In the eighteenth century, midwives were important people in a community even if there was a doctor who lived in the village or town. People typically consulted a midwife, not a physician, about an illness or ailment. And in more remote parts of North Carolina, a midwife would have been the only medical expert available.

Midwifery was an exclusively female profession, and it was one of the few public roles available to women. One reason why women were the chief practitioners of medicine was that family health was the concern of wives and mothers, and so people thought it was natural that women learn the art of healing. Midwives were paid for their work and were sought after for their knowledge and skills. Although it was often women who called upon the midwife to help a sick child or husband, men would also ask midwives for help.

Midwives also helped women in childbirth. As they do today, midwives gave advice to pregnant women and prepare them to give birth. Midwives were also present at the birth and delivered the baby. A physician or doctor would only be asked to assist the midwife if there were complications that required surgery.

Physicians, who were always men, had different duties from those of a midwife. These men were educated at a university and were called in to set bones and to operate. Physicians would rarely administer medication and people who were sick would see an apothecary (similar to a pharmacist).

Most midwives learned their skills from a female relative such as a mother or aunt. Other women learned medical skills from male relatives who were physicians or apothecaries.

Rachel Allen (1760-1840) was a midwife who lived near Snow Camp, North Carolina in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We do not know where she learned her medical skills, but we do know that she chose to write down her herbal remedies, which suggests that she most likely passed her knowledge on to her children. Very few diaries or letters of everyday women such as Rachel Allen still survive, and the fact that her recipe book has been preserved shows us how important midwives were to their communities.

Below are excerpts from Rachel Allen’s writing that show how residents of the backcountry treated wounds, illness, and disease.

**[1]**

To Make Green Salve take one pound of bores Greese one pound of turpentine and melt it together then take it of the fire take one ounce of Verdigreese and pound it and Sift it then put it in and Simmer it over the fire but not to boil to be Sure put Something over thy face while pounding Sifting and Stirring and String in the Verdigreese to take out proud flesh and dead flesh from old Sores and Clense them

**[2]**

To make ointment  to Cure a burn or Scald take of the tops of high RattleSnake in the Spring of the year and fresh may butter and pound them well together then make it up in Balls let it lie about six weeks then put it in a kettle over the fire let them Simmer Well then Strain them out keep it for use

**[3]**

A Cancer wort the Cure take Blood wort the inner Bark of Shoemake Root pound them together Mix Sower cream & apply it to

**[4]**

The yaws or Countray Distemper is very Bad to Cure perfectly Especially when grown invited this is the highest kind of Scurvy and the Symtoms of it are Eating Ulcer in the throat or pallet and filthy Sores in other parts of the body having near Resemblance to of the pox this unclean Diseas often yealds to Dr. Paps Remady or at Least may be Cept under by it:

Take one ounce of the Bark of Shoemake Root one ounce of the iner Bark of Spanish oak boil these together
in two quarts of water till the decoction
Bee very Strong, of the Liquor drink a full pint milk warm and immediately after it half a pint quite cold and it will give thee powerful vomit the next morning take half a point of the Same Drink warm and the Same quantity again in the Evening and Continue So doing for Six weeks or two months only the Vomit must bee Repeated Every Seventh day, in the meantime gargle your throat and wash all you Sores and ulcers with the Same warm Liquor which aught to be made fresh Every two days Besides all this you Must Chew the Shoemake Root very often and Swallow the healing juice Every night before you go to Rest take two pills made of turpentine and Deers dung in Equel quantities of Eating and Drinking Confine thyself from flesh and from Strong Drink and bee very careful of catching Cold

[5]

A Receit for a Canser take the bark of the root of Spanish oak dogwood sassafras persimmon and the shoemake that bares the berrys take of these one pound each off the north side wash them scrape of the outside bark put them in a pot cover it close boile it for half a day then strain the liquor then put it in a small pot and bile it to it becomes a save then put it away for use

[6]

To Make Eye Water Take half a point of Spring water, the bigness of two hazelnuts of allom one Spoonfull of hunney the bigness of a large heazelnut of verdigreese boile all together and S it well Let it Settle and bottle it for use.

