

Did D.D. Palmer Visit A.T. Still in Kirksville?

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It has been claimed that prior to the discovery of chiropractic in 1895, D.D. Palmer, the discoverer of chiropractic, visited A.T. Still, the founder of osteopathy, in Kirksville, Missouri, where Still started the first school of osteopathy. Palmer's signature supposedly can be found in A.T. Still's guest-book. Palmer denied ever being in Kirksville, as did his son B.J. This article explores the evidence on both sides of the question.

There have been at least two articles that have dealt with the question of whether D.D. Palmer stole chiropractic from the osteopaths ([1], [2]). Certainly, both osteopathy and chiropractic employ manipulative/adjustive thrusts into skeletal frames and are alike in that sense. But, on a higher level, at least after 1902 (3), the difference in the purpose of the thrust is what is, as Wardwell points out, the more important consideration.

The conceptual differences between (osteopathy and chiropractic) were even more important than the differences in their adjustive or manipulative techniques...

The dominate theme for Still was "the rule of the artery" -- that it was blood circulation or its lack that was decisive in causing or curing disease... (Palmer on the other hand) focused on the nervous system as his rationale for spinal adjustment rather than on promoting stimulation of the circulatory system (4).

This article deals primarily with the question of whether D.D. Palmer visited A.T. Still in Kirksville, Missouri. This assertion is made by some, apparently, as evidence for the other assertion that D.D. Palmer stole chiropractic from A.T. Still and his osteopathy.

One of the first times -- if not *the* first time -- the Palmer-Kirksville connection is made originated from Kirksville, the home of A.T. Still's first osteopathic school. It was Still's school, the American School of Osteopathy (ASO), that wrote in a letter, cited in D.D. Palmer's 1910 text, about Palmer's visit to Kirksville.

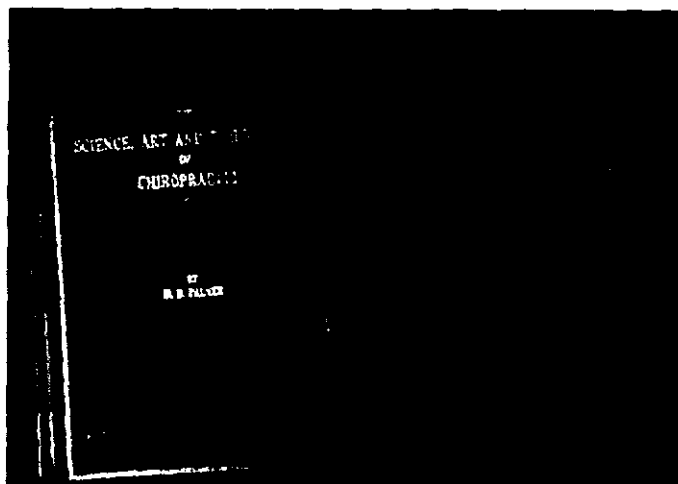
The 1908 ASO letter read

Some few years ago a man by the name of Palmer, from Iowa, came here for Osteopathic treatment and remained only a short time. After his return home he conceived the idea that he could establish a school which he called Chiropractic and has undertaken to teach a system of treatment claiming it to be the same as Osteopathy. It is absolutely a farce on his part (5).

There are several contradictions in the ASO letter. First, this 1908 letter is somewhat at odds with an ASO letter two years prior, also cited in Palmer's 1910 text. The other letter from the ASO, in 1906, to Mrs. S.J. Rice of Davenport stated that the ASO did not know "anything" about chiropractic (6) i.e., about D.D. Palmer's alleged visit to Kirksville in the early 1890s. Yet, two years later in 1908, the ASO *did* know about the visit. Second, the 1908 ASO letter states that D.D. Palmer claimed chiropractic to be "the same as osteopathy" which conflicts with Palmer's many citations in his many writings pointing out the differences between osteopathy



The first location of the American School of Osteopathy



Two books by two discoverers. The one on the left by D.D. Palmer - *The Chiropractor's Adjuster*, 1910 and the one on the right by A.T. Still - *Osteopathy, Research and Practice*, also 1910.

and chiropractic. In his monthly circular, *The Chiropractor*, and in his books, *The Science of Chiropractic* (1906), and *The Chiropractor's Adjuster* (1910), one does not have to look very far to see how Palmer painfully goes to great lengths to show that chiropractic is not "the same as osteopathy." The third contradiction, which happens to be the crux of the present paper, is that Palmer visited Kirkville, a charge Palmer flatly denied (7).

