

A Chiropractic "Divorce": What's Old Is New Again

Steve Troyanovich, DC | DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE

Recently, in the professional journal *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies*, authors Leboeuf-Yde, Innes, Young, Kawchuk and Hartvigsen¹ discuss the possibility of initiating a "professional divorce" between two factions in the profession. They describe the adversarial camps as the "evidence friendly" chiropractors and the "traditional" chiropractors. The authors detail a variety of problems that exist between the two groups and the obstacles that are created regarding professional advancement as a result of these differences.

Later in the article, the authors draw an analogy between the two adversarial chiropractic wings and a marriage between squabbling spouses; and point out that marriage partners either resolve their differences or agree to disagree and dissolve their marriage partnership. They conclude with the following:¹

"We have argued that the situation within the chiropractic profession corresponds very much to that of an unhappy couple that stays together for reasons that are unconnected with love or even mutual respect. The current marital disharmony clearly goes beyond the scope of continuing to live unhappily with 'another person' of a differing world view. The alternative to this unhappy family structure would be an amicable divorce."

The chiropractic profession has a long history of professional disharmony. The roots go back to the very beginning of the profession as divisions developed and the leaders of adversarial groups vied for control of the infant child, chiropractic.

Setting the Table for Civil War

D.D. Palmer granted a diploma that stated the graduate of his school was certified to "practice and teach" chiropractic.² Many of the early graduates did just that. During the profession's first decade, several schools were teaching chiropractic; among these were the National School of Neuropathy and Psycho-Magnetic Healing in Minneapolis, and Solon M. Langworthy's American School of Chiropractic & Nature Cure in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.³ A number of individual practitioners also established apprenticeship programs, and apprentice-trained chiropractors took on apprentices of their own.⁴

Gibbons⁵ reports that, as a result of these apprentice relationships, as many as 200 chiropractors may have populated the state of Minnesota by 1905.

Langworthy's American School of Chiropractic & Nature Cure had established the first two-year systematic chiropractic school curriculum. That course of instruction was longer and more progressive (i.e., broad scope) than that of the Davenport Palmers' school.^{3,5} Additionally, the apprentice-trained

FIG 1 Advertisement for Langworthy's American School of Chiropractic & Nature Cure, circa 1904 (courtesy the author's private collection).

With this relatively large number of DCs practicing in the state of Minnesota, along with the backing of one of the earliest competitors of the Davenport Palmers, Minnesotan chiropractors were emboldened to attempt to get a chiropractic bill passed through the state legislature.

Daniel D. Riesland, an apprentice-trained chiropractor from Duluth, and Solon Langworthy successfully lobbied the Minnesota legislature to pass a chiropractic bill that would have established a five member board of chiropractic examiners; required that applicants have attended a school with a two-year chiropractic curriculum; and grandfathered in the appointed members of the Minnesota Board of Chiropractic Examiners, even if they had *not* attended the two-year school.

In early 1905, Riesland and Langworthy were successful in gaining passage of the bill in both houses of the Minnesota legislature by significant majorities. If signed by then-Governor John A. Johnson, Langworthy's progressive two-year curriculum would have been codified into state law and Palmer graduates would not have been eligible to sit for the examination.

Civil War Erupts

The Davenport Palmers understood the stakes of this political game. Old Dad Chiro cranked up his Underwood typewriter and wrote to each of the Minnesota legislators on March 7, 1905. In his letter, D.D. railed against the "mixer" nature of the bill and the fact that the proposed members of the board of examiners would be established as chiropractic "czars" of the state. He concluded that:

CHIROPRACTORS AT CIVIL WAR

"DISCOVERER" OF NEW HEAL-
ING ART FIRES A GUN.

D. D. Palmer of Davenport, Iowa,
Writes to Legislators that the Ojer-
sen Bill Will Give Five Men a Mo-
nopoly on the "Profession" and a
Czar's Despotic Power.

There is civil war on among the mem-
bers of the new fraternity of "chiro-
practors," who are seeking recognition
as a school of healing. It is all over
the bill introduced in the legislature by
Senator Ojersten of Minneapolis, creat-
ing a state board of chiropractic ex-
aminers, and requiring an examination
for a license to practice the healing art
under that name.

D. D. Palmer of Davenport, Iowa, who
claims to be the discoverer of the sci-
ence, has written a circular letter to
members of the legislature, denouncing
the Ojersten bill. He declares it is not
the same bill that was presented be-
fore the state society of Minnesota.

The bill is a cunningly devised one, de-
signed for certain purposes. It is for
that of creating a state office for five
persons who are to regulate the practice
of chiropractic in the state of Minnesota.

In the third paragraph of section 1, we
find that these five "are appointed by the
governor, at the suggestion of some per-
son or persons who are familiar with the
material suitable for examiners." These
five persons referred to above have for

FIG 2 Newspaper coverage of the internal squabble. (courtesy *Chiropractic History* and the Association for the History of Chiropractic).

"It would be dangerous to confer upon them the undisputed, absolute, unconditional, dictatorial, despotic power that they are asking. This bill clothes the board with legalized monopoly; it is granting them a privilege, a franchise that they will not despise for enriching themselves at the expense of those of whom they have full control."⁶

In late March 1905, D.D. met with Governor Johnson and pleaded with him not to sign the bill into law on the basis of the arguments he had raised with the Minnesota legislators. As the discoverer and developer of the new science, D.D. proclaimed that he, and only he, was qualified to decide what should or should not be contained in any legislation governing his profession.

