

ESOTERICA MEDICA

They had
their heads
examined

ceramic head, a 19th century phrenologist could supposedly distinguish a homebody from a wanderer, a generous man from a miser and a math whiz from a dunce. Such "doctors" had a large following in Europe and the U.S. more than a century ago.

— ELENA CONIS

At the turn of the 20th century, Austrian physician Franz Joseph Gall proposed that the brain was divided into organs, or segments, each corresponding to a different personality trait — and that the size and shape of different brain parts matched a person's character.

Such traits would leave their mark on the outside of the skull, he proposed. An organ would grow larger as it was used, generating a measurable bump on the skull, or grow smaller if unused, causing cavities or depressions in the skull.

Gall called his study organology; he was, after all, identifying organs of the brain. It was his follower-turned-colaborator, Dr. Johann Kaspar Spurzheim, who dubbed the practice phrenology ("study of the mind") and took it on the road in Europe and the U.S.

Spurzheim and others developed Gall's ideas even further, identifying 35 brain "organs" (also called faculties) that reflected such innate characteristics as parental love, acquisitiveness, individuality, combativeness, friendship, mirthfulness, secretiveness, self-esteem, hope, calculation and "alimentiveness" (or love of food). Bumps, bulges and divots on the brow, forehead, back, top and sides of the head could even reveal whether one was likely to be patriotic or to hate one's own children.

Phrenology, the practitioners said,

Perhaps no one touted that last idea louder than the two Fowler brothers, farmers' sons from New York. Beginning in the 1830s, Lorenzo and Owen Fowler, barely college graduates, popularized phrenology across the U.S. Their Lower Manhattan museum, the Phrenology Cabinet, contained scores of skulls and head-casts, including ones of criminals and "the most distinguished men that ever lived." It was nearly as big a draw

The brothers also published tomes and journals on the topic, and sold a great many ceramic heads mapped out with the 35 faculties. The trend-conscious flocked to have their heads read

Phrenology, the Fowlers preached, could direct one to true love — or a dependable employee. It could identify a proclivity toward homesickness or a dislike of children. They also suggested remedies — such as this one to cultivate

parental love: "Play with and make much of children; try to appreciate their loveliness and innocence."

Mark Twain, meanwhile, claimed to have had his skull examined twice by an unwitting Lorenzo Fowler — who gave the writer two widely different readings.

It was just such inconsistencies that led phrenology to eventually be abandoned. By the early 20th century, it had become obvious to most in the fields of science and medicine that, for example, every combative person with a large

every combative person with a large combativeness faculty was matched with a combative person with a small one.

And far too many greedy folks had enormous faculties of benevolence.
Gall did get one thing right: Skull



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PARTS: An 1848 journal depicts what were believed to be the brain's segments.