A Superior Tool

Forceps replaced the tooth key as an effective method for removing teeth. Still in use, they have different shapes to fit each individual tooth.

Images courtesy of Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan

Quick but Not Painless

Originally developed in the 1700s, the tooth key remained popular into the 19th century for quick tooth removal when effective anesthetics were not yet available. Unfortunately, less experienced dentists often broke jaws or adjacent teeth owing to the quick levering action of this tool.

Images courtesy of Sindecuse Collection unless otherwise noted

A Proper Fit

The adjustable articulator helped dentists create dentures with a comfortable fit and proper bite for their patients. Before 1920, nearly all dentists made their own dentures and crowns. They took pride in their work, experimenting with materials and techniques to provide their patients with the best fitting, most attractive dentures.

Images courtesy of Taubman Health Sciences Library, University of Michigan

Dentists Made Their Own Tools

Until the late 1800s, dentists mostly used the forge, hammer and grindstone to shape metal tools for specific tasks, adjusting angles and keeping points and edges sharp. Wood and bone handles were commonly used. This set has ivory handles.

Hand Drill—Slow but Effective

The hand drill with finger ring, introduced in 1846, was an improvement over earlier drilling methods. Dr. Jonathan Taft, first dean of the University of Michigan College of Dental Surgery, continued to teach its use.

Images From Sindecuse Collection unless otherwise noted