
William Frederick Norwood
College of Medical Evangelists

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/medartssciences

Part of the Life Sciences Commons, Medicine and Health Sciences Commons, and the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/medartssciences/vol2/iss1/6

After several previous considerations the Board of Trustees of the American Medical Association, in 1929, authorized the establishment of a committee to prepare a centennial history of the Association. The officers of this committee were R. L. Sensenich, chairman, and Ernest E. Irons, secretary. Other members were Dwight H. Murray, William F. Braasch, Louis H. Bauer, E. L. Henderson, John H. Fitzgibbon, James R. Miller, and C. W. Roberts. In 1947 the American Medical Association offered this encyclopedic volume "as a record of its founder, its founding, its ideals and its motivations and the extent to which these have been accomplished over a period of one hundred years."

Submitting as it does a mass of well-organized information touching intimately the lives of hundreds of physicians, and the functioning of what has come to be a powerful organization with many departments, this type of book, in its preparation, lends itself to a plan of multiple authorship. In addition to the editor and principal author, Dr. Morris Fishbein, there are twenty-eight other well-informed persons who contributed to the building of the book. Some of the authors are members of the American Medical Association staff and others are well known members of the medical profession.

The volume opens with a fourteen-page account of the life and heroic struggles of the grand old man of the Association, and its founder, Nathan Smith Davis, M.D., A.M., LL.D., by his lineal descendant Nathan Smith Davis III, M.D. Next comes a narrative year by year sketch of the organization from its conception to the end of the centennial period, concluding with very interesting chapters on libel suits brought against the Association and its indictment and trial by the Federal Government. A short chapter gives brief biographical sketches of the nine members whom the Association's House of Delegates has honored with its distinguished service medal: Rudolph Matas, 1938; James B. Herrick, 1939; Chevalier Jackson, 1940; James Ewing, 1941; Ludvig Hektoen, 1942; Elliott P. Joslin, 1943; George Dock, 1944; George R. Minot, 1945; and A. J. Carlson, 1946. About 225 pages are devoted to biographical sketches of the 101 presidents who have served the Association. The author of this section, Dr. Walter L. Bierring, an elder medical statesman of Iowa, indulges in some, perhaps justifiable, fulsome praise of the profession's mighty men. A division of the book in which various authors participate is that given to a discussion of the councils, bureaus, committees, and sections, including an exposition on the place and purpose of the Woman's Auxiliary by its president Mrs. Jesse D. Hamer. Except for the Journal of the Association, which is discussed as a part of the growth and development of the organization, the Association's other thirteen periodicals are presented in a seventy-four page section on publications. This very useful reference volume concludes with six statistically well-laden appendices and indices of persons and subjects.

The student of American history casually leafing through this ponderous tome and noting its structural organization and numerous portraits, with their respective facsimile signatures, will probably be reminded of the many city, town, county, and organizational
centennial volumes which colored but lent scant luster to nineteenth-century Americana. This bulky record, sired by Editor Fishbein, is representative of the best in commemorative book writing where a multiplicity of authors is involved. Historically the study spans a century marked at its beginning by Jacksonian democracy’s emphasis on the “common man,” and signalized at its end by Rooseveltian democracy’s hurrah over the “forgotten man.” The period began with a growing belief by medical leaders in the need for better State regulation of licensing and terminated in tumultuous years of public agitation for socialized medicine. To the historian the content of the volume is of national importance, social significance, and economic meaning. Indeed, had it been written in the spirit of critical analysis and historical insight it might well have been a classic in scale and mold. Such a result is obviously quite impossible where numerous authors are involved, most of whom apparently are not trained scientifically in historiography. Nevertheless, the book is an opus of colossal proportions, generally well done textually within the limits of its planning.

