

## A Hundred Years Ago in Chiropractic

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A century is a long time in the history of the chiropractic profession. One hundred years ago there were still fewer than a dozen members of the profession, including students (see Table I). D.D. Palmer's new system of healing, barely more than two years old, was not well known beyond those residents of Davenport, Rock Island and Moline who received his newspaper sized advertisements, called *The Chiropractic* (Palmer, 1897a&b). The opposition that Old Dad Chiro's new methods would create among the allopathic physicians of Davenport, particularly Heinrich Matthey, MD (Lerner, 1954) was still a year in the future. Palmer had already suffered the slings and arrows of the local medical community (Gielow, 1981, pp. 64-7), but nothing like what was yet to come.

Table I: Early members of the chiropractic profession, 1896-1898. (Years in parentheses indicate date of study at the Palmer School of Magnetic Cure, Davenport, Iowa.)

D.D. Palmer, founder  
Leroy Baker (1896)  
C.H. Collier (1897)  
W.A. Crawford (1898?)  
Andrew P. Davis, MD, DO (1898)  
B.O. Morse (1898)  
L.W. Roberts, DO (1898?)  
W. Ambrose Seeley, MD (1898)

Among those earliest of chiropractors was Andrew P. Davis (Palmer, 1910, p. 159), an 1863 graduate of the Rush Medical College, and one of A.T. Still's first students at the American School of Osteopathy in Kirksville, Missouri (Booth, 1924, p. 81). After earning his "doctor of osteopathy" degree from Still, Davis stayed on for several years to teach at osteopathy's "Fountain Head" school. And while Davis was taking instruction in chiropractic in Davenport in 1898, his textbook, *Osteopathy Illustrated*, was published. Davis' credentials as a medical physician, osteopath and chiropractor gave him special credibility when in 1903 he signed an affidavit declaring that osteopathy and chiropractic were distinctly different methods of healing (Zarback, 1988). But that was still several years in the future.

D.D. Palmer

In 1898 D.D. Palmer, founder of chiropractic, was still teaching and practicing according to his original theory of chiropractic. This seminal idea, a transitional concept from the magnetic hypotheses (Palmer, 1896) that had guided his alternative healing practice since 1886, held that disease was due to displacements of anatomic parts, which caused friction, created heat, and thereby produced inflammation (Keating, 1991, 1992; Palmer, 1897a&b). Not until 1903, while teaching and practicing in Santa Barbara, California, would Old Dad Chiro reduce his chiropractic concept to an exclusive concern for neural influences in health and illness (Keating, 1995). The "bone-pinches-nerve" notion

was surely part of Palmer's first theory, but only a part, as he made clear in his discussion of the cause and treatment of cancer:

...The cause is an obstruction to the blood circulation and an injury to certain nerves. Show us a case of cancer -- no matter in what portion of the body that cancer may be -- and we will at once show you two injuries which obstruct the blood circulation and injure certain nerves. It is this combination of injured nerves and obstructions which cause cancers.

Having found the cause of cancer, it is an easy thing to relieve the pressure upon the blood vessels and nerves. Arranging the body in a natural condition so that the circulation of blood is free and the pressure is removed from the nerves, the secretion and excretion becomes perfect, and the patient cannot help getting well. In other words, if all the different parts of the machinery of the human body were just right, secretion and excretion would be perfect and all the impurities would be thrown out the back door, instead of finding an outlet elsewhere...

The generally accepted and college taught theory is that lupus and cancer are local diseases, hence cutting, eating or burning them out is the treatment to be used, and this is suggested to you as the only means by which your life can be saved. The operation is over -- the butchering and torturing done. Anyone who has ever had a lupus or cancer burned out will admit that the pain produced is beyond the power of language to describe. You have been butchered, tortured, deformed and disfigured. And the saddest and most serious of all is the fact that even after submitting to all the butchery, deformity, etc., you will find the lupus or cancer growing again -- there or somewhere else.

The treatment of lupus and cancers by the medical profession has been, and is, an utter failure to cure the afflicted patient. It is worse than useless. Our treatment of the cause is painless and the benefit lasting. The cause of all lupus, cancers and tumors, no matter where located, is the same; when the cause is gone their support is gone and they cease to exist, no matter where they are, inside or out (Palmer, 1897a, p. 2).

