

Weather Vanes

In recognition of the important part that art has had in the Mayo Clinic environment since the original Mayo Clinic Building was finished in 1914, *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* will feature some of the numerous works of art displayed throughout the buildings and grounds on the Mayo Clinic campuses.



Among the many great works of art at Mayo Clinic by many well-known and highly talented artists, there are a great many displays of artifacts that focus on a specific point in time or reflect a historical perspective or reveal a lost knowledge. One such collection is a set of circa 19th century zinc and copper weather vanes. Examining the world at large before the era of modern technology—eg, telephones, radios, Doppler radar—one had to rely on experience and reality to witness nature in its purest form. The weather vane, a tool that aided in recognizing this experience, provided insights into oncoming weather fronts, potential tide-turning consequences, and changes that could have great effects on life and survival.

Historically, the weather vane dates back as far as ancient Greece, but they are found in many cultures, countries, and eras, and

individual designs were created to convey beliefs or messages in addition to providing a visual cue about the direction of the wind. The functional design, however, remains the same for each vane. It must be loosely fitted on a vertical rod so that it can easily pivot, and it must be balanced and weighted such that the front end will always point into the wind.¹

The weather vanes in the Mayo Clinic collection represent an American flavor, with a pair of horses racing each other and another single trotting horse, high-stepping along. Other designs often included a rooster as a Christian symbol, or other farm animals to reflect the state of rural existence, but they could also include sea serpents, mermaids, birds, or many other caricatures. In the present era, they have become a folk art that honors the past, and a collectible item found at many flea markets and antique shows.¹



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1. Bruno G. Turning in the Wind: A Short History of Weather Vanes. <http://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/view/3524/>. Accessed August 28, 2014.