To his classmates, friends, and patients, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology Emeritus Herbert Durfee, M.D.’48 has always stood out as a quiet and friendly man, and a consummate medical professional. But a chance discovery by a family member has allowed the world to see another side of Dr. Durfee — a visual artist with an outstanding eye.

From about 1951 to 1953, prior to beginning his decades-long clinical practice in the Burlington area, Dr. Durfee was stationed along with his wife, Elizabeth, at the U.S. Army Airbase in Wiesbaden, West Germany. On occasional trips to other parts of Germany, and to Paris, London, and Italy, Dr. Durfee brought along his Rolleiflex and Rolleicord cameras and photographed the people and places of a Europe where the scars of war were still fresh. An interest in photography ran in the family: his father and fellow College of Medicine alumnus and obstetrician, Herbert A. Durfee, Sr., M.D.’20 took a photograph of every baby he delivered.

After returning to the U.S., the negatives from those European excursions sat in a box for more than 60 years, until discovered by chance by the doctor’s son, Eleazer “Lea” Durfee. Working with Vermont photographer Don Ross, Lea Durfee resurrected the artwork that had been hidden for so long. A selection of Dr. Durfee’s work opened this year at the University of Vermont Robert Hull Fleming Museum.

At left: Street Pavers, Paris
Dr. Durfee’s black-and-white images show both his talent for composition — such as his striking photograph of the Eiffel Tower, where the colossal structure itself seems to be out for a stroll on the boulevard — and his deep interest in the people he met in his travels. Those people and places can be visited at length in “Travelers in Postwar Europe: Photographs by H.A. Durfee Jr., 1951–53,” running through June in the Fleming’s Wolcott Gallery. 

In 1905, when the College of Medicine completed its third home at the corner of Prospect and Pearl Streets in Burlington, the main lecture room was named Hall A. For the next 63 years, students (such as the members of a class in the 1950s shown below right) learned the science of medicine while perched on those rows of steeply-raked wooden seats. When the College moved to the top of the hill in 1968, the designation of Hall A moved too, to a slightly more comfortable assemblage of orange-upholstered seats on the second floor of the Given Building.

Today’s learning environment fits today’s medical curriculum. Students take in lectures as a class in the Sullivan Classroom, and they work in teams in the new Larner Classroom. The settings have changed, but the mission remains the same: inspiring a lifetime of learning in the service of patients. This section of Vermont Medicine, named in honor of that storied hall, serves as a meeting place in print for all former students of the College of Medicine.