Twenty-two years after the 1908 ASO letter, the charge that D.D. Palmer went to see the osteopaths in Kirkville prior to 1895, would surface again, this time from the medical community. In 1930, Morris Fishbein, M.D., editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, gave a lecture in Webster City, Iowa, as a guest of the Hamilton County Medical Society. A Webster City chiropractor, J.E. Slocum, was in attendance at that lecture. Fishbein apparently made the same charge -- that D.D. Palmer had spent time in Kirkville with A.T. Still -- and therefore stole chiropractic from the osteopaths. Slocum wrote to Fishbein:

During your lecture in Webster City you stated that you had in document form the absolute proof of every assertion you made. You stated further that you would be glad to submit your evidence to anyone who you would go to the trouble of writing you at headquarters.

You made the assertion that B.J. Palmer admitted before a jury that his father, D.D. Palmer, had spent time in

Kirkville, Missouri, with Andrew Still. I believe you affirmed he further admitted that Chiropractic was stolen from osteopathy. For one, I would appreciate it very much if you would send to me, at your early convenience, a copy of the evidence which causes you to make such an assertion (8).

Dr. Fishbein sent Dr. Slocum a booklet titled "A Chiropractor's Catechism" which purportedly contained evidence taken from court records, to which Slocum replied

You stated in Webster City that B.J. Palmer had admitted under oath, in court testimony, that Chiropractic was a steal from osteopathy, and that his father, D.D. Palmer, did go to school in Kirkville prior to 1895. It is the documentary evidence supporting those assertions that I am now seeking ... I failed to find such evidence in the booklet you sent me. Was the sending of this booklet a mistake or is it the only evidence you have to submit? (9).

A month had passed and still there was no reply to Slocum's letter. Dr. Slocum wrote Dr. Fishbein again on 30 April 1930; this time a bit more direct:



A.T. Still studying a femur.

Daily Freeman Journal

WEBSTER CITY, IOWA, THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 1930 -- 8 PAGES

MANY PRESENT FOR LECTURE

Dr. Morris L. Fishbein, of
Chicago, Flays Alleged
Enemies.

SAYS HE HAS PROOF

Chiropractors, osteopaths had to listen to Christian Science class in the considerable attention just having decidedly unfavorable when Dr. Morris L. Fishbein, of Chicago, editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association, addressed a society gathered in the Methodist church. His subject was "Facts and Fallacies in Medicine." The lecture was sponsored by the Hamilton County Medical Association with Dr. M. B. Oatman introducing the speaker. Dr. Fishbein, speaking in a very frank manner, flayed members of chiropractic and osteopathic profession in a merciless way, declaring

*The Daily Freeman Journal, March 6, 1930
which covered Dr. Fishbein's lecture in Webster
City, Iowa.*

Am I to conclude that you are unable to answer this letter? Am I to further understand that because of your inability to support your assertions with facts that other remarks you made while in Webster City are of the same fabric? Did you deliberately lie in the assertions you made? (10).

This got Dr. Fishbein's attention, and he wrote to "Mr." Slocum:

I do not intend to enter into any discussion with you as to what I said in my address in Webster City, Iowa. If you want to know exactly what I have to say about Chiropractic, you will find it in my book *The Medical Follies*, published by Horace Liveright, and in various statements appearing in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (11).

Slocum replied in a 6 May 1930 letter to Fishbein:

In your letter of May 5th you stated that you do not intend to enter into any discussion with me as to what you said in your address at Webster City. In reading copies of my correspondence to date, I fail to find any evidence, either direct or by inference, wherein I have attempted

to draw you into any discussion. I consider your letter of May 5th a deliberate attempt to evade the question I have raised. I am not seeking to discuss this issue with you and all I have sought from you to date has been the proof of your assertion that B.J. Palmer admitted before a jury that his father, D.D. Palmer, had spent time in Kirksville, Missouri, with Andrew Still. You very emphatically stated that you had the absolute facts and that you would gladly submit them to anyone sufficiently interested to write you. I am seeking the facts. Do you have the facts? If so, then support your word by sending them to me and I assure you now that there will be no comment, either pro or con to you (12).

The postal service was efficient even back then, during the Depression. A communication out of Chicago, this time signed "American Medical Association," dated one day later, 7 May 1930, read

Your communication of May 6th, 1930, is received. The one to whom it is addressed, or to whom it would regularly be referred, is at present out of the city. The matter will be referred to him on his return (13).

