

C. Sterling Cooley, DC, FICC, Forgotten Leader of Chiropractic's Middle Ages - Part I

Joseph Keating Jr., PhD

Born to Edward and Margaret Cooley on February 8, 1890, C. Sterling Cooley grew up in North Carolina. His father had studied for the ministry and later for a career in medicine at what became Duke University, and then at the Union College of Osteopathy. Margaret Cooley died around 1903, and father and son relocated to Oklahoma City circa 1907. It was here in the Indian Territory that they became acquainted with the father of chiropractic, who had recently abandoned his interest in the Palmer School of Chiropractic (PSC) in Davenport, Iowa.

Impressed with the results received from D.D. Palmer's adjustive care, the Cooleys took up their studies in the first class at the Palmer-Gregory College of Chiropractic, and graduated in 1908. The Cooleys found the experience valuable but troubling. Sterling Cooley recalled that their interest in the young profession was due: ...in part to the promptness with which the strange exponent of Innate Healing Intelligence freed me from an affliction which had defied the best of orthodox methods. Daniel David Palmer rescued me from invalidism and helped me to health. The chances are that, except for the ministrations of his gifted hands, guided by a mind which seemed never to err or falter in expressing chiropractic principle, my voyage on "Life's tempestuous sea" would have ended years ago (Cooley, 1943).

Edward Cooley (who changed his name to A.T. Godzway in 1929) noted that:

Dr. Daniel Palmer, as I knew him, was a gentleman of high honor and integrity, but with all had a very high temper, and an unforgiving disposition. He was very strong in his likes; when he liked you there was nothing too good for you, and when he disliked you, then there was nothing too bad that he could express for you...

I did not intend for him to ever know my real identity, or for him to ever know that I was an MD, but he seemed to sense the truth...Dr. Palmer delighted in calling me "that old Medical Fool" and often reminded me that I was stuffed so full of Medicine and Surgery that there was no room for anything else, and that he had little hope of ever making a real good chiropractor out of me...He seemed to always think his ASSERTION was sufficient proof of any argument or any statement that he might make; that for him to say so was sufficient to make it so.

During my school days under Dr. D.D. Palmer, I learned to dread the approaching hour for recitation or lecture under him. He seemed to take a pride in upbraiding me, seemed to blame ME for all the troubles that the Medical Profession at large had imposed on him...I tried one time to reason with him before the class, but soon found that it only added fuel to the fire and made him worse rather than better and, after this experience, I took the "dose" with the best possible grace. These incidents may be verified by Dr. C. Sterling

Cooley of Tulsa, who was at that time also a student and often heard these personal abuses given before the assembled class...I gladly forgave ALL, when he placed his arm around me at the graduating supper in his home and said, "You old Medical Fool, after all, I'm proud of YOU" (Godzway, 1934).

Father and son graduated from the Palmer-Gregory school as devoutly "Innate" chiropractors. The Cooleys established their first practice in Enid, Oklahoma, but Sterling soon sought further training at the Palmer School in Davenport. The PSC, then an institution of some 300 students, offered a short, post-graduate course of "6 mo. 3 wks.," which satisfied the young Oklahoman. He delighted particularly in the anatomy course, which included the opportunity to perform human dissections under the supervision of M.P. Brown, MD, DC, the PSC's resident allopathic physician. Here also C.S. was first exposed to the new technology of x-ray, which B.J. referred to as "spinography." In later years young Cooley became quite proficient in the new imaging technique.

At the PSC, young Cooley took an active interest in the profession's political struggles. "Separate and distinct," a phrase that repeatedly won the day for chiropractors in courtrooms and legislatures around the country, became the Oklahoman's firm conviction. As various states began to license chiropractors in the World War I era, Sterling Cooley applied for and assed examinations to practice in a number of jurisdictions, including Arkansas, California, Florida, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee and Virginia. He continued his education by enrolling for undergraduate and post-graduate courses at a variety of chiropractic schools; among these were the Colorado Chiropractic Institute, the Davis College of Neuropathy, the California Chiropractic College, the Carver Chiropractic College, and the National College of Chiropractic.

Cooley was pleased with his training at B.J. Palmer's school, but disapproved of the "Developer's" politics. Following his return from Davenport he collaborated with Alva Gregory, his father and several others to form the American Chiropractic Association (ACA; the second of five societies which have borne this name). Headquartered in Oklahoma City, the ACA (see Table 1) provided several of the same membership benefits offered by Palmer's Universal Chiropractors' Association (UCA), and published the American Drugless Healer. The magazine was subsequently edited by Alva Gregory, who taught "drugless healing" and was detested by the Palmers. Nonetheless, young Cooley sought to maintain his friendly ties with B.J. and his father. The Drs. Cooley were participants in 1912 in the formation of the first state society of chiropractors in Oklahoma, and were active in its affairs.

