



CHIROPRACTIC (GENERAL)

## B.J. of Davenport: a Photo Odyssey

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Once upon a time (and perhaps as recently as 30 years ago), the Palmer College of Chiropractic could claim with some confidence that it had trained as many as 75 percent of all the chiropractors in the world. And for more than half of the chiropractic century (1902-1961) a majority of the planet's DCs could claim (or renounce) B.J. Palmer, DC, PhC, as their mentor. This year marks the fortieth anniversary of his death at his winter home on St. Armand's Key in Sarasota, Florida. (The home is now a museum maintained by Life University's founder and former B.J. student, Sid E. Williams, DC). Some will say facetiously that B.J. never died (recently seen with Elvis in Brazil?), while others acknowledge that the profound and lingering spirit of B.J., for better or worse, still hovers over the profession. Love him or hate him, the self-styled "Developer of Chiropractic" was a singular character who shaped the profession in many ways ( in ways he intended and ways he did not).

But this article is not meant to set a somber tone. For those who would better appreciate the complex nature of the man, there are several serious account of his life (e.g., Keating, 1997; Palmer, undated), and at least one fictional work (Maynard, 1977). As well, the journal of the Association for the History of Chiropractic, *Chiropractic History*, has offered a great many articles on B.J.'s life during its 20 years of publication, as have other scholarly periodicals. But Palmer's is also a visual story, for he was born (1882) during the early years of photography, and made prolific use of the new imaging technology throughout his career. (Many of these photos are taken from B.J.'s biography; Keating, 1997.)

So sit back and relax. Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear, with a cloud of dust, a puff of smoke, and a hearty Hi-Yo-BJ!

In His Youth



*Figure 1:  
This photo  
of the  
Palmer  
family,  
taken on 3  
April 1890,  
shows  
young B.J.  
(age 8), his  
father,  
stepmother  
and two  
sisters.  
B.J.'s was a  
stormy  
childhood,  
reportedly  
full of  
abuse and  
neglect  
(Keating,  
1997, p. 1).*

*Figure 2:  
Young Mr.  
Palmer  
returned  
to his  
parent's  
home in  
Davenport,  
Iowa for  
Christmas,  
1900. It  
was a  
vacation  
from his  
job as an  
hypnotic  
subject  
with  
"Professor"  
Herbert L.  
Flint's  
travelling  
vaudeville  
show  
(Keating,  
1997, p.  
15).*





Figure 3: By 1905, young Dr. Palmer (standing, with his hand on his father's shoulder) had several years of experience in operating the Palmer School of Chiropractic (PSC). This group of PSC graduates included: standing from left: E.E. Sutton (Class of '01), B.J. ('02), O.B. Jones (1900), and Solon M. Langworthy ('01). Seated from left: Oakley Smith ('99), Old Dad Chiro and Thomas H. Storey ('01) (Keating, 1997, p. 23).

*Figure 4: By the time this photo was made (circa 1908) B.J. had taken over as president and owner of the PSC from his father following the latter's incarceration in Scott County jail for the unlicensed practice of medicine (Keating, 1997, p. 51).*





*Figure 5: B.J. married Mabel Heath on 30 April 1904; she soon completed the course in chiropractic under D.D. Palmer and took over financial management of the Palmer School. In 1906, she gave birth to their only child, David D. Palmer, and in future years she provided a soothing counterpoint to B.J.'s often abrasive style of interaction. Mabel H. Palmer, DC is affectionately recalled as the "Sweetheart of the PSC" (Keating, 1997, pp. 33-5).*

*Figure 6: One of only two surviving photos showing all three generations of the Palmer chiropractors. From left to right: Mabel Palmer, B.J., D.D., and Dave; probably taken in 1913 during D.D. Palmer's final visit to Davenport.*



