

C. Sterling Cooley, DC: Forgotten Leader of Chiropractic's Middle Ages, Part II

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Editor's note: Part I of this article appeared in the March 22nd issue.

Sterling Cooley was a frequent contributor to the NCA's Journal. Of particular interest were his many historical reviews of D.D. Palmer's life and theories. He is credited with dozens of published papers.

Cooley grew increasingly dissatisfied by the extreme policies of B.J. Palmer. The Oklahoman looked for his authority in chiropractic to the founder. Chiropractors should be free to innovate, he reasoned, but the fundamental principles of chiropractic should be those set forth by D.D. Palmer rather than his son. The "Old Master," he believed, had offered the "true...concept of chiropractic" (Cooley, 1961). Restricting adjustments to the upper cervical vertebrae, as B.J. had done with his "hole-in-one" technique, was especially distasteful to Cooley, who had been trained to adjust any of the several hundred joints of the body. His education under D.D. was reflected in his policies as an officer of the NCA:

The National Chiropractic Association does not tell a member he MUST do this or that. It DOES tell his enemies what they must not - and shall not - do to HIM (Cooley, 1936).

and:

..."Chiropractic," to the NCA, means the science founded, defined and expounded by Daniel David Palmer - and it proposes to preserve that science against destructive influences from any and all sources - internal as well as external. It does not say that all its members must practice Chiropractic in exactly the same manner, that they must not express their individualities and individual abilities or that Chiropractic research must be kept within limits prescribed by an official clique. In fact, it does not tell its members they must or must not do anything - except be good, sincere chiropractors, true to the trust imposed in them by their patients and to the principles of liberty and progress on which our nation was established (Cooley, 1937).

C.S. and B.J. sparred over the scope of practice and "authority" issues in rather gentlemanly fashion (e.g., Palmer, 1949). Cooley often drew parallels between the founder of chiropractic and Christ:

To disagree with the teachings of Jesus, as expressed in his own words, would be useless in developing a Christian concept. If we want Christianity, rather than Mohammedanism or Bhuddism [sic], we must take it as he gave it to us - remembering, however, that he did not give it to us as "finished"...

As a pioneer in Chiropractic, I feel entitled to repeat that the Chiropractic standard was established by the Master Chiropractor, Daniel David Palmer, and by none other... (Cooley, 1940).

Cooley considered himself a "straight" chiropractor whose exclusive focus was on subluxation-reduction:

Not infrequently we hear a sincere, successful Chiropractor declare: "Adjusting alone is not enough in all cases"...I shall call attention to one "extra" I believe every chiropractor should try to employ - not occasionally, but IN EVERY CASE. I must resort to a biblical parallel, as I often do, because I find a striking resemblance between the story of primitive Christianity and the story of Chiropractic from its discovery until now...That SPECIFIC adjustment is the "extra" which has kept Daniel David Palmer's message and achievements so far above and ahead of anything offered by his would-be imitators and detractors. It is the "extra" which separates scientific Chiropractic from mere spinal manipulation. It is an "extra" every chiropractor should employ IN EVERY CASE (Cooley, 1941).

Cooley became the voice of D.D. Palmer within the broad-scope national association. This position was expanded by his commitment to several historical projects. The first was the commissioning of a statue of the founder to be placed in D.D. Palmer's supposed birthplace, the town of Port Perry, Ontario. [Palmer was actually born just a few miles east of Toronto, in the area then known as Brown's Corner or Audley (Vear, 1997)]. Sterling Cooley commenced this work circa 1938 in association with the NCA's Toronto convention. At this meeting Cooley was elected chairman of the executive board. Again likening chiropractic to Christianity, he suggested that "Toronto is to Chiropractic what Bethlehem is to Christendom" (Cooley, 1938). The NCA's conventioners traveled to Port Perry to dedicate the plot where the monument was to be placed in 1945 during the profession's fiftieth anniversary. (The memorial ceremony was delayed until 1946, owing to wartime travel restrictions.)

One of Sterling Cooley's proudest moments occurred in 1943, when he made an invited presentation to the Associated Chiropractors & Drugless Therapists of Ontario. His lecture was published as a pamphlet entitled "The Life of Daniel David Palmer" (Cooley, 1943), and quoted liberally from D.D. Palmer's classic text, *The Chiropractor's Adjuster: The Science, Art & Philosophy of Chiropractic* (Palmer, 1910). The founder's classic tome had not been widely available to the profession, but B.J. had published a sanitized version (minus D.D.'s many arrows aimed at his son). When the NCA and its non-profit arm (the non-profit Chiropractic Research Foundation, today's FCER) considered republication of D.D.'s text, Cooley's reputation as a disciple of D.D. Palmer grew as a result of his enthusiastic endorsement of the project. He favored republication by a photographic process so as to ensure that the founder's original rhetoric, with all its warts and wonders, would be available to all chiropractors.

In 1945, Cooley joined with Vinton F. Logan, DC of the Logan Basic College in St. Louis; Leo Spears, DC, of Denver; Judge E.B. Simmons of Texas, publisher of the *Simmons-Service for Chiropractors*; Mr. Cash Asher, former publicity director for both the NCA and the ICA; and Herbert E. Weiser, DC, of the Texas Chiropractic College, to form the American Consolidated Chiropractic Association (ACCA). With Cooley as president, Logan as "executive secretary" and Weiser as "defense secretary," the goal of the new society was to conduct a vigorous campaign against political medicine, specifically the American Medical Association (AMA). The ACCA charged a stiff membership fee, \$100 per year, which Cooley justified in terms of the political action that was needed (Cooley, undated).