Table 1: Officers of the American Chiropractic Association, Oklahoma City (Officers, 1911)

Albert G. Dennis, DC, President & Member, Publication Committee

C. Sterling Cooley, DC, Vice President

Joe Shelby Riley, DO, DC, Secretary- Treasurer & Member, Publication Committee

Edward L. Cooley, ND, DC, OphD, Member, Publication Committee

Alva A. Gregory, MD, DC, Member, Publication Committee

Sterling Cooley encountered D.D. Palmer in June 1913, during the latter's epochal trek to the midwest. Cooley's recollections of the meeting (Cooley, 1914) later formed part of B.J. Palmer's defense against charges of patricide. Young Cooley wrote of the "unfriendliness and jealousy of D.D. Palmer against B.J. Palmer," and that the founder's animosity was "without any reason and was harmful to the science of Chiropractic" (Cooley, 1914). He also noted the elder Palmer's "childish" demeanor and the dominating influence of D.D.'s wife, Mary (Hudler) Palmer.

C.S. Cooley relocated to Tulsa in 1914, and participated in the lobbying campaign that produced the state's first licensing act in 1921 (Carver, undated, pp. 127-8). Oklahoma's governor appointed him to the state's first Board of Chiropractic Examiners (BCE), and his fellow board members named him president (Carver, undated, pp. 130-1). Dr. Cooley continued as president of the BCE through 1934. In 1938, he was re appointed to both the BCE and the Oklahoma basic science board.

Cooley's work with the Oklahoma BCE brought him in contact with Harry Gallaher, DC, who provided the initial work to establish the International Congress of Chiropractic Examining Boards (ICCEB) in 1926 (Keating & Rehm, 1993). Gallaher assembled representatives from 16 state boards in Kansas City in September, 1926 (see Table 2). Unlike the membership societies of the day (i.e., the UCA, the Chiropractic Health Bureau/CHB and the American Chiropractic Association/ACA), the ICCEB sought to provide a neutral forum for all political factions within the profession. In 1928, upon C. Sterling Cooley's recommendation, the ICCEB was expanded to form the International Chiropractic Congress (ICC), which included divisions of state association presidents and college presidents as well as state board representatives. The organization was largely successful in achieving its modest goals, but dissolved into the newly formed National Chiropractic Association (NCA; forerunner of today's ACA) circa 1934.

Table 2: Officers and members of the first Board of Directors of the International Congress of Chiropractic Examining Boards, 1926

Officers

Eugene Cox, DC, *President*, North Carolina
Anna Foy, DC, *First Vice-President*, Kansas
R.C. Ellsworth, DC, *Second Vice-President*, Oregon
Sylva L. Ashworth, DC, *Third Vice-President*, Nebraska
E.J. Bullock DC, *Fourth Vice-President*, New Hampshire
Harry Gallaher, DC, *Secretary-Treasurer*, Oklahoma

Board of Directors

J. Ralph John, DC, Maryland
Maud Hastings, DC, Tennessee
C. Sterling Cooley, DC, Oklahoma
Myrtle Long, DC, Iowa
W.J. Robb, DC, Kansas

Unified action within the chiropractic ranks at this period of its history was critical. Americans were in the midst of the Great Depression, and chiropractors were reeling from the attacks of political medicine. Prosecuted for unlicensed practice in those states that had not yet enacted chiropractic legislation, chiropractors were also challenged by the increasing number of basic science laws. Meanwhile, internal squabbles over profession. In a few states Palmer went so far as to ally himself politically with organized medicine in efforts to reduce chiropractors' scope of practice (Keating, 1993).

Formed in 1930 by the amalgamation of the ACA and the formerly Palmer-led UCA, the NCA welcomed "straight" and "mixer" chiropractors to its ranks and proclaimed its independence from school leaders (in contradistinction to the Palmer-dominated CHB). Lillard T. Marshall, DC, of Kentucky, a leader in the ICCEB, was elected the NCA's first president in 1930, and served four one year terms. Ruland W. Lee, DC of Newark, New Jersey (brother of Lyndon E. Lee, DC) succeeded Marshall as president in 1934.

Dr. Cooley was elected the third president of the NCA at its Hollywood convention in 1935. This meeting was a milestone in chiropractic history, for it saw the birth of the NCA Committee on Education, forerunner of today's Council on Chiropractic Education (Keating, 1993). Although Cooley may have played no role in the formation of the standard-setting agency for chiropractic schools, he supported the principle of elevated standards for the training of chiropractors. As president of the Oklahoma BCE, Cooley had raised the educational requirements in his state for chiropractors seeking licensure (News, 1932). Cooley's year in the presidency of the NCA was followed by five years as a member of the organization's Board of Directors, over which he presided in 1938-40.

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