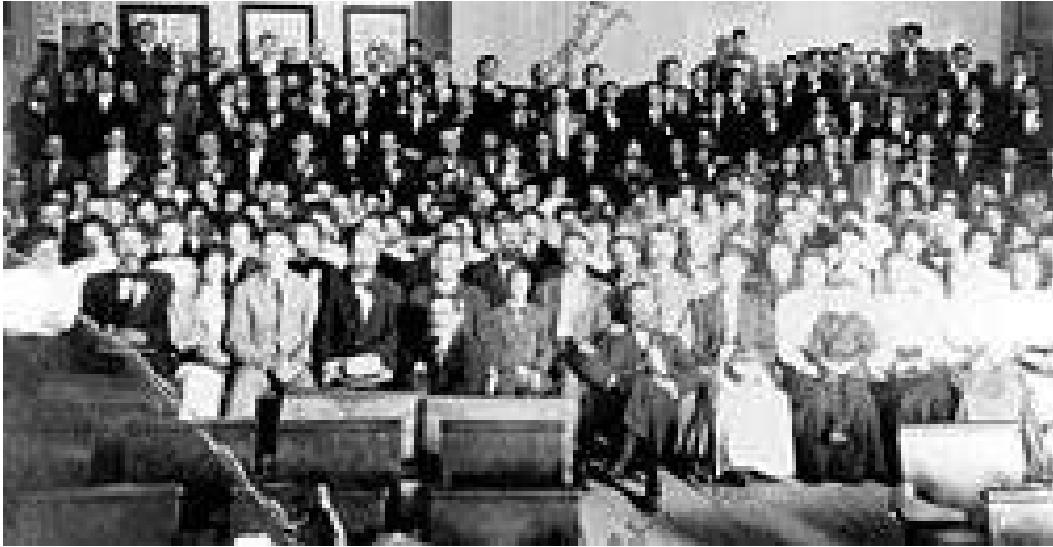
*Figure 7: This is a view of the parade of chiropractors (mostly DCs and students from the PSC and the Universal Chiropractic College) during August 1913 festivities. It was during this parade that B.J. Palmer, driving a car with Wisconsin state Senator Tom Morris at his side, was supposed to have struck his father down. Three subsequent grand jury investigations thoroughly exonerated B.J., but rumors that this nonevent led to D.D. Palmer's death in Los Angeles two months later would haunt the younger Dr. Palmer (and the profession) throughout his life (Keating, 1997, pp. 97-103).*

President of the PSC & Leader of the Profession

Figure 8: This classic photo, probably taken in the late teens or early 1920s, shows B.J. (seated center) with the PSC faculty, including Harry Vedder, DC (standing second from left); Mabel Palmer, DC (standing third from left); dean of the PSC, A.B. Hender, MD, DC (standing fourth from left); Lee Edwards, MD, DC (standing third from right); James Firth, DC (standing far right); Reverend John Craven, DC (seated far left); William Heath, DC, Mabel's father (seated second from left); Stephen Burich, DC (seated second from right); and radiologist E.A. Thompson, DC (seated far right). The PSC reached an all-time high in student enrollments (perhaps as many as 3,000) in the years immediately following World War I.







*Figure 9: Scene from a PSC assembly, circa 1910. B.J. is seated front row, center; Joy Loban, DC, chair of the PSC's department of philosophy, is seated fourth from left in front row. Loban subsequently left the PSC to organize the Universal Chiropractic College; commencing in 1913, he repeatedly sought against (unsuccessfully) grand jury indictments of B.J. for patricide (Keating, 1997, p. 71).*



*Figure 10: This scene from a banquet of the Wisconsin Chiropractic Association on 3 January 1916 includes B.J. (seated far right). Seated opposite B.J. is F.G. Lundy, DC, an officer in the Universal Chiropractors' Association (UCA), the protective society established at the PSC in 1906 for the purpose of defending chiropractors charged with unlicensed practice. Seated at Dr. Lundy's left is Tom Morris, LLB, lieutenant governor of Wisconsin, and chief legal counsel for the UCA. Palmer and Morris traveled extensively throughout the country to appear in court on behalf of the UCA and its members (Keating, 1997, p. 108).*

