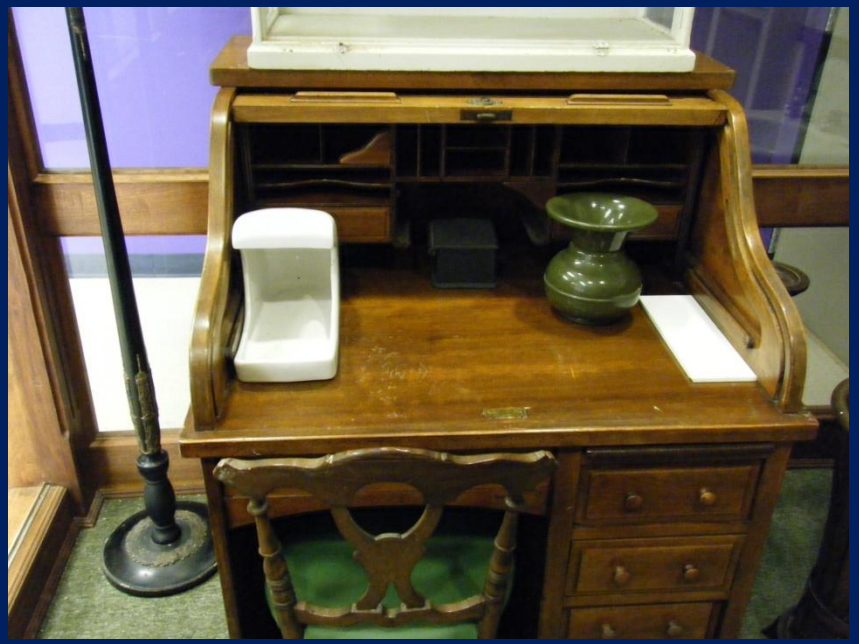


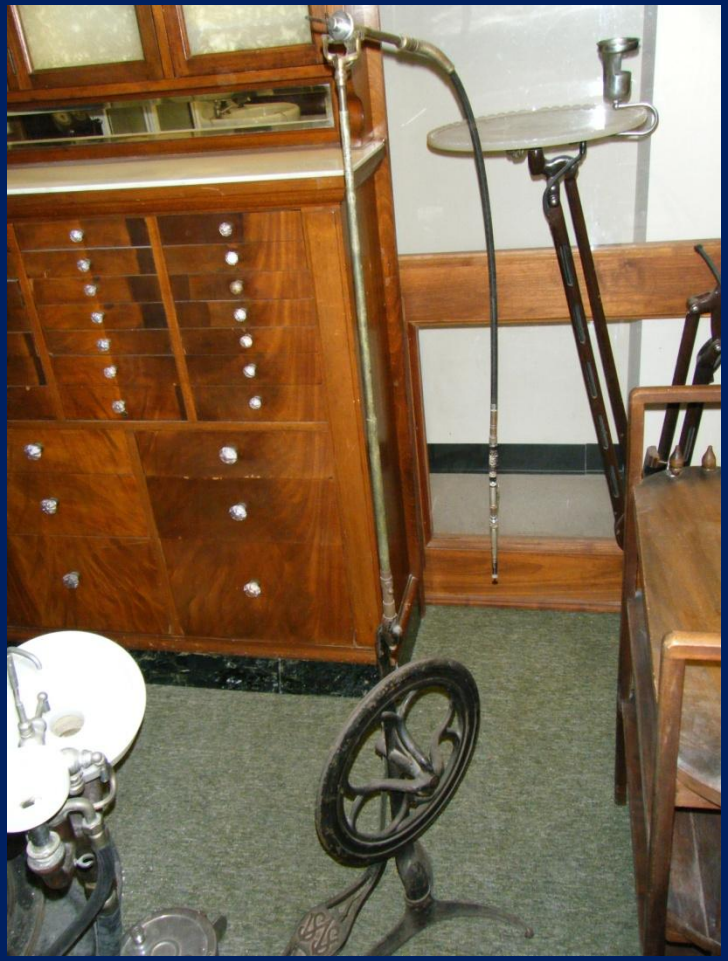


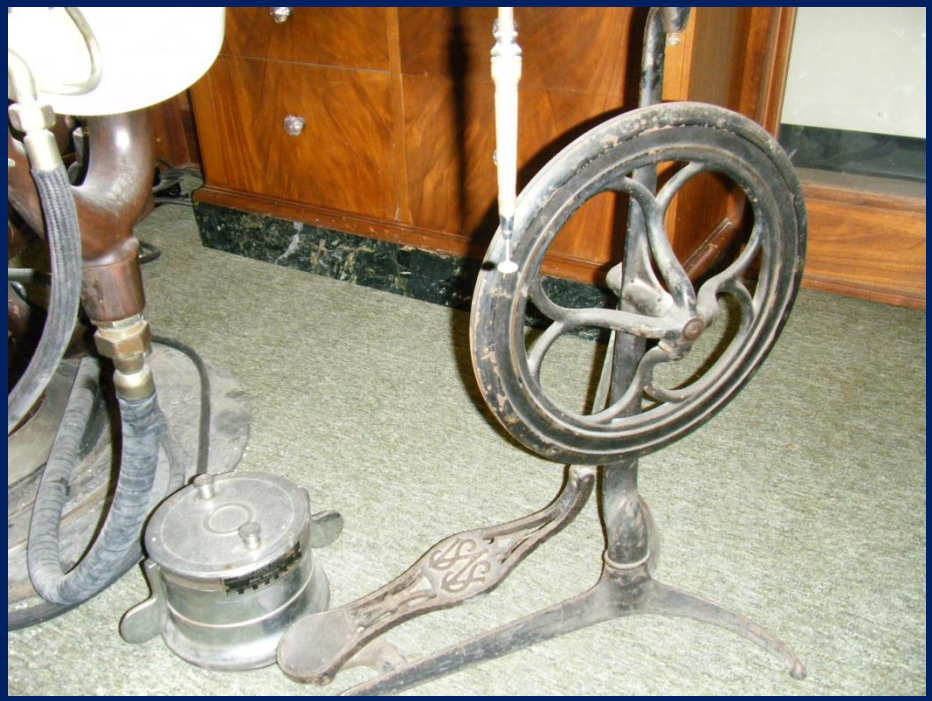