Founder Nathan Smith Davis exhibited an interest in the study of medicine as early as his sixteenth year (1833). In the spring of that year Nathan and his older brother Stephen were helping their father Dow Davis repair a rail fence. A passing country physician, Dr. Daniel Clark, of Smithville Flats, Chenango County, New York, halted his horse and asked the farmer if he planned to make a “pill-peddler” of young Nathan. Dow Davis replied that his son would make as good a “tin-peddlcr” as anything. The father’s reply was jocose, for in the fall he gave Nathan the choice of remaining at home until he was ready to purchase a farm of his own or to attend a six-month term at Cazenovia Seminary in preparation for an apprenticeship in medicine under Dr. Clark. Like the hero in every good American success story, Nathan chose education.

Dr. Davis completed his preceptorial training under Dr. Thomas Jackson of Binghamton and received his medical degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Fairfield, Herkimer County, New York, on January 31, 1837. A few months later, when only twenty years old, he opened an office for the practice of medicine in Binghamton. Soon he became an active figure in the Broome County Medical Society and identified himself with the cultural activities of the community. Within a decade Dr. Davis was seated as a delegate to the New York State Medical Society (1844) and began an agitation for the improvement of the standards of medical education and licensure. It was soon apparent that the problem was national in scope and that no State was likely to act independently. The present-day function of State boards in setting up standards of medical education and licensure was in that day usually lodged with the State societies. They hesitated to act lest they drive medical education out of their individual States and deprive themselves of an adequate flow of new doctors. In 1845, at the suggestion of Dr. Alden March, of Albany, Dr. Davis introduced to his State society a resolution calling for a national medical convention to be attended by delegates from medical colleges and State organizations. He became chairman of the committee to carry into effect the resolution, which opponents labeled “impracticable if not Utopian.” “The National Medical Convention held in New York in May, 1846,” according to Davis’ biographer and descendant, “proved that this twenty-nine-year-old country practitioner not only had the vision to propose such a meeting but also the ability to make it an accomplished fact.”

When the National Medical Convention reconvened in the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia in May, 1847, there were al-
most 250 delegates from forty medical societies and twenty-eight medical colleges. Dr. Davis played an important role in the committee which recommended the organization of a society to be called the American Medical Association. His ready defense and lucid explanations aided the adoption of the proposed plan. The first president of the Association was Nathaniel Chapman, professor of the institutes and practice of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

By this time Dr. Davis had joined the faculty of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City and was making his name known in the field of medical literature. In 1849 he accepted the chair of physiology and pathology at Rush Medical College in Chicago, one of the West's newer schools. Dr. Davis was president and presiding officer at the 1864 and 1865 meetings. He was first editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, serving from 1883 to 1888. In addition to his public service this indefatigable worker found time to practice medicine, teach, conduct investigation, and write. Dr. Davis attended forty-seven of the Association's first fifty meetings. He was described as an "untiring, irrepressible, uncompromising and incorruptible leader in efforts to elevate the standards of medical education, licensure and public health; to maintain its high ethical standards; to oppose charlatanism; to promote clinical and scientific investigation; to make available a better quality of medical service; and to establish the American Medical Association as the recognized representative organization of the medical profession of the United States."

In 1897 "the ever-young man," then in his eighty-eighth year, after sixty-seven busy professional years and sixty-six happy married years. He was a sincere Methodist, an ardent Democrat, and a devout physician.

Ernest E. Irons' chapter entitled "Trustees of the American Medical Association" records some of the incidents which mark the expansion and development of the organization. The Board of Trustees has come to be the agency for implementing the policies of the House of Delegates between its regular sessions. Prior to the establishment of the *Journal* the proceedings of the annual meetings, together with a few articles of a professional nature, were published in a volume called *The Transactions of the American Medical Association*. As early as 1870 Samuel D. Gross urged that the annual *Transactions* be replaced by a periodical medical journal. After repeated agitation the *Journal* was established in 1883, the same year in which the first Board of Trustees was set up. In fact, previous to the publication of the *Journal* there was, according to Dr. Irons, little need for a Board of Trustees. Therefore, for some years after 1883 the Trustees were referred to as the Trustees of the *Journal* and not of the Association.