*Figure 11: Students and faculty of the PSC are seen in this photo taken in Montezuma, Iowa circa March 1910. The group had traveled by train from Davenport to attend the trial of "State of Iowa vs. Corwin." It was common for supporters from the PSC to "pack the courtrooms" during trials of DCs for unlicensed practice. Dr. Corwin, a chiropractor and member of the UCA, is seen here standing front and center with the local sheriff (in light sweater). B.J. Palmer is seen standing fifth from left in back row (Keating, 1997, p. 54).*



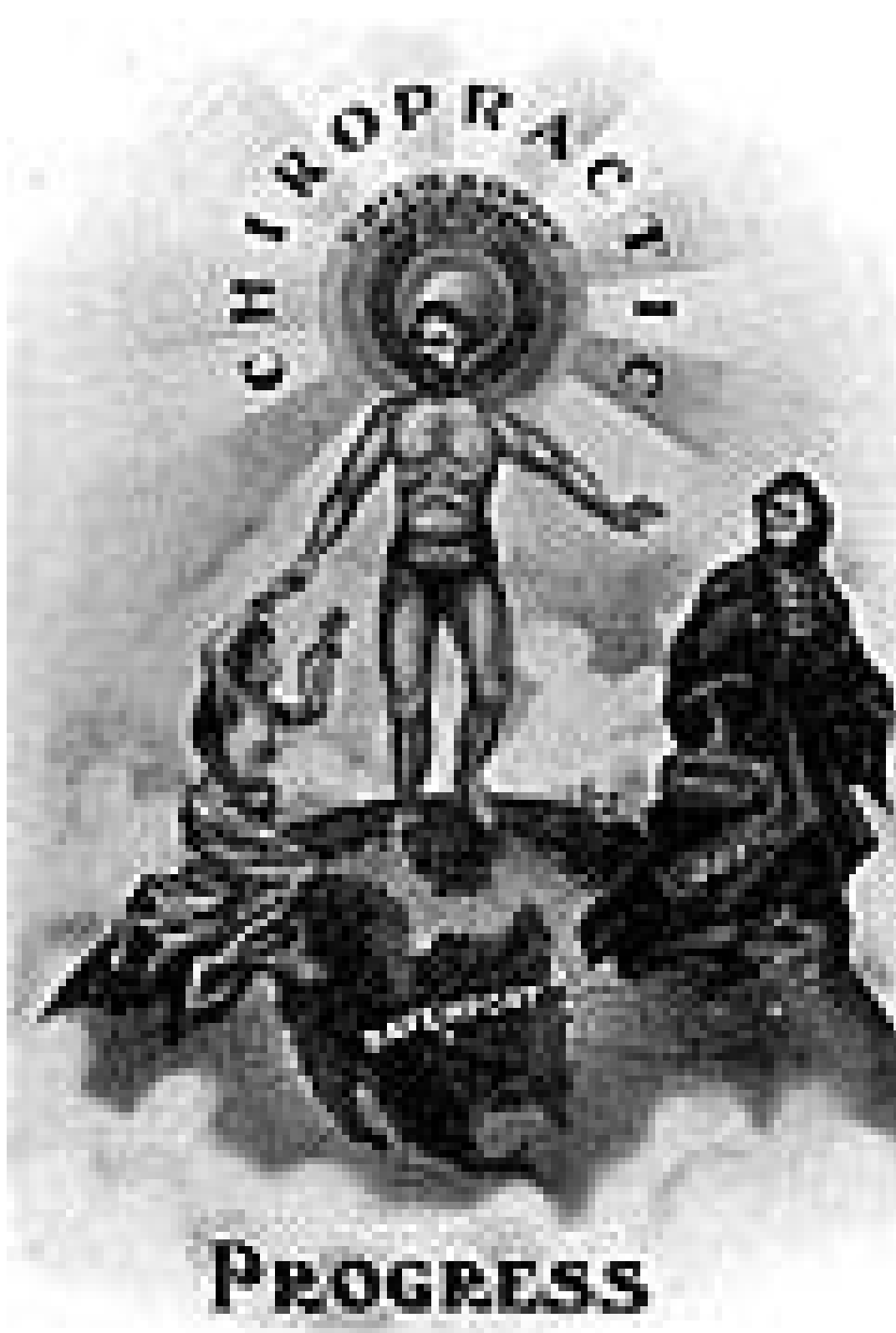


Figure 12: This cartoon image first appeared in the PSC's *The Chiropractor* in 1910, and later on the inside lid of boxes of *The Chiropractor* brand of cigars. It exemplifies B.J.'s notion of promoting chiropractic, the PSC and himself. A bare-chested, muscle-bound B.J. stands atop the planet (of which Davenport, Iowa is the center). With his right hand he reaches out to the sick and ailing, and with his left he fends off Death Incarnate (who carries a physician's black bag of poisons/drugs) (Keating, 1997, p. 78).

*Figure 13: Palmer's methods of advertising were influenced by his friendship with iconoclastic Elbert Hubbard (left), Harvard University drop out, "free thinker," and well known writer for Boston's Arena Magazine, who established his Roycroft furniture factory and printing plant in Aurora, New York. Hubbard and his wife died when a German submarine sank the Lusitania in the early days of World War I (Keating, 1997, pp. 140-2).*



Love of Gadgets and Collectibles



*Figure 14: Born in the "age of machines," Palmer was fond of technology. In this photo he rides in one the earliest "horseless carriages" in Iowa. By 1910 he had purchased an early x-ray machine for the PSC, and commenced development of the field he identified as "spinography" (Keating, 1997, pp. 66-7).*

*Figure 15: In 1922, B.J. brought radio to Iowa with his purchase of a small transmitter, and the formation of Radiophone Station WOC. Within two years he had increased the broadcasting reach of WOC to Europe, the Orient and South America, and became a well-known national celebrity. With his 1930 purchase of sister station WHO in Des Moines, he formed the Central Broadcasting Company, which was the "western link" of the National Broadcasting Company [NBC] (Keating, 1997, Chapter 9, pp. 225-46).*

