Instruments within kits for surgery, autopsy, and dissection differed little from one another. These kits or sets were sold to students, medical professors, and peripatetic rural physicians alike. The kits provided most of the primary tools for surgery and dissection, all contained in a small, durable, and easily transported wooden chest.

Shown here are several knives and probes for working with soft tissue and a saw and drill for cutting bone. Instruments in these kits often had handles made of ebonized wood, ebony, ivory, or a hardened natural latex called gutta-percha. Non-metal handles were phased out by the end of the nineteenth century, as sterilization became standard practice.