This would be the last communication from AMA head-

quarters to Dr. Slocum on this subject. Maybe Dr. Fishbein never returned to the city... . B.J. wrote to Slocum, setting the record straight:

I have never admitted anywhere, at any time, that my father spent time in Kirksville. I have not made any such statement before any jury. I have, on the reverse, always vehemently denied such to be true, especially when so stated and advertised by the osteopaths. I have even, time and again, challenged them to the extent of \$50,000 to offer or prove any such fact as true. My father never was in Kirksville, never attended that or any other osteopathic school. It is true that he met and talked with Andrew T. Still at Clinton, Iowa, at the spiritualist camp meeting on several occasions. I have never affirmed but have always denied that Chiropractic was stolen from osteopathy (14). -- emphasis Palmer

Although the local newspaper in Webster City did not specifically mention Palmer's stealing chiropractic from the osteopaths, it did say that Dr. Fishbein

was most outspoken in tracing the growth of osteopathy, as well as chiropractic ... Dr. Fishbein made particular mention of the Palmer School of Chiropractic, at Davenport, and held B.J. Palmer, the present head, up for ridicule (15).

For at least twenty-five years, no one collected B.J.'s reward because in about 1955, B.J. made the same offer again (16). According to B.J., the only time his father and A.T. Still met was upon the open campground in Clinton, Iowa, where the two had a fierce debate on which was "supreme," the "rule of the artery," Still's position, or the "rule of the nerve," Palmer's position ([17],[18]). B.J., in about 1955, repeated the 1930 offer:

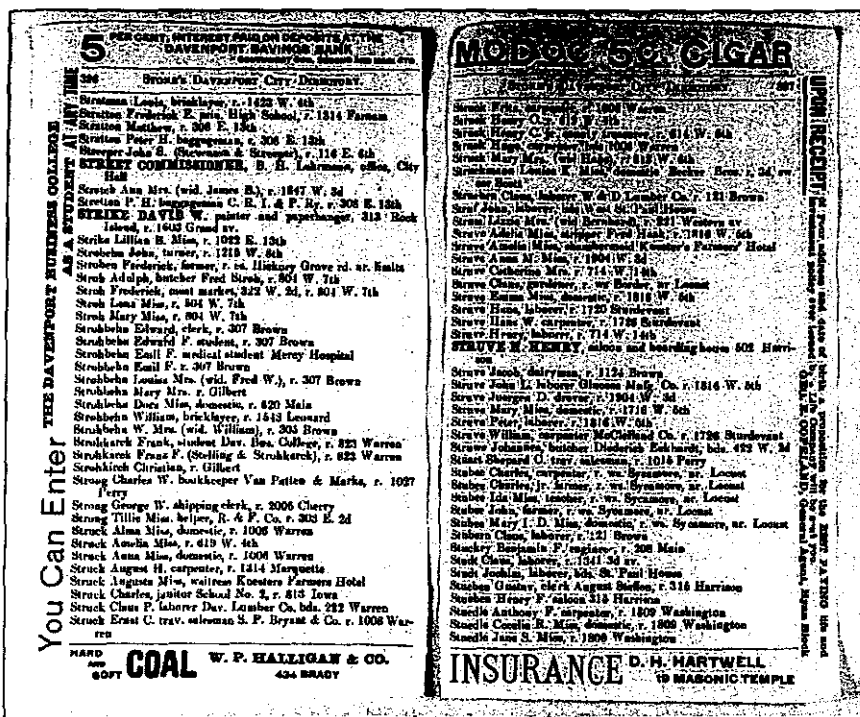
Now I have a standing offer of fifty-thousand dollars in cold cash for anybody that can ever prove that my father ever attended the Kirksville school of osteopathy, that he was ever in Kirksville, or that he ever went through Kirksville on a train or anything else ...

My father never studied osteopathy, never knew what it was. The only time my father met A.T. Still was upon the open campground at Clinton. And I never forget the Sunday afternoon that they met. A.T. Still was as much a character as my father was, if not more so. And A.T. Still said "the rule of the artery is supreme." My father said "the rule of the nerve is supreme." And they got to it. And it wasn't long 'till they had a big audience around them. That's the only time either of those ever met each other, was up there on the open campgrounds. Now I wish you'd carry my message that I have a fifty-thousand dollar reward for anybody that would ever prove my father studied osteopathy. They do like to say that he stole it from them, which isn't of course true (19).