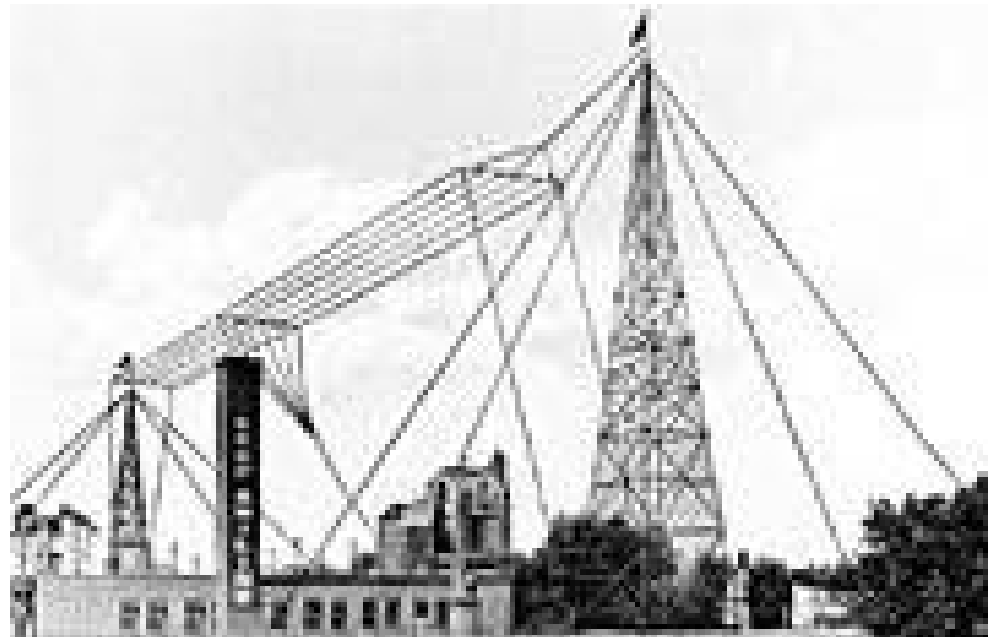
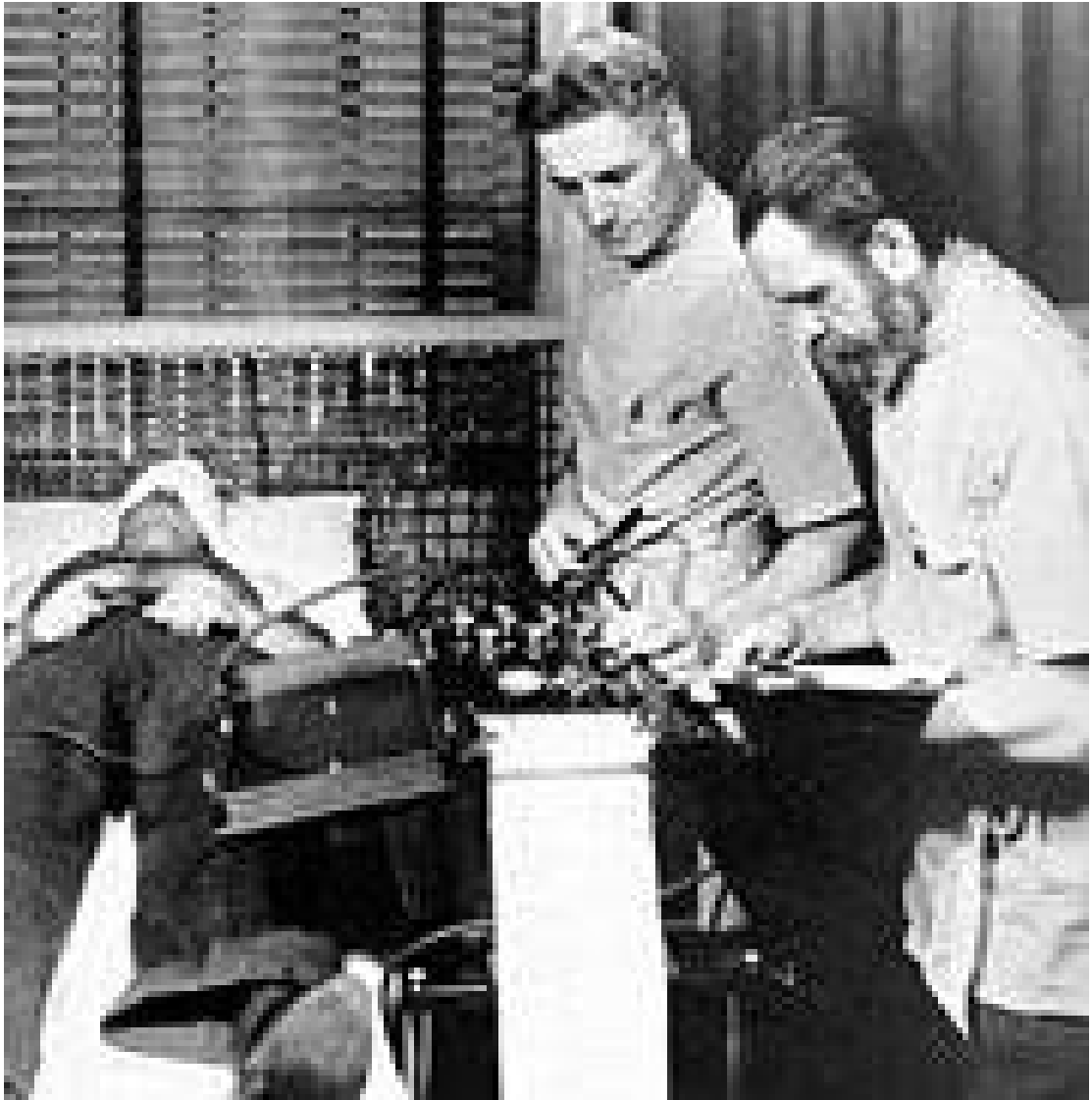