How much influence D.D.'s pleadings had over the governor's decision not to sign the bill is unknown. The medical lobby that had been caught asleep at the wheel by the passage of the bill through the Minnesota house and senate sprang into action and lobbied hard against the governor's signature.

Witnessing the broken ranks among the chiropractors likely resulted in great celebration among the medical lobby. Divide and conquer is an often-used strategy to defeat one's enemies, and the Palmer and Langworthy camps played right into that trap. The desire for power, influence, legacy and money was the bait.

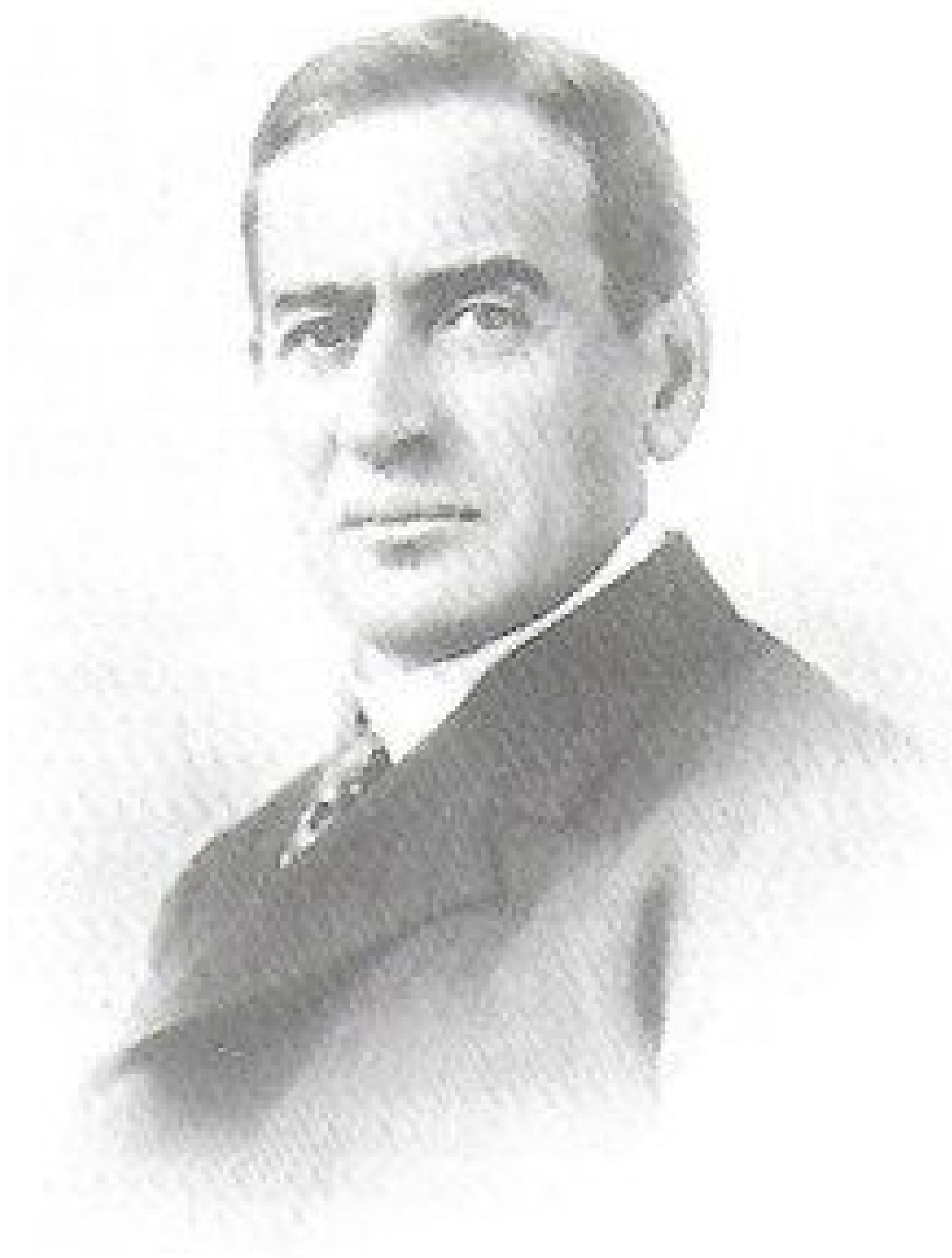


FIG 3 Governor John A. Johnson circa 1905 (courtesy *Chiropractic History* and the Association for the History of Chiropractic).

In his remarks in defense of vetoing the bill, Governor Johnson stated that chiropractic was a discovery of recent origin, unproven and promoted and promulgated by uneducated men with little knowledge of the sciences of "anatomy and kindred subjects."⁶ It would be nearly a decade before the enactment of the first law licensing chiropractic as a legal profession.

Doomed to Repeat the Past?

The tradition of disharmony within the ranks of the chiropractic profession has a long history that extends back almost to the very beginning of the profession. I am sure chiropractic's adversaries delight in the fact that, when faced with difficult choices regarding the advancement of the profession, the opposing political factions within the profession "circle the wagons" and shoot inward.

Whether the strained marriage of so-called "traditional" and "evidence friendly" chiropractors will succeed is a question yet to be resolved. What is the proper solution to this problem? That is a topic beyond the scope of this article and is far above the pay grade of this author. I can state, however, that as the Spanish philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Our political adversaries are happy that chiropractors cannot remember their past.

References

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