The year 1897 marks the time when legal incorporation was deemed necessary. It was accomplished under Illinois law. The assets of the Association in that year consisted of *Journal* property, $21,031.30 and cash and securities, $27,368.80. By February, 1903, the Association had accumulated sufficient funds, presumably from the revenues of the *Journal*, to purchase the land for and to build a permanent home. In addition it had on hand $25,000 in gilt edge securities. The minutes of the Board and House of Delegates at the turn of the century betray an increasing concern over elevating the standards of medical education and correcting the frauds in medical advertising. The committee on medical education in 1903, because of the multiplicity of inferior
medical schools, requested an appropriation of $5,000 to finance a survey of medical education. The report was approved in principle, "but the appropriation was denied because the financial condition of the Association did not justify it."

At the beginning of the new century George H. Simmons was editor and general manager. The Board sustained him in his strong stand against accepting Journal advertisements characterized by false claims or secrecy of formulae. In 1904 Dr. Simmons proposed and secured an appropriation for the establishment of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry. By 1906 the clean advertising policy of the Journal had aroused the wrath of the proprietary medicine interests. In time these attacks reached a vicious crescendo, which aroused the resentment of the profession generally.

In 1906 a carping minority in the House of Delegates was responsible for the introduction of a resolution charging the trustees with making incomplete financial reports, concealing essential information, alleging distrust of the management of the Journal, and asking for an investigation by a committee of the House named in the resolution. The resolution was promptly tabled without discussion by an overwhelming vote. The subject was nevertheless kept alive by a series of letters to the editor, published in the Journal, and by charges published in an eastern medical journal. The argument was at least temporarily disposed of by a withering editorial from the pen of Dr. Simmons. At the Los Angeles meeting in 1911 criticism again arose as a result of certain interests having been excluded from the advertising pages. In reply to these criticisms the Board drew a sharp distinction between "an attack" and "an expressed difference of opinion." "The former is an attempt to do violence, hence is always destructive in its tendency," the Trustees declared, and "the latter is an attempt to bring about a favorable change by showing wherein the thing sought to be changed is wrong, hence is constructive in its tendency; the former should be crushed, the latter encouraged."

The Association's first specialty periodical was in the field of internal medicine. It began publication in 1907 and ultimately was named Archives of Internal Medicine. In 1911 the Board considered publishing a journal in the field of surgery, but the officers of certain existing surgical journals protested violently. Action was thus postponed until 1923. As a result of collaboration with representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1918, the Association began publishing a Spanish edition of the Journal. This project was abandoned after several years. Publication of the popular journal Hygeia began in 1922 under the editorship of Victor C. Vaughan. The publication of the Quarterly Cumulative Index to Current Medical Literature began in 1916.

The increasing volume of business and the expanding field of activity and responsibility led to important organizational changes during the twenties. Three yearly meetings of the entire Board were provided for, one at the annual session, one in October, and one in February, with an executive committee meeting at intervals of about one month. The term of service for a trustee was increased from three to five years, with the provision that no trustee serve more than two terms. Following the death of Dr. Alexander Craig in 1922, Dr. Olin West became secretary of the Association, and after the retirement of Dr. Simmons in 1924 he was secretary and general manager. Dr. West continued in this capacity until June 30, 1946, when he was succeeded by Dr. George F. Lull, formerly a major general and Deputy Surgeon General of the United States Army. Dr. West became president-elect at the San Francisco meeting in 1946, but ill health forced his resignation in early 1947. Dr. Edward Bortz of Philadelphia succeeded him. Dr.
Morris Fishbein, who joined the association staff as assistant to Editor Simmons in 1913, became editor of the Journal in 1924.

The burdensome war years and the problems of postwar readjustment have increased the regularly scheduled meetings of the Board to four each year, two of which extend throughout the annual and winter meetings of the House. Officers and trustees of the Association are finding that the increasing complexity of problems facing the profession make more than ordinary demands on their time.