If one wished to study chiropractic in 1898, there was still only one institution wherein the new healing art was taught: the Palmer School of Magnetic Cure, incorporated in the state of Iowa by D.D. Palmer in July, 1896 (Wiese, 1986). In later years Old Chiro indicated that the impetus for creating his chiropractic school had come from a near fatal railway accident he had been involved in during 1897 (Palmer, 1910, p. 74), but in fact, his school was chartered the year before his earliest known, published offer (in January, 1897) to teach chiropractic. And Palmer was already involved in alternative healing education, as suggested by his 1896 advertiser, The Magnetic Cure (Palmer, 1896), and by an announcement for the Independent Medical College of Chicago, which listed "Dr. D. Palmer, Magnetic Healing" as a member of the faculty (Cramp, 1921, pp. 777-8).

Tuition for the chiropractic curriculum at Palmer's School of Magnetic Cure in Davenport was \$500 for the three month course. Old Dad Chiro claimed:

\$500 will get you an education in three months which will better fit you for a healer of diseases, than any medical education in the world. Above does not include medicine, surgery, chemistry or obstetrics (Palmer, 1897a, p. 1).

Although \$500 may have been a stiff price for tuition at that time, Palmer's students, at least some of them, were apparently quite satisfied:

A chiropractic student says: I have been taking lessons in this science for six weeks. I feel quite

encouraged. I think that I shall be able to do the same work that Dr. Palmer is doing in three months. Fixing the human body is simple and easy when you know how. I never expect to be perfect; there is always room to learn. Dr. Palmer not only teaches his students the causes of disease, but by putting them to work on patients who are afflicted teaches them that they can do the same work that he does. I see no reason why any intelligent person cannot learn to do this work.

Yes, chiropractic was extremely young in 1898. B.J. Palmer, who deserves credit for building the profession and his father's school from nothing into the largest alternative healing arts profession in the United States (Keating, 1997), had not yet come onto the chiropractic scene. Then a youngster of only 16, he may have just been starting his first career, as a professional subject in Professor Flint's itinerant vaudeville hypnosis show.

The healing arts had been lucrative for D.D. Palmer. His personal income had grown from \$700 per year in 1887 to \$9,276 in 1898 (Gielow, 1981, p. 59). During this period his clinic and infirmary had grown from three to 40 rooms (Important, 1905) on the fourth floor of the Ryan Block building at the corner of Second and Brady Streets in downtown Davenport. By 1895 he was charging \$1 or \$2 per treatment (Gielow, 1981, pp. 66-7), attracting a large clientele to his Davenport facility, and making housecalls to patients in nearby communities. Advertising was an important component in Palmer's business strategy, and he made liberal use of local directories, newspapers and his own homegrown publications.

It had been in one of the earliest issues of *The Chiropractor* that Palmer had published the tale of the first chiropractic adjustment. The author was the patient himself, Harvey Lillard, a janitor in the building where Palmer rented his offices:

#### DEAF SEVENTEEN YEARS

I was deaf 17 years and I expected to always remain so, for I had doctored a great deal without any benefit. I had long ago made up my mind to not take any more ear treatments, for it did me no good.

Last January Dr. Palmer told me that my deafness came from an injury in my spine. This was new to me; but it is a fact that my back was injured at the time I went deaf. Dr. Palmer treated me on the spine; in two treatments I could hear quite well. That was eight months ago. My hearing remains good.

One hundred years ago the field of chiropractic was embryonic. D.D. Palmer still referred to himself as "a chiropractic" (not yet a chiropractor) and as a "magnetic manipulator" (Palmer, 1897a, p. 3). Chiropractic was explicitly considered a "therapeutic" school of healing, and Old Dad Chiro had not yet rejected the mechanical metaphors of his first theory of chiropractic. Oakley G. Smith, primary author of the first textbook of chiropractic, *Modernized Chiropractic* (Smith et al., 1906), had not yet enrolled at the Palmer School. The term "subluxation" had not yet appeared in the chiropractic literature (Gibbons, 1981).

Yes, 100 years is a long time in the history of chiropractic. And yet in some respects it was only yesterday. And perhaps in some sense the variety of options that lay before Palmer and his peers are still with us today: to define the role of the chiropractor, to scientifically explore the merits and limitations of the chiropractic art, to find cost-effective means of training DCs, and to integrate the skills of the "bone-setter" (Palmer, 1899, p. 4) into the wider health care arena.

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If your interest in chiropractic history 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 nonprofit, 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 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. Details about the upcoming conference can be obtained by contacting:

University of Bridgeport, College of Chiropractic  
 75 Linden Avenue, Bridgeport CT 06601 USA  
 tel: (203) 576-4336; fax: (203) 576-4351

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 Bibliography of the History of Medicine, 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:

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