Likening the ongoing feud between the NCA and ICA as the "POT calling the KETTLE black," Cooley called upon the profession to accept "founding authority" in defining chiropractic's scope of practice:

The very fact that the "GAP" is so very wide between the ICA and the NCA is PROOF POSITIVE that BOTH must be more or less wrong in their concept of Chiropractic. The publication and distribution of the ORIGINAL D.D. Palmer's "CHIROPRACTOR'S ADJUSTER" - by photographic process - has beyond a shadow of a doubt proved that both the ICA and the NCA are "OFF THE BEAM" with the science they are both supposed to represent.

The "MIDDLE GROUND" that both the NCA and the ICA can and should find a SOLID FOUNDATION upon which to stand - the ONLY foundation upon which Chiropractic can lay claim to being a DISTINCT, SEPARATE and INDEPENDENT science, art and philosophy - is the ORIGINAL concept of Chiropractic as presented to us by its FOUNDER - Dr. D.D. Palmer.

Up to 1949 - "The Chiropractor's Adjuster" by D.D. Palmer was not available, therefore, Chiropractic HAD NO AUTHORITY...Any definition of Chiropractic not CONSISTENT with the principles expressed by...[D.D. Palmer's] definition of Chiropractic would and SHOULD BE set aside by any COMPETENT judge or jury... it is the only definition each and every Chiropractor can or should support as being AUTHENTIC...It is the "MIDDLE GROUND" upon which to build the superstructure of Chiropractic that will endure throughout eternity; it is the only FOUNDATION [by which] Chiropractic can or will merit public esteem and acceptance (Cooley, 1949).

The ACCA may have continued to operate as late as 1950, yet it never became a significant influence within the profession. Cooley became more active with his state association, serving in the 1950s as associate editor of the O.C.A. News, and in the 1960s as editor of the *Magazine of the Oklahoma Chiropractic Physicians Association*. He was interested in the formation of the present-day ACA (in 1963), but was concerned that the new national organization would be dominated by the same politicians (e.g., Loran M. Rogers, DC) who had governed the former NCA.

In 1965, Dr. Cooley was honored by Palmer College president Dave Palmer as an "outstanding pioneer" of the profession (Rehm, 1980, p. 280). He died later that year, at the age of 75 and still practicing daily.

In his 57-year career (1908-1965), C. Sterling Cooley was probably the most prolific of authors on the life and teachings of Old Dad Chiro. His adherence to the "Old Master's" teachings permitted alliances with straight and mixer chiropractors alike. He believed strongly that members of the profession, no matter their individual differences, must unite against the common foe: political medicine. He admired ultra-straight chiropractor T.F. Ratledge's view of the intra professional political scene in the first few years after B.J.'s demise. In correspondence with Paul Smallie, D.C., a 1935 Ratledge graduate and editor of the *World-Wide Report*, Cooley expressed his admiration of Ratledge and Smallie:

I think Dr. T.F. Ratledge, in his observation on September 15, 1959, just about summed up the Chiropractic World Situation as it appears to be in 1963:

"I never saw people so afraid of each other as are the various groups of Chiropractors. Whether it is fear of divulging their scientific knowledge OR LACK OF IT, I do not know." Your book "The Guiding Light of RATLEDGE" could, if the profession would read it, CLEAR UP the confusion as to WHAT CHIROPRACTIC was intended to be. Your book will not be popular because Dr. Ratledge tells the profession WHAT THEY DO NOT WANT TO HEAR: That Chiropractic IS and MUST BE TO SURVIVE an

Independent, Separate and Distinct Health system within itself and has nothing in common with any other Health or Disease system what-so-ever... (93).

C. Sterling Cooley was a gentle person. Herbert K. Lee, D.C. of the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College recalls the Oklahoman from his 1943 visit to Toronto. Lee relates: "I remember the man well. He had a friendly smile, had a hearty laugh and was very approachable" (Lee, 1998). Dr. Cooley's life was summarized in an obituary written by fellow political activist Stanley Hayes, D.C.

On the morning of November 25, we were shocked and grieved beyond expression to receive a telegram that at eight o'clock on the night of November 23, aortic aneurism had ended the life of Dr. C. Sterling Cooley... [he] was probably the last living student of the Founder. He fought in the front lines of our profession throughout almost its entire history. His enthusiasm never flagged and his valiant efforts never faltered. He carried the chiropractic message and advanced the chiropractic cause in ways innumerable. A clear and convincing writer, a forceful and compelling speaker, he was a tower of strength to our profession.

He was never a radical, never a bigot, but he was always a crusader for the sane, scientific, RATIONAL chiropractic of D.D. Palmer...His body has returned to the dust. But Dr. C. Sterling Cooley is not dead - for he will live forever in the hearts and minds of those who knew him (Hayes, 1965).

Dr. Cooley is not well remembered today, but he exerted a significant influence on the middle ages of the chiropractic profession. His contributions merit further study.

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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 reservation of the saga of chiropractic. The AHC held its first annual Conference on Chiropractic History at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. in 1980, and has held similar conferences each year since at various chiropractic colleges. The AHC's 1999 Conference on Chiropractic History will be held at the University of Bridgeport, College of Chiropractic, in Bridgeport, Connecticut during April 30-May 2. Details about the upcoming conference can be obtained by contacting the college:

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Thank you.

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