To the layman, Dr. Fishbein's chapter on the libel suits brought against the Association should be most interesting and informative. The majority of these suits were filed as a result of the editor's refusal to accept advertising copy, or his publishing in the Journal or Hygeia alleged libelous remarks about nostrums, cure-alls, and quack healers. This chapter illuminates the regrettable gullability of the American public.

The "Wine of Cardui," a product of the Chattanooga Medicine Company, was assailed in the Journal of April 11 and July 18, 1914, as a vicious fraud. John A. Patten and Zeboim C. Patten, Jr., filed suit for $100,000 against the American Medical Association and George H. Simmons. A second suit for $200,000 was filed by John A. Patten alone against the same defendants. The latter suit ended automatically in the midst of the trial when the plaintiff died. The partnership case was tried and went to jury, which found the defendants guilty and assessed damages at one cent.

In this trial, attorneys for the defense pointed out that neither of the Pattens was a physician and that no one associated with them was a physician. It was further declared that their nostrum could not possibly cure the diseases for which it was offered. Dr. Fishbein quotes the Association attorneys as follows:

With full knowledge of the fact that at least one fifth or more than one fifth of every bottle of Wine of Cardui, prior to 1906, that Mr. Patten was putting out on the market, was pure alcohol, he was nevertheless satisfied that the business should continue with the representation to the purchasing public that it was positively non-intoxicating.

The company had circulated over 20,000,-000 almanacs known as the "Ladies' Birthday Almanac." The advertising slogan for a book entitled Home Treatment for Women was:

Lest you may have some serious female trouble that is working on you, buy a bottle of Wine of Cardui today, and be taking it while you are getting this book; price $1.00 a bottle. Or what is better, if you will buy 5 bottles, we will throw in a bottle. All orders cash; nobody trusted.

During the course of the trial some leading toxicologists, chemists, gynecologists, obstetricians, and other experts of the country appeared for the defense. The jury was out for nearly a week before bringing in the verdict for the plaintiff. The Association regarded the assessed damages of one cent as a notable victory. The worthlessness of Wine of Cardui had been proved and what was more important all purveyors of patent medicine knew that the American Medical Association would both publish the truth and fight in its defense.

Probably the greatest charlatan in the history of American medicine was John R. Brinkley. His many suits against Dr. Morris Fishbein and the Association totaled in the millions. When he died in 1942, the Associated Press spread world-wide the obituary notice of John R. Brinkley, M.D., Ph.D., M.C., LL.D., D.P.H., Sc.D., Lieut. U.S.N.R. "Death today," the report declared, "closed the turbulent medical, political and radio career of Dr. John Richard Brinkley, 56, rejuvenation surgeon known popularly as 'the goat gland doctor.' "

According to Dr. Fishbein's satirical account of the "greatest charlatan the world has ever known," "His record, full of chicanery and deception, was punctuated with licenses, diplomas, citations, subpoenas, court orders, bad checks, election ballots, bonds and mortgages. In these days of paper shortage, his ac-
cumulation would be more valuable as scrap than ever it was for documentary purposes."

Brinkley attended Bennett Medical College in Chicago 1908-1910 but apparently never graduated. He later secured a diploma from the National University of Arts and Science in St. Louis. He also had a diploma from the Eclectic College of Medicine or the Eclectic Medical University of Kansas City. When his class graduated at this institution, all the members, accompanied by one of the professors, went to Arkansas, where they were licensed by the Eclectic Board. In 1921 Brinkley was licensed by the Eclectic Board of New Jersey. This license was revoked a few years later. Once he went to California and under a temporary license tried to rejuvenate "an aging and decrepit publisher," for which he was paid $40,000 for what turned out to be a "useless effort." After returning to Kansas, Dr. Brinkley was indicted in California. Efforts to extradite him were not successful. He was licensed in Tennessee at one time, where he tried practice without success.

After considerable wandering he came to Milford, Kansas, in October 1917, where he made his residence until 1933. From time to time he visited New York, Chicago, and foreign countries. Once in Shanghai he picked up $5,000 for a few operations. A sort of certificate issued him in England and an honorary diploma granted him by the Royal University of Pavia were both later annulled.