Eight years after the Fishbein lecture in Webster City, the next Palmer-Kirksville connection was made, this time from the osteopath community again. In his 1938 book, *The Lengthening Shadow of A.T. Still*, Dr. Arthur Hildreth, an osteopath, reflects on the early 1890s, some forty-five years earlier, when he recalled that Palmer came to Kirksville during this time prior to the Harvey Lillard case of 1895. According to Hildreth, accompanying Palmer to Kirksville was a Davenport osteopath by the name of Strothers, who practiced in Davenport in 1893. Hildreth writes further that Palmer was

probably in his fifties, was a large heavy set man with a dark brown beard. He came to Kirksville, it was said, to take treatment from Dr. Still. Dr. Still's daughter, Blanche, now Mrs. George M. Laughlin, told me that this man Palmer was not only treated by her father, but also sat at the family table upon the invitation of the Old Doctor ... Palmer took treatments from Dr. Still for a few weeks. He also talked with Dr. Still's students, and was treated by many of them. When we next heard of him, he had "discovered" a method of treating disease by the hands, which he called chiropractic (20).

A quick check with the Davenport City Library



Davenport City Directory from the early 1890's showing a lack of listing for osteopath Dr. Strothers whom Dr. Hildreth claimed accompanied D.D. Palmer from Davenport to Kirksville in the early 1890's (1938).

revealed that there was no listing for an osteopath by the name of Strothers, for the years 1892, 1893, and 1894. According to Dr. Hildreth, a Dr. Strothers accompanied Dr. Palmer to Kirksville in 1893. Further doubt is cast on Dr. Hildreth's allegations when he describes D.D. Palmer as a "large heavy set man" when, on the contrary, Palmer stood only five feet four inches with an average build (21).

The next time the Palmer-Kirksville connection surfaced in the literature was not from the osteopaths and not from the medical community, but from within the chiropractic community. In the 1979 scholarly text, *Modern Developments in the Principles and Practice of Chiropractic*, chiropractic historian Russ Gibbons writes, in his contributing chapter, that

Several Missouri chiropractors who visited the original Still homestead on the campus of what is now the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine had reported seeing D.D.'s name in the guest book in the early 1890's (22).

Curious about who these "several Missouri chiropractors" were, this writer made a call to Mr. Gibbons, who could not remember the names of the chiropractors (23). The statement about the Still guest register is repeated almost verbatim, no less than four different times later in the literature, by Brantingham (24), in *Chiropractic*

History (25), by Wardwell (26), Andre (27); and chiropractic historian Joe Maynard (28) also makes the claim that D.D. dined with A.T. and took osteopathic treatments at his Missouri mecca of osteopathy. One of the references cited above was a letter-to-the-editor that read in part:

anyone who wishes may visit the K.C.O.M. Museum at Kirksville. There, one can see the signatures of D.D. Palmer in A.T. Still's guest register. D.D. was said to have been a somewhat frequent dinner guest at the home of the founder of osteopathy. The 1890 dates of his visits there predate the all-important Harvey Lillard "event" of Sept. 18, 1895 (29).

Having heard much about this guest book, and at the kind suggestion of Mr. Gibbons, this writer contacted the osteopathic museum in Kirksville. To my surprise, the registrar of the museum wrote back stating that the museum

had heard about a guest book which D.D. Palmer purportedly signed. This guest book was never a part of this museum's collection (30)

Furthermore, the registrar said that the museum did not know of any guest book that pre-dates 1910 (31).

Wanting to give additional information to the above letter-to-the-editor, this writer informed the editor of the magazine of the new information from the osteopathic museum and, that

yes, anyone who wishes may visit the osteopathic museum in Kirksville, but don't expect to see D.D. Palmer's signature in A.T. Still's guest book (32).

Four months passed, and the writer's letter had not appeared. This writer made a phone call to the editor in question and was told that his letter was passed over for "more timely" letters (33).

Interestingly, in the 1992 version of Haldeman's text, in the history section (again by Gibbons), no mention is

made of the "several Missouri chiropractors" seeing D.D.'s signature in A.T. Still's guest book (34). Perhaps the signature issue, at least, can now be laid to rest.

Based upon the evidence available from the Show-Me state and elsewhere, this writer concludes that it cannot be shown that D.D. Palmer ever visited A.T. Still in Kirksville. Therefore, this assertion cannot be used any more as evidence that D.D. Palmer stole chiropractic from A.T. Still and his osteopathy.

Acknowledgement

The writer would like to thank Mr. Russell Gibbons for his words of encouragement to research this topic for possible publication in *Chiropractic History*. The author is also grateful to Dr. Marc Johnson for making available sound recordings of B.J. Palmer that his father Dr. Merle Johnson first recorded in the 1940s and 1950s.

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