



**African Origins
of
Modern Healthcare**

**2019-2020 Season Exhibit
Blanchard House Museum
406 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
Punta Gorda, FL 33950**

www.blanchardhousemuseum.org

Welcome to the Blanchard House Museum...

African Origins of Modern Healthcare

Exhibit researched and compiled by Scot and Jill Shively and Dr. Martha Bireda

Our 2019-2020 exhibit examines the roots of African medical practices in the Diaspora and in America. Of all the acknowledgements of the contributions to the New World, the botanical contributions of enslaved Africans have largely gone unrecognized. One of the least explored aspects of the history of Africa pertains to African medicinal knowledge. The enslaved Africans laid the foundation for 21st century knowledge about the uses of plant life for medicine. We hope this exhibit will highlight the influence of medical practices brought to this continent by enslaved Africans and their descendants.

Traditional African Medicine

Traditional African healing has been in existence for centuries. It is the oldest and perhaps the most diverse of the world's indigenous medical systems. Africa, the cradle of civilization, is blessed with a rich biological and cultural diversity marked by regional differences in healing practices. Illness and health care are determined by and closely connected to the worldview or culture of the particular society.

Traditional African healing is mutually interwoven with African religion and spirituality. Traditional healing encompasses treating illness with herbs to spiritual treatment. It is holistic in its approach and embodies the collective wisdom of indigenous knowledge handed down generation to generation (Ashfort, 2015).

African traditional practitioners include herbalists, traditional birth attendants (midwives), bone setters, diviners, traditional surgeons, and spiritualists. Treatment approaches include fasting, dieting, bathing, massaging, herbs, certain surgical procedures, and spiritual practices. This approach to medical care has its roots in Egyptian medicine.

Africans experimented with plants in their immediate environments in the New World and incorporated many into their diets, religious, and healing practices. Many enslaved Africans in the Americas with medical knowledge and skills were healers in their communities.

Conclusion

Medicine and healing are the common threads in our human fabric.

We hope you have been enlightened by this exhibit. Most importantly, we wish that you will examine your beliefs and views about Africa and appreciate one of the most significant gifts that enslaved people gave to America. Through their medical knowledge and practices, Africans and their African American descend-ants have contributed greatly to the development of the healthcare system in America.



Cornelia West Ponder (1874-1934) Having received medical training prior to moving to Punta Gorda, she was a mid-wife and assistant to local physicians from 1910-1934. She willingly offered medical as well as home care assistance to those in need in the community, both black and white. She was very religious and depended on God to help her do her work.





The Blanchard House Museum is an open access, educational institution devoted to the procurement, preservation, study, and display of artifacts and materials related to the history, culture, and contributions of African Americans in the settlement and development of Charlotte County and Southwest Florida.

History of the Museum

The Blanchard House Museum, established in 2004, was the vision of Bernice Andrews Russell. Mrs. Russell was a humanitarian, social activist, and historian for the local African American community. Bernice felt it was important to document the history and contributions of African Americans in Charlotte County. The Bernice A. Russell Community Development Corporation, created in her honor, is dedicated to continuing the work begun by Mrs. Russell.

Originally located three blocks from its present location, the house was built in 1925 and was moved to its current location in 2002. It was built for the owner, local fisherman Joseph Blanchard and his wife Minnie. He was born in St. Augustine, and had been a steam boat pilot, and she was a mail order bride from Louisiana.

The house is a Florida vernacular style Craftsman bungalow was originally built with just 4 rooms and a front porch. The Craftsman style house was the dominant style for smaller houses built throughout the country during the period from about 1905 until the early 1920s. The Blanchard House is a single story, front gabled roof Craftsman – about one third of Craftsman houses built are of this subtype. The front porch is a partial width design and gives the house its southern charm. The house is elevated on pilings and features 9 foot ceilings. The Blanchard house is one of a few remaining examples of this type of residential architecture left in Charlotte County from the 1920's.

Many years after the passing of Minnie, the house was purchased by Bernice Russell in 1997, after all of the Blanchard heirs were deceased. Upon her death in 1999, the house was donated to the Bernice A. Russell Community Development Corporation by her daughter, Dr. Martha R. Bireda, and her children. Dr. Martha Bireda serves as the Executive Director of the museum.



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