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The 1890's in Kennett Square

Many patients ask us when our office building was built. The original part of the house was built in 1890. We thought it would be fun to dedicate this newsletter to life in the 1890's (or the "Gay Nineties"). For starters, life in a rural area such as Unionville did not include indoor plumbing or electricity and would not for quite some time.

Travel in the 1890's: Cars existed back then, but they were not readily available for most homeowners yet due to a lack of commercial production. People traveled by horse drawn



carriage mostly. Bicycles were all of the rage at the time. The first flying machines were being tested, but the Wright Brothers' historic flight would not be for another 10 years. Trains were the way to go

for long distance travel. Railroads finally linked West to East and refrigerated cars allowed perishable goods to be transported long distances.

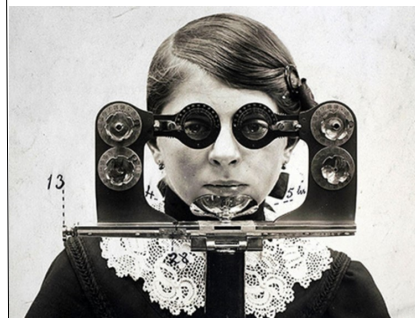
Entertainment in the 1890's: There were no movies, television, computers or radios. New printing presses made mass production of inexpensive prints and books possible for common people so reading was a popular past time and prints decorated their walls. Pianos and musical instruments were around and the first player piano was invented around this time. Sewing and embroidery were past times as well as a necessity as most clothes still had to be made by hand and with a primitive sewing machine.

Current Events: Wars with the American Indians occurred in this decade, most famously the Battle of Wounded Knee. Ellis Island became the receiving station for the wave of new immigrants. The Klondike Gold Rush also happened in the 1890's. Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland and William McKinley were all one term presidents in this decade.

EYE CARE IN THE 1890'S

Eye care in the 1890's was very primitive by modern standards. Most computerized instruments that we use routinely today were not even available in their primitive form yet. The direct ophthalmoscope was around in 1890. That is the hand-held instrument that doctors use to get a limited "peek" at the back of the eye, but this version did not have its own light source yet so the view was very poor. The precursor to the modern slit lamp was invented in 1890. The slit lamp is the machine that Dr. Luscaavage swings in on a table to examine you. The 1890 slit lamp also had no light source at this time so it was not practical for clinical use yet.

Prescribing and making glasses was relatively modern in 1890. Eye doctors used loose lenses in an empty frame called a trial frame to come up with someone's prescription. There also was a primitive version of the machine we use today, called a phoropter (see picture). Bifocals were also avail-



ble. Because of lack of instrumentation to examine the eye and a lack of understanding of causes of most optic nerve and retina diseases,

treatment was not available for most diseases affecting the back of the eye. Glaucoma was a mystery to doctors as it was thought (erroneously) to be very rare, and they did not understand its mechanism of damage. Even though they had an instrument to measure eye pressure called a tonometer, the association between eye pressure and glaucoma had not been made. Cataracts were taken out whole with no microscope or sutures to help the doctor, and the modern version of implant we use today would not be invented for almost one hundred years.

**For the Patients & Friends of
Eye to Eye Ophthalmology**

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Important Phone Numbers & Resources

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