

# Now & Then

STILL NATIONAL OSTEOPATHIC MUSEUM

NATIONAL CENTER FOR OSTEOPATHIC HISTORY

## REMEMBERING A. T. STILL

A.T. Still was a pioneer, both literally and figuratively. His childhood was spent on the frontier of Missouri, he was involved with the legislation that propelled Kansas from a territory to a free state in the Union, and he pioneered a new form of medicine, establishing the osteopathic profession. Often when we remember those individuals who contributed significant developments to society, we regard the individual not as a mere man or woman, but as a hero separate from the characteristics that make us human: our gait, our physical appearance, and our habits.

A.T. Still was one such individual who is often forgotten as a man and remembered solely as a hero. However, by remembering the less glamorous details of his physical characteristics as well as his personality one can be inspired by an ordinary person who accomplished extraordinary deeds.

Ernest E. Tucker, an American School of Osteopathy alumnus Class of 1903 and professor of Osteopathic Technic wrote the following anecdote.\*

The red brick wall of the house, the snow half across the porch, the slant of the morning sun, and the figure standing before me on that early morning in February fifty-six years ago are as clear to me now as though I were still looking at them. Well, I was prepared to be impressed: but not in just the way it turned out. Was there a bit of hero-worship in it? At the time I would have repudiated the idea.

But that does hold a place for that picture in any book of reminiscences.

Two things about Still's appearance I never did get used to, often as I saw them. One was the bulge of that

forehead, like the bud end of a watermelon. The other was the unbelievable aquilinity of the nose. They harmonized with each other of course and were not ordinarily noticeable, until some trick of posture or background threw them into relief. His moustache helped to—shall I say normalize—his nose, and moustache and beard kept nose and forehead in harmony. And why should anyone bother about that? I do not know why: have not given it much thought; but observe that my fellow human beings do seem to “set considerable store” by it—it being physical appearance generally.



Another unusual thing about him, often remarked, was his gait; a springy gait, rising on his toes: which I was told was the Indian gait. As though part of this gait, he usually carried a six or seven foot staff, cut from the woodpile and whittled or planed [sp] down. For these reasons he seemed to walk leaning forward; on his way to the “backy” shop. Like all Civil War veterans, he chewed tobacco. Every now and then he swore off [the tobacco], and then it was that he made trips to the candy shop. It was chocolate that he bought.

Intrigued by that long staff, a Mrs. Conger, wealthy Ohio woman, had a seven-foot staff of ebony specially made for him, complete with gold head and tassel. He walked to school with it a couple of times, grinning like a school boy. It found its inevitable way into his “parlor” where he kept the treasures-trove sent to him from all parts of the world, and for which he had a conducted tour, complete with spiel.

Another thing that almost always surprised me was the huskiness of his voice; like a voice from somewhere else, far away; or somebody else. O, he could speak powerfully—he could make the students in the rear seats hear as clearly as those in front; but—huskiness—it had a sort of intimate quality about it—just you and me sort of effect.

His eyes were grey, flecked as I remember it with brown: under untrimmed eyebrows. His hands were large and flat and no doubt very powerful. The lobes of his ears hung down quite generously. I suggest that you take note of the ear-lobes of strong leaders of men. His skin was dusky—a matter of age, as well as atmosphere no doubt. The wrinkles at the corners of his eyes were numerous and humorous. He was often compared to Lincoln; and I have no doubt those two backwoodsmen would have understood each other.

On his feet were boots—“Missouri mud boots.” Jean trousers were tucked into them, with the inevitable bulge at the outer top. Overcoat, coat and vest he carried open; the two halves of the vest held together by a heavy watch chain (those were the days of pocket clocks). The coat was a blue army coat. Through his grisly beard shone the gleam of a gold collar button, innocent of collar (unless it happened to be attached). A few straggly grey hairs appeared beneath the brim of his wide—brimmed army hat, which was thrust far back on that bulging dome of a forehead.

He wore “specs” of course; and—well—but one never sees the dirt on one’s own glasses, unless one takes them off to look at; and then one does not see well enough to see the dirt. And I am sure the same thing is true of our ideas as well.

No, he was not sartorially conscious. On one occasion the wife of one of our state senators was attracted to Kirksville to see him. News of her arrival preceded her: and there was a bit of excitement, and a crowd at the station to greet the great lady. Still ambled down there, and stood on the outskirts. When the train and the lady arrived, and she had alighted, someone who had caught a glimpse of him said, “There’s the Old Doctor”—and automatically the crowd parted and a lane formed from the lady direct to him. Taking her clue, she naturally walked down this lane, all cordiality and suavity. Still shook the offered hand.

“Want to see my good clothes?” he queried—“Ma will show them to you. She’s got them in a trunk at home.” Fortunately, the lady was genuine too; and they became instantly friends.

Forward written by Katie Hsu-Hoberman, Education Coordinator



Museum Collection [PIC-Stat-27] ca. July 1908

\* Excerpted from Reminiscences of A.T. Still by E.E. Tucker, 1950. Charles E. Still, Jr. Collection, Still National Osteopathic Museum. Original punctuation and spelling have been retained.