

# Phrenology: All in your head?

**Looking back, from page A1.**

to the phrenologist, Dr. Burhans, was poetical ability, and the reading inspired so much confidence that the lady came up with "the first rhymes I ever made in my life; and as they were produced spontaneously, without meditation, it satisfies me that a talent for poetry must be innate. . . ."

In fact, she included that very first poem in her letter to the editor:

"I received a chart  
Which I've got by heart;  
The man said I was a poet,  
But I'm sure I didn't know it;  
Yet as soon as I knew it  
I felt anxious to show it."

One certainly gets the impression that the phrenologist told the letter-writing woman what she wanted to hear about herself. Still a trace of doubt lingered in her mind. "I was determined, however, to put the

skill of the professor to one more, and a very difficult test."

She sent her son, George, to the phrenologist for 50 cents' worth of reading. (The boy had a permanent bump on his skull, which was the result of an old injury.) He returned to his mother to tell her that Burhans had said the bump was not one he was born with and bore no relation to his character or intelligence.

Like an epidemic, the pseudo science of phrenology ran its course in the United States. Madeline Stern, author of *Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers*, has written that the Phrenological Institute continued to graduate practitioners until at least the 1920s. Stating that Americans became inclined toward liberation by a newer philosophy of mind, Stern concluded, "Wall Street and Freud together broke the back of the American Institute of Phrenology."