

Who Will Save the Family Jewels?

Joseph Keating Jr., PhD

It was another letter from a senior doctor who wanted to know if anyone would be interested in the papers, books, journals, and photographs that he had amassed during many decades as a chiropractor. What should he do with them? Many of the photographs were one-of-a-kind snapshots of the members and leaders of the old National Chiropractic Association and its successor, the American Chiropractic Association. They are priceless, irreplaceable treasures. Once they're gone, they'll be gone forever: no second chances.

There was only one possible answer. There is only one college that has made a major, sustained commitment to professional quality preservation of all aspects of chiropractic history. Established during the vice presidency of John L. Miller, DC, (later president of Palmer College West), and nurtured by his successors, the Archives of the David D. Palmer Health Sciences Library at Palmer College in Davenport does a very commendable job of preserving the written and photographic record of the chirocentury. A team of archivists and assistants apply themselves daily to the on-going tasks involved in restoring, cataloguing, preserving, and storing the profession's "family jewels." They labor constantly to strike that delicate balance between the need for security of the collection and the need to provide access to those who wish to explore the roots and branches of chiropractic. Like many librarians, they work quietly, deliberately, steadily, and often go unappreciated. They do nice work.

Headed by Glenda Wiese, MA, the Palmer Archives is, to my knowledge, the only facility of this caliber in the profession. Many schools and societies have collections of "history stuff," but none has made the magnitude of investment that Palmer College has. I assume that the Palmer Archives is a money-loser for the college; if so, it bespeaks the commendable insight and commitment that the school's trustees and administration must have for historical scholarship. This is perhaps all the more remarkable when one considers that the Palmer archival workers themselves (rather than nonlibrary faculty and personnel) have been the most frequent source of scholarly publications from the institution. There's something very right about the people who manage the Palmer Archives.

To be sure, the Davenport facility has enjoyed a distinct advantage in establishing its collection. The college is the oldest institution of any type in the profession, and its leader from 1906 to 1961 was a remarkable hoarder with a sense of history and his own destiny. To B.J. Palmer, who collected everything related to chiropractic (whether he approved of the content or not), we owe a debt of gratitude. The contents of the notorious elevator shaft, a storage area at the Palmer school in which B.J. accumulated a mountain of paper, is part of the explanation for the breadth and utility of the Palmer collection. The holdings of the Palmer Archives are not the largest in the profession (they may be second in volume); what distinguishes it most significantly is the care which it receives.

In terms of quality of preservation, organization, and security of chiropractic historical materials, the Palmer Archives are rivaled perhaps only by the American Medical Association's (AMA's) "Historical Health Fraud and Alternative Medicine Collection" (Hafner et al., 1992) and by the extensive collection of documents maintained by the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE). The

AMA's chiropractic records date to 1908, and include more than 26 cartons of materials. In 1906 Arthur J. Cramp, MD, joined the editorial staff of the Journal of the AMA and his primary responsibilities were in the area of "health fraud and quackery" (Hafner et al., 1992, p. viii). His work led to the 1913 creation of AMA's "Propaganda Department," which might be thought of as an early precursor to AMA's 1963 Committee on Quackery. Although JAMA's new editor in 1924, Morris Fishbein, MD, would be better remembered for his extensive chiro-bashing, it was Cramp's work which provided Fishbein with his ammunition. Cramp published many of his findings in several volumes: *Nostrums & Quackery* (Nostrums, 1912; Cramp 1921).

Concerning the Archives of the CCE, I would estimate that Ralph G. Miller, EdD, executive vice president, has had some 100,000 pages of materials placed on micro-fiche and back-ups of the micro-fiche cards are stored at a professional archival center. This care of records will mean that the CCE's files should be available in perpetuity. Dr. Miller deserves a heartfelt round of applause from the profession. Of course much of the content of the CCE Archives is not available to the public, since it bears on the confidential reports made by various chiropractic schools in compliance with accreditation standards. However many files are accessible, such as the records of now defunct institutions, general correspondence, and various reports from CCE committee (excluding those of the Commission on Accreditation, of course). Included in the material are many letters and reports dating back to the 1930s, such as the voluminous correspondence between various chiropractic leaders and John J. Nugent, DC, NCA director of Education 1941-1961. Fascinating stuff. However, the CCE does not accept records and materials from the profession-at-large for its archives. It is not a general repository for historical materials in the sense that the Palmer Archives are.

Back to the main theme of this report: my advice to inquiries from doctors who would like to see their own personal collections preserved for future generations is always the same. Whether you're an ICA-type or an ACA-type or some other type, from a straight school or a "dirty, stinkin' mixer college," you would do yourself and the profession a service if you would send (or plan to have sent posthumously) your collected papers, including books, journals, correspondence, audio and video tapes, diplomas, certificates, photographs, etc., to the Palmer Archives. Our other schools have simply not yet shown an equivalent degree of commitment to preserving the "family jewels."

And yes, it's time to start planning for the bicentennial.

Enuf sed!

References

Cramp AJ. *Nostrums and Quackery*. Chicago: American Medical Association, 1921.

Hafner AW, Carson JG, Zwicky JF. *Guide to the American Medical Association's Historical Health Fraud and Alternative Medicine Collection*. Chicago: American Medical Association, 1992.

Nostrums and quackery: articles on the nostrum evil and quackery, reprinted from the Journal of American Medical Association. Chicago: American Medical Association, 1912.

Joseph Keating Jr., PhD

MARCH 1995