Figure 16: In 1924, B.J. officially unveiled a two-pronged, spinal heat-sensing device, the neurocalometer (NCM), which he claimed could find subluxations better than any chiropractor. Henceforth, he proclaimed, practice without an NCM must be considered unethical, and those who introduced competing NCM-like instruments would be sued for patent infringement. The device could not be purchased, but was available by 10-year lease from the PSC at a cost of more than \$2,000 (a fabulous sum in those days). Reaction from the profession was rapid and largely negative (Keating, 1997, Chapter 9, pp. 225-46). Enrollment at the PSC plummeted, and Palmer was defeated in his bid for re-election to the secretariat of the UCA in August 1926; he had held this post since 1906 when he founded the protective society, until his resignation in 1925. In September 1926, Palmer organized the Chiropractic Health Bureau (forerunner of today's International Chiropractors' Association), over which he would preside until his death in 1961.

*Figure 17:  
Palmer is  
seen here,  
circa  
1945,  
operating  
an early  
version of  
the  
polygraph.*





*Figure 18: Another Palmer innovation was the electroencephaloneuromentimpograph, a precursor of the electroencephalograph (EEG) technology in regular use by neurologists and brain researchers today (Keating, 1997, p. 279). Palmer apparently believed this device enabled detection of mental impulses from innate intelligence.*



Figure 19:  
Part of  
B.J.'s  
famous  
knife  
collection  
can be seen here,  
circa 1945,  
obscured  
by the  
American  
flag and a  
DAV  
banner.  
Also  
memorable  
were his  
collection  
of Oriental  
art, which  
graced the  
B.J. Palmer  
Clinic  
gardens  
and the  
amusement  
center  
known as  
"Little Bit  
O'Heaven,"  
and his  
collection  
of phallic  
symbols.  
Palmer's  
many  
witticisms  
were  
displayed  
on the  
walls of the  
PSC.





*Figure 20: This image of the Palmer family in India (right to left: B.J., Mabel and Dave) was taken during one of several world tours. B.J. authored a book describing his travels, 'Round the World With B.J. (Palmer, 1926), as did his wife, Mabel, who authored Stepping Stones (Palmer, 1942). B.J.'s travelogues were broadcast on Radiophone stations WOC and WHO in the 1920s and 1930s, and generated great interest in this era before easy global air travel.*

