

## **SAW Seminar: History of Science, History of Text**

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*Creating Treasuries for Health: Knowledge Codification in the 'Margins'*

**Abstract:** Early modern householders were bombarded with health-related information. Know-how was exchanged during medical consultations with physicians and other medical practitioners, around dinner tables with friends and family, scribbled on little paper slips and sent with letters and proffered between the covers of the myriad of printed medical books. These sorts of know-how ranged from recipes detailing how to make secret remedies to the information on the wondrous properties of new materia medica to drug shopping tips to gardening information on harvesting of herbs. With their family's health maintenance and potential sicknesses never far from their minds, householders eagerly collected and treasured such information. As a result, many households collectively compiled large notebooks filled to the brim with medical knowledge. With new and seemingly unique and important information flooding in from so many avenues, householders often felt the same sense of information overload experienced by Renaissance scholars and like scholars, they used a range of sophisticated information management technologies to shape, control and create their treasuries of health. This paper examines the notebooks of three seventeenth-century English families, the Boscawens, the St. Johns and the Temples, to explore the various note-taking strategies they adopted to manage their ever-growing collections. It will argue that householders adopted a number of information management strategies such as list making, extracting, commonplacing and the use of tables, columns and rough and waste books in their medical notebooks. It posits that in-depth studies of these notebooks give historians of science and medicine rare glimpses into practices of natural inquiry and knowledge codification outside the learned academy. Finally, these texts encourage us to consider early modern paper tools, technologies and information management systems within broader contexts.