It was during his years at Milford that Brinkley capitalized on the popularity of his "rejuvenating" goat-gland operation. The author quotes Brinkley's own account of the origin of the operation. In unlettered lay language he tells how a farmer, sixteen years impotent, insisted on an experimental transplant, which according to the surgeon produced "amazing and startling" results. In a relatively short time Brinkley was riding the crest of a wave of popularity which carried him to fame and fortune. How this came about is entirely too long a story to recount within the narrow limits of a book review. The press, radio, a pharmaceutical organization of druggists selling Brinkley prescriptions, and the charlatan's drive and personality had much to do with his miraculous elevation to dubious distinction.

Brinkley's kingdom began to crumble when the Kansas City Star and the Journal started telling the truth about the broadcasts of the surgical sage of Milford. In 1930 the Federal Radio Commission refused to renew his license. He sued the Star and Journal and their editors for millions, but the suits never came to trial. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals sustained the Radio Commission. The greatest blow was when the Kansas Board of Medical Examiners revoked his license to practice, an act supported by the Kansas Supreme Court, which held that Brinkley was—an empiric without moral sense, and having acted according to the ethical standards of an impostor the licensee has performed an organized charlatanism until he is capable of preying on human weakness, ignorance and credulity, to an extent quite beyond the invention of the humble mountebank.

The court further described him as one—who was fleecing the defective, the ailing, the gullible and chronic medicine takers who are moved by suggestion, and is scandalizing the medical profession and exposing it to contempt and ridicule.

Dr. Brinkley’s next undertaking was in the field of politics. Three times he tried for the governorship of Kansas, buying radio time and stumping the State with a truck equipped with a loud-speaker. Among other things he promised free motor licenses, free textbooks, better roads, and a lake for every county. Through some error, he filed late in his first campaign, so that it was necessary for voters to write in his name. After election clerks discarded all ballots on which his name was not spelled perfectly, the Kansas demagogue lost the election by about 14,000 votes. It was reported that he received 20,000 votes in Okla-
In 1933 Brinkley set up shop in Del Rio, Texas, a sleepy village on the Rio Grande River. With the aid of the powerful radio station XERA, which he established on the Mexican side of the border, the great Brinkley was soon doing a big business which featured an operation based on the researches of Steinach, a famous Austrian rejuvenator.

Apparently a suit against the American Medical Association and Morris Fishbein brought the editor to Del Rio in 1939, where he witnessed Brinkley and his retinue in all their glory. The jewel-bedecked surgeon and his wife Minnie, who also held a diploma from the Kansas City College, reminded defendant Fishbein of "the twin chandeliers of a house of ill fame." While sitting in court the goateed little surgeon was seen to explore the various orifices of his head with a gold combination ear and tooth pick, "and then view the results with a tender, solicitous expression." The Association and Editor Fishbein of *Hygeia* were found not guilty of the $250,000 libel charge.

When the Texas Board of Medical Examiners annoyed the Brinkley enterprise, the doctor bought a mammoth country club estate in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he was previously licensed, and moved his practice to the new quarters. He continued to commute between his Del Rio mansion and Little Rock with his own twelve-passenger Lockheed monoplane with pilot and copilot.

In spite of Brinkley's connections in high places with both political parties and his native capacity to climb fast and furiously both socially and economically, his final decline began with the loss of the libel suit. In 1941 he filed with a Federal court a statement in bankruptcy. After the loss of money, power, and prestige came ill health, a heart ailment, and eventually death, in May, 1942. With the present stringency of State boards, the regulations of the Federal Radio Commission, the restrictions of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1937, and the fraud precautions of the Post Office Department, it is not likely, thinks the author, that the Brinkley episode will ever be reproduced in America.