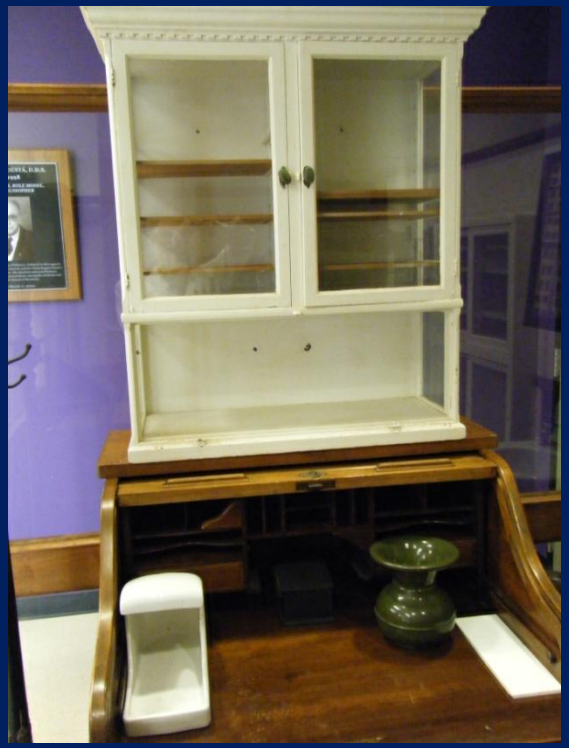


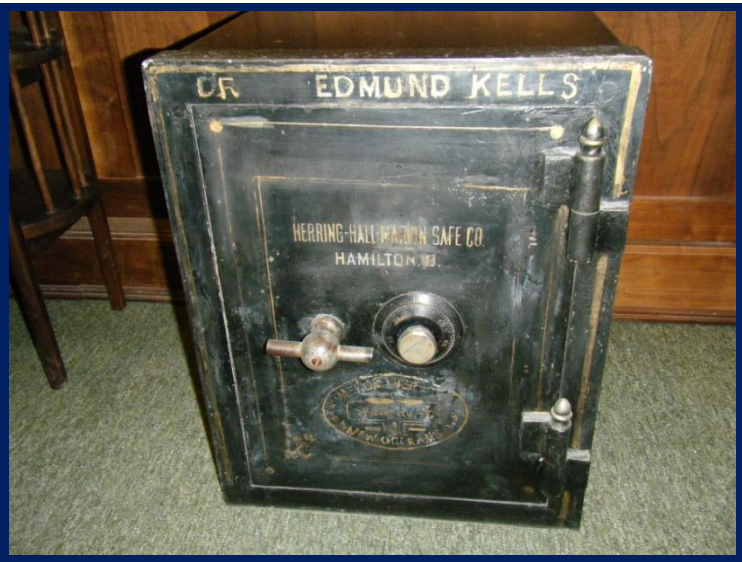











DR EDMUND KELLS
HERRING-HALL MARVIN SAFE CO
HAMILTON