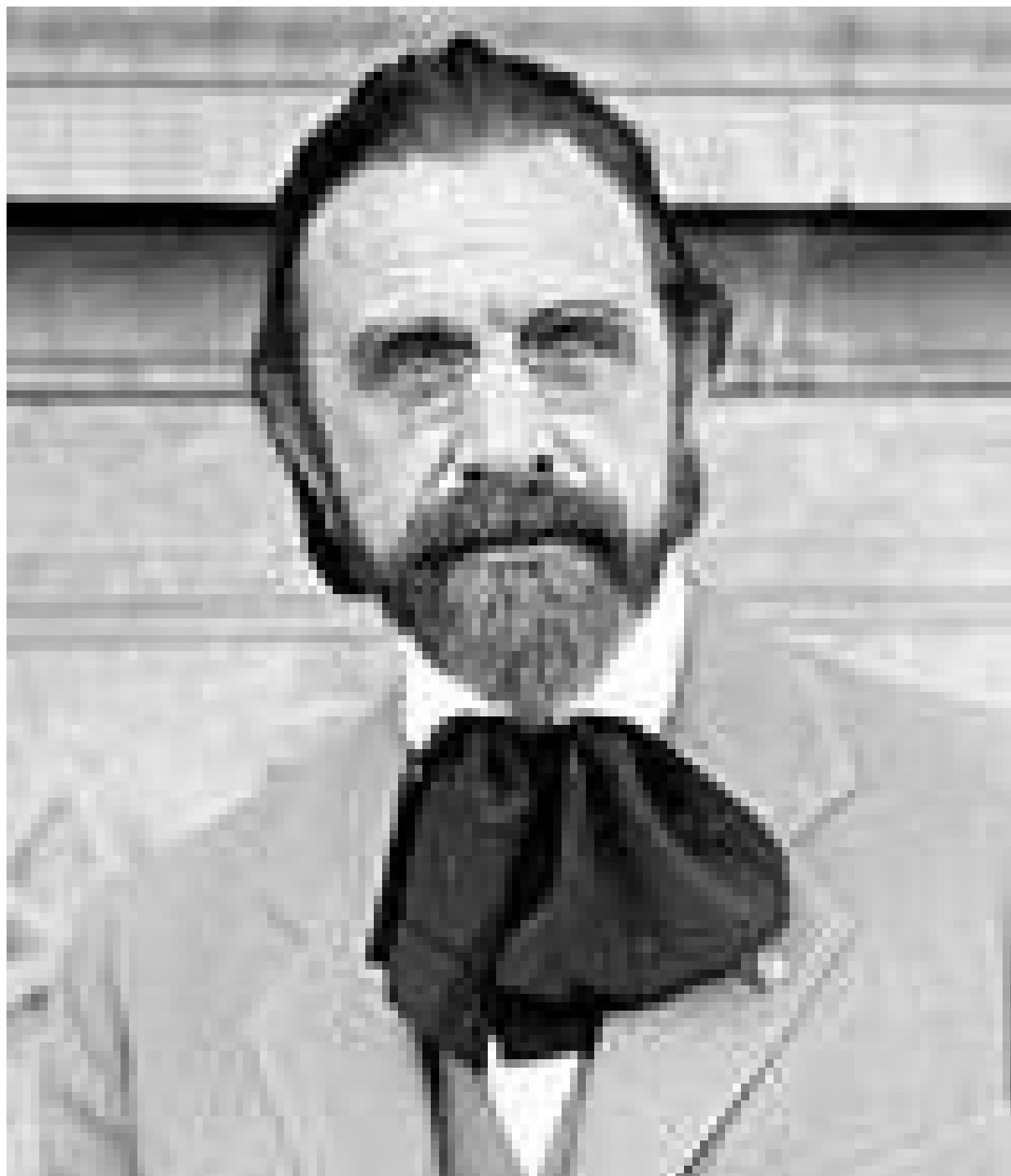
*Figure 21:  
Ever the  
showman,  
B.J.  
donned  
many  
colorful  
garbs  
throughout  
his career;  
here, "Big  
Chief B.J."  
poses for  
the  
camera.*





*Figures  
22 & 23:  
B.J. was  
especially  
fond of  
uniforms.*

*Figure 24:  
Even in his  
daily garb,  
B.J. chose to  
stand out  
from the  
crowd. His  
suits were  
specially  
made, and  
his flowing  
ties were  
part of his  
trademark.  
This photo  
was taken in  
Long  
Beach, CA, in  
1931, during  
his  
attendance  
at  
homecoming  
festivities for  
the Ratledge  
College of  
Chiropractic.*



The Final Years



*Figure 25: B.J.'s life following the calamitous introduction of the NCM and his fall from his position as "majority leader" in the profession has been characterized as a "setting sun." But "B.J. himself" would never admit this, and his surviving empire gave him considerable grounds to ignore his declining authority. He is seen here circa 1945 (seated center, front) with the interns and staff of his PSC Clinic. Seated on his right is Lyle Sherman, DC, clinic director, after whom the Sherman College of Straight Chiropractic is named. Seated on B.J.'s left is Herbert Hender, DC, successor to his father, A.B. Hender, MD.*

*Figure 26:  
Dr. B.J.  
Palmer, age  
73, is seen  
here with  
students  
during a  
lecture at  
the  
Canadian  
Memorial  
Chiropractic  
College on  
Bloor  
Street,  
Toronto in  
1956.*



# Builders of America



Small text block on the top left side of the poster.

\*\*\*



**B.J. PALMER, D.C., Ph.D.**



Small text block on the top right side of the poster.