The chapter giving the history of the Council on Medical Education and Hospitals by Dr. Victor Johnson, secretary of the Council, will probably receive the acclaim of professional historians as being the most satisfactory contribution to the multiauthored centennial volume. The reviewer reaches this conclusion for two reasons: one, Dr. Johnson's social and economic frame of reference historically does much to set his story in its proper relationship to the culture of which it is a part; two, his account is well documented. Although Dr. Johnson's sketch of the Council on Medical Education and Hospitals is not offered as a history of American medical education in the past century, his thirty-six page chapter is the best and most recent survey of the subject.

The original call of the Medical Society of the State of New York for a national convention commenced with this credo: "It is believed that a national convention would be conducive to the elevation of the standard of medical education in the United States." One of the first acts of the 1847 meeting in Philadelphia was the establishment of a committee on education. This committee functioned for fifty-seven years, until the formation of the Council on Medical Education, which has further promoted the cause of medical education.

The first pronouncement of the Committee on Medical Education a century ago was:

> This association considers defective and erroneous every system of medical instruction which does not rest on the basis of practical demonstration and clinical teaching; . . . it is . . . the duty of the medical schools to resort to every honorable means to obtain access for their students to the wards of a well-regulated hospital.
Dr. Johnson traces the vicissitudes of American medical education through the latter half of the nineteenth century and then observes:

Yet it cannot be concluded that nothing was accomplished by the American Medical Association and its allies, the American Academy of Medicine, the Association of American Medical Colleges and the state licensing boards. When the American Medical Association was established, colleges were awarding the M.D. degree for less than six months' attendance in addition to a period of apprenticeship. Such a degree admitted the holder to the practice of medicine in almost every state. There were no admission standards worthy of mention. Sixty years later, a four years' course of at least six months each was required for the degree. In almost every state, this degree admitted the graduate not the right to practice medicine, but to a licensure examination. A goodly number of schools exacted a high school diploma for admission and a few required two years of college.

The reorganization of the Association just after the turn of the century paved the way for the establishment of the Council in 1904, under the chairmanship of Dr. Arthur Dean Bevan, professor of surgery at Rush. The council wisely recognized that it faced a most difficult task and did not set immediate objectives impossible of achievement. In 1905 the minimum standard was four years of high school for admission, a four-year medical course, and satisfactorily passing a State licensing examination. The Council began classifying medical schools according to their respective percentage of failures in State board examinations. Publication of these statistics proved to be a stimulus to the schools and provided some basis for evaluation.

The remainder of Dr. Johnson's story is one of progress and further elevation and refinement of medical education. Reference is made to the efficient secretariaship of Drs. N. P. Colwell, William D. Cutter, and H. G. Weiskotten. Dr. Johnson was secretary at the time of his writing. The second chairman of the Council was Dr. Ray Lyman Wilbur, of Stanford University. Dr. Weiskotten is the present chairman. Significant organizations and incidents related to the work of the Council since its founding are inspection of medical schools, co-operative studies with the Carnegie Foundation, certification of hospitals for internships, the beginning of graduate medical education, establishment of the National Board of Medical Examiners, co-operation with the Association of American Medical Colleges and the Federation of State Medical Boards, the advent of specialty boards, and the war contribution of medical education. In conclusion Dr. Johnson poses the immediate and future problems of the Council.

Limited space does not permit a discussion of other features of this worth-while addition to the historical literature of American medicine. The order of presentation is good. Typography is satisfactory. So far as information goes the volume is excellent. Unfortunately, with the exception of Dr. Victor Johnson's contribution, documentation is generally quite poor, indeed completely lacking in many sections. The volume is not well laid on a background of the social and cultural fabric of the times. There is still need for a critical history of the American Medical Association.

WM. FREDERICK NORWOOD, PH.D.


This new text comes as a valuable addition to the literature already published on nursing technics. The author has broken away from the traditional manner of presenting nursing procedures by not including a detailed discussion of anatomy, physiology, medicine, and surgery, a practice which is so often followed.

The general format of the book is attractive and includes a well-outlined table of contents, a generous number of original, clear illustrations, a fairly complete list of references, an adequate index—all in clear, easily read type.

The fundamental theme is the preparation of a community nurse, one who includes the