

Many injuries once led to artificial limbs

Civil War veterans were issued either 'patented' leg or cheaper 'peg-leg'

Turn back the clock a hundred years and in your mind's eye stroll down the main streets of Rock Hill, York, Fort Mill, Chester or Lancaster and look about. No paved streets. No stop lights. For that matter, no electricity.

Unless it was a Saturday, there were very few people about. If it was a Saturday, the streets would be crowded with wagons and buggies passing through. Saturday brought the farmers in from the country. There were hitching posts instead of parking meters, and no parallel parking for the wagons. Wagons and horses filled the lofts behind the stores.

Today we complain of potholes. They complained of sinkholes. Several days of hard rain were enough to create dips, especially around the watering trough, so deep that a mule might sink as deep as its belly.

But more striking than the rough streets would be the certain presence of men minus a leg or arm. The older, bearded men might be Civil War veterans (though farm life and factory employment in that time could be nearly as dangerous).

NEARBY HISTORY

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For the veterans there had been the state artificial limb acts of 1879 and 1881. In 1893 compensation was authorized for anyone who had lost an eye in the war (from \$7 to \$47.50 with the higher amounts to those who had insufficient income).

The disabled veteran had to provide information as to name, rank, unit, place of wound, type of wound, and furnish affidavits as to his citizenship and military service. A surgeon's certificate of disability was also required. The veteran received a "patented" leg that was flexible at the knee with an attached shoe. The best patented legs cost around \$75.

The cheapest artificial limb was the "peg-leg," which has been described as made out of "a 4-by-4 piece of wood with a draw-knife and the soft top of an old pair of boots."

Old anecdotes indicate that some of the men handled the peg-leg as well as those who had "patented" legs. We are reminded of Robert "Peg-Leg" Graham, a great-uncle of evangelist Billy Graham. He reportedly had a tendency to fight, especially when drinking: "He would stand on his

good foot and throw the artificial one around in a circle and fend off any attacker." It was told that on one occasion Peg-Leg, wielding his artificial leg, "knocked down three men in one whirling motion."

It is also said that when Wade Hampton was running for governor of South Carolina in 1876, there was a Red Shirt rally in Lancaster. When the band began playing a stirring tune, Peg-Leg Graham jumped on the stage and with his peg-leg vigorously kept time to the music, accompanied by the audience's rebel yells.

It was routine for a doctor to cut off a leg or arm after a bad injury. Cotton gins and threshing machines were notorious for pulling off arms. Hunting accidents, run-away horses and gun fights, among other things, could shatter a bone.

If a compound fracture resulted, it was easier to amputate an arm or a leg than it was to cure a wound. Without antibiotics and modern techniques, the patient was almost sure to die of "blood poisoning" if the limb were not quickly amputated.

According to many accounts, the surgery was more likely to be done on a kitchen table in the home of the victim than in a hospital. As late as 1895, the only hospital worthy of the name in this area was in Chester. Magdalene Hospital had the distinction of being

the only hospital between Athens, Ga., and Raleigh on the Seaboard Railroad route.

Because roads were in such bad condition, the railroad was the best way to get a patient to a hospital. But trains often derailed, and there were enough accidents with trains and on trains that every rail line employed what were called "railroad surgeons."

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