

Dispelling Some Myths About Old Dad Chiro

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Where to begin? Which chiro skeletons to bring out of the closet? There are so many! The exhumation of the notorious elevator shaft at Palmer College in Davenport has produced such a wealth of intriguing information. Moreover, the growing volume of serious scholarship in chiropractic history is providing new insights into the chiropractic century. Well, here are a few choice selections:

Myth 1. Harvey Lillard received the first chiropractic adjustment on September 18, 1895.

This seems unlikely since Lillard reported otherwise in the January 1897 issue of Palmer's advertising flier, *The Chiropractic*. Harvey says that DD had first told him about his new method "last January." Either Harvey Lillard was not the first chiropractic patient, or that magical first thrust did not occur until 1896. Parenthetically, although Old Dad Chiro does later mention September 1895 as the time of the first adjustment, I've never found him to narrow it down to September 18. Okay, so this is trivia, but the following theoretical consideration is not. ...

Myth 2. Old Dad Chiro treated nerves only, while osteopaths treated the circulation.

Well, not in DD's first chiropractic theory and practice. Palmer tells us in his pre-turn-of-the-century advertiser, *The Chiropractic* (available from the Palmer College Library Archives in Davenport), that he is concerned with relieving "friction" (the presumed cause of inflammation) produced by displaced anatomy -- any displaced parts: arteries, veins, nerves, muscles, ligaments, and bones. DD had previously become interested in inflammatory processes, apparently as a result of his efforts to develop a more rational and "specific" magnetic healing diagnosis and intervention (Palmer 1896). By finding the precise site of inflammation in his patient, he believed he could avoid wasting his personal magnetic force. He treated the diseased organ only through laying on of hands in very specific/strategic sites. Palmer indicates that other magnetics promiscuously rub, slap, knead and/or massage their patients, whereas he cools the inflammation more efficiently by pouring his magnetic power directly into the diseased organ only. Later, as a "chiropractic" (not yet a chiropractor) he will "manipulate in order to adjust" the displaced part, thereby obviating the need to cool it off magnetically.

Andrew Taylor Still, founder of osteopathy, aka the "Lightening Bonesetter," manipulated any part of the body, including bone-pinching-nerve, in order to permit the endogenous medicines of the brain to reach any affected part. The earliest rationales for osteopathy and chiropractic were equally broad in presumed implications and applicability to health and healing. Still's and Palmer's theories were not synonymous, but both dealt with treated nerves and blood.

Myth 3. Old Dad Chiro believed that bones pinched spinal nerve roots, thereby restricting nerve flow: In his earliest theory -- perhaps.

In his last writings (1910 a&b, 1914), however, Palmer tells us otherwise:

"I have learned since that nerves are not 'pinched in foramina,' but, instead, are impinged by pressure of displaced bones ..." (Palmer 1910a, pp 10).

and:

"Nerves are never pinched or impinged upon in the foramina. Foramina are never narrowed. We do not adjust the vertebra. The vertebra itself, so far as a chiropractor knows, is never displaced, dislocated or subluxated."

"Any extreme movement of the articular surfaces enlarges the foramen or foramina, causes the nerves and blood vessels to become stretched, irritated, increasing its carrying power."

"Nerves are never shut off by the closure of the foramina. There are no dams or obstructions that restrict. Impulses are never interrupted." (Palmer, 1914, pp 94)

At the end of his chiropractic career DD had come to believe that nerve impulses were vibrational phenomena and behaved like guitar strings. I fantasize that he imagined the nervous system as a meshwork of fine threads stretched out across the skeletal structure of the body. When one or more joints subluxated, in the spine or elsewhere, this would tend to stretch or relax the nerves, thereby altering communication to end-organs, causing either inflammation (too much nerve tension) or cold hard tumors (too little nerve tension). Although Old Dad Chiro may have originated the "foot on the hose" concept which B.J. Palmer later popularized, he had definitely abandoned such by the time he reached Portland.

Myth 4. Old Dad Chiro died of auto injuries sustained when B.J. Palmer attempted patricide: This contention is absurd in several respects. Firstly, we know that Dad Chiro's death certificate indicates typhoid fever as the cause of death (Gielow, 1981); I am unaware that trauma is considered an etiology for this disorder. We also know that Joy Loban, DC, executor of DD's estate, voluntarily withdrew a civil suit claiming damages against B.J. Palmer, and that several grand juries repeatedly refused to bring criminal charges against the son. More importantly, the claim of patricide is absurd on its face. If BJ had desired to murder his father, why do it at the front of a parade with many witnesses? Lastly, Dr. Carl Cleveland Jr.'s grandmother, Sylva L. Ashworth, DC, a 1910 graduate of the PSC, related to Carl that she had been there on that fateful day in August 1913, had witnessed the events, and recalls that DD was not struck by BJ's car, rather, that the founder had stumbled and that she had helped him to his feet. So why has this myth persisted so durably? Perhaps because BJ gave the profession so many other reasons to dislike him, and some of us cannot resist finding homicide credible? Yet logic and the available facts really do not support the perpetuation of this myth.

Myth 5. "Old Dad Chiro" is a disrespectful way of referring to D.D. Palmer.

Actually, the founder repeatedly refers to himself by this and similar appellations. In the 1908-10 journal published by the D.D. Palmer College of Chiropractic in Portland (today's Western States Chiropractic College), and in his classic 1910 book, *Old Dad*, relates his pleasure when others call him "Old Chiro," "Dad Chiro," and the like. Palmer was a 19th century man, a time when elders were highly respected, and he enjoyed his status as elder and father of his profession (Gielow, 1981).

If the reader's curiosity is tickled, then may I recommend that you consider joining the Association for the History of Chiropractic (AHC)? The AHC is a nonprofit foundation committed to exploring and preserving the rich legacy of the chiropractic profession. The AHC publishes *Chiropractic History*, a legitimate, scholarly periodical indexed by the National Library of Medicine. Annual membership dues are \$50, or \$20 for students; membership includes a subscription to *Chiropractic History*. Each year AHC holds a Conference on Chiropractic History at one of the chiropractic colleges; the 13th Annual Conference will be held at Western States Chiropractic College in

Portland during October 8-9, 1993. This year's Conference on Chiropractic History will be held in conjunction with the Annual Convention of the Chiropractic Association of Oregon, and promises to attract a number of fascinating historical presentations, including information on Palmer's time in Portland. For further information, contact Lester Lamm DC, WSCC vice president of Academic Affairs (503) 256-3180, or Alana Callender, MS, executive director for the AHC (her office is in the Admissions Department at Palmer College in Davenport: (319) 326-9190. Information about the Palmer College Archive can be obtained by contacting Librarian Glenda Wiese, MLS (319) 326-9896.

References

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APRIL 1993