[7]

To Make Hunney physick Take flower of sulphar one ounce Creame of tarter one ounce, powder of Jalep Quarter of an ounce mix them in Clarified honey to the Consistance of an Electury and take thereof Every morning fasting as much as will ly on the point of a Case knife to cure Bad Blood.

[8]

For the consumption take angillico horseradish allom pain Each one Large handful put them into an earthen pot with two gallons of Spring Water cover it cloce Set it on the coles and Stew it half away then Strain it and ad thereto half a pound of fresh butter half a pound of treacle then Stew it 5 hours take in the morning and at night half a point milk warm.

[9]

A Diet Drink to be Wrought in Beer 2 handfulls of Water Cresses 2 handfulls
of Sassafras roots 2 handful of Nettles 2
handfuls of Sasborelle
2 pounds of Lignumety 2 handfuls of Burdock roots 2 handfuls of Sweet Bryers
rots all this infuse in 3 or 4 gallons of
Malt Beer – for the consumption

[10]
for the consumption take white turpentine
hunney and fresh Butter mix them all
together take the Bigness of a Chestnut
in the Morning

[11]
Clense the Blood take Vervine Ditony
Sweet goldin rod of each alike ----(ripped)
and Sweeten it with honey & Drink

[12]
for deafness & busing in ye head peel a
Clove of garlick dip it in honey & peel
it in ye Eare at lying down
ye Eare Ach from worms drop in warm
Milk Brings them out or Juse of
Wormwood> which kills them
Nurse in the Eare drop in Juse of onions.

[13]
for Weak Eyes Wel the Eye lids Morning
& Evening with Campfire
to restore Strength after Rheumatism.
Walk in a Strong Broth Made of wordCow heels.

[14]
to clean the teeth Rub them With
ye ashes of Burnt Bread
for an Ulser in Bladder or kidneys
take decton of agrimony 3 times a day
or dection powder or syrup of horse tail.

[15]
for an old sore leg take
parsnips pounded boil in water
ill soft thicken it with
Wheat Bran make a poltis & apply it

[16]
Inflamation of ye Bladder a pain
in the Bottom of ye Belly a desire to make
water often & with difficulty the diet
light and thin ye drink cooling
Bleeding good --- ye Lower part
of ye Belly with warm water and
Emalient Cylsters frequently
Eating Small broths pruels or mild herbs

[17]
In a Raging fit of Stone beat
onions into a pulp & apply them as
a poultis part to the Back & part to
Each Groin it gives Speedy ease in
the most Raching pain.

[18]
To ease or Cure ye Stone take decoction
or agrimony Morning & Night
or of Camomile
or boil half a pound of parsnips in
a Quart of Water drink a glass Morning
& night & no other drink all day for
6 weeks
or take Morning & Night a teaspoon full of onions caleind into White
ashes in White wine an ounce
will often dissolve ye Stone.

[19]
a Drink for any Inward Weakness
take Grounding and Yarrow White plantain
and Silverwort agrimony Bittersweets
Hartstongue Maidenhair Cinquefoilide
Strawberry Leaves and Cattstool leaves
take a Small hadfull of Each
and cut them Small and Boil in
three Quarts of Water Until it Comes
to two then take one pill Night and
Morning Milk Warm or more if
Necessary if the Cant all Be got
Such as can if Circum Stance
Should render it Difficult or unsafe to take
any of the yerbs on any account they
May be omitted polpadom is
Sometimes put in with Them.

[20]
take Linseed 2 Spoonfulls Liquorice half an
ounce Stew them for Some houres then Strain
it take in difficulty of Making Water and
coughs and Compalints of y Brest
Emollient muilagient Liquor

[21]
for the Quinsey take Stalions
dung freest Stewed in Sweet wort
or new Milk and thickened with
Wheat Bran Make a poltis &
apply it to the throat.

[22]
dissolve 2 drams of gum arabeck and 2 drams of Liquorice ball in ten
ounces of boiling water when cool add 150 drops of animonial wine and
one ounce Paregoric take a table spoon full three tiem a day Shake the bottle before pouring out the drops.
The John and Rachel Allen house, originally in Snow Camp in Alamance County, has been relocated to Alamance Battleground Historic Site.

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