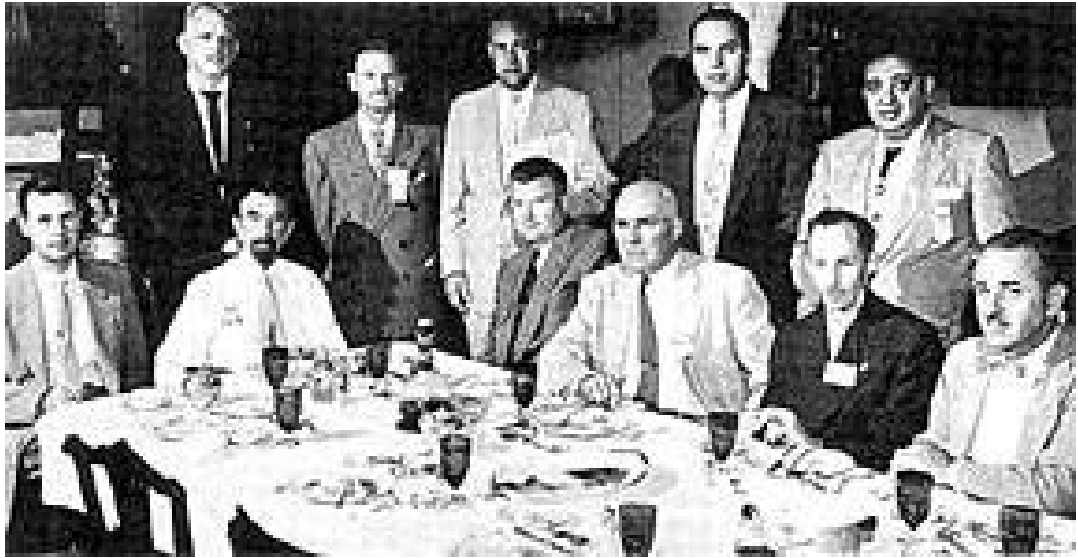


Small text block at the bottom of the poster, enclosed in a decorative border.

Figure 27:  
The  
International  
Chiropractors'  
Association  
honored its  
founder in  
1947 with this  
poster.



*Figure 28: Officials of the International Chiropractors' Association and various chiropractic college leaders enjoy a breakfast meeting with B.J. at the Palmer mansion in Davenport during the mid-1950s (Keating, 1997, p. 283).*



*Figure 29: A weary looking B.J. Palmer, as he appeared circa 1960. His final decade was "marked by increasingly severe illnesses," according to W. Heath Quigley, DC, MS, nephew of Mabel Palmer and B.J.'s personal chiropractor in his final years (Quigley, 1989). B.J. spent an ever increasing part of his time at his winter home in Sarasota, Florida, where he died of intestinal cancer on 27 May 1961. Soon after, his son, Dave, took over as president of the PSC, and renamed the institution the Palmer College of Chiropractic.*

## References:

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- Quigley, William H. The last days of B.J. Palmer: revolutionary confronts reality. *Chiropractic History* 1989 (Dec); 9(2): 11-9.

If your interest in chirohistory has been stimulated, then consider joining the Association for the History of Chiropractic (AHC). Founded at Spears Hospital in Denver in 1980, the AHC is a non-profit, membership organization whose goal is the discovery, dissemination and preservation of the saga of chiropractic. The AHC held its first annual Conference on Chiropractic History at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. in 1981, and has held similar conferences each year since at various chiropractic colleges.

The AHC publishes a scholarly journal, *Chiropractic History*, in which chiropractors and interested observers contribute their expertise to telling and interpreting the rich lore of the profession. The journal, which is indexed in the National Library of Medicine's *Histline*, is published twice per year. *Chiropractic History* is distributed to all members of the AHC as a membership benefit. Membership in the AHC can be obtained by sending your name, address and check for \$50 (\$20/year for students) to the AHC's executive director:

Alana Callender, MS,  
*Executive Director*  
Association for the History of Chiropractic  
1000 Brady Street,  
Davenport, IA 52803 USA

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Thank you.

*Joseph Keating, Jr., PhD*

*Phoenix, Arizona*

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