
Now & Then

STILL NATIONAL OSTEOPATHIC MUSEUM

NATIONAL CENTER FOR OSTEOPATHIC HISTORY

⚡⚡⚡ TEACHING “TRUE” OSTEOPATHY ⚡⚡⚡

After Dr. A. T. Still started the American School of Osteopathy (ASO) in 1892 and proved that osteopathy was a science that could be taught to others (not a gift unique to Still alone), numerous osteopathic institutions sprang up around the country. Between 1895 and 1900, at least sixteen new osteopathic schools were established.(1) Many of these were founded by Still's students, eager to spread osteopathy as far and as quickly as possible. Some were diploma mills seeking to capitalize on osteopathy's success. Even the legitimate schools did not necessarily open with the Founder's blessing. As Gevitz states in *The D.O.'s*:

Relations between these new colleges and Still were at best correct and at worst openly hostile. Still believed that few if any of his early graduates had either the training or the practical experience to teach osteopathy on their own; that their institutions, for the most part, did not match the standards of the [ASO]; and finally, since some of them were situated within a few hundred miles of Kirksville, that they were in open competition for students who should rightfully be his.(2)

In a notice in the *Journal of Osteopathy*, Still wrote, “I do not now, nor have nor ever will allow my name to be used for the promotion of any school other than the American School of Osteopathy until they are at least four years old and their diplomates prove that their alma mater in teaching all branches is thorough and equal on examination to the American School of Osteopathy.”(3)

In two cases, Still's opposition to the new schools was undoubtedly fueled by their founders' claims that they alone were teaching “true” osteopathy. To make matters worse, each said that he had been working on the principles of osteopathy long before Still. And finally, both schools set up shop practically on Still's doorstep.

National School and Infirmary of Osteopathy

The National School and Infirmary of Osteopathy was established in Baxter Springs, Kansas, under a charter dated June 27, 1895. Its founders, Elmer and Helen Barber, had both graduated in March 1895 as members of the ASO's second official class. Among their 22 classmates were A. T. Still's daughter Blanche, his brother James, and his nephew Summerfield (founder of the Des Moines school), along with Alice and Henry Patterson, early members of the ASO staff.



Dr. Elmer D. Barber

In 1896, Elmer Barber published *Osteopathy, the New Science of Healing*, the first book on osteopathy ever published. In the introduction, Barber stated that throughout his life he had seen people cured through manipulation and that he enrolled in the ASO because he believed that Still “had discovered

results accidentally reached by others." However, by 1896, he had come to think differently. He said,

While it is our desire to give Dr. Still credit for the new science which he discovered, we must differ with him as to the true cause of the results achieved by the Osteopath. While the good Doctor believes that nearly all diseases are caused by dislocated bones, nearly always finding them . . . in our practice we never find a great number of dislocations and by the same manipulation effect the same cures as Dr. Still.

Barber attributed the success of manipulation to the stretching of muscles, "thereby freeing the circulation and permitting Nature to assert herself." (4) Barber reiterated this belief in his second book, *Osteopathy Complete* (1898), in which he stated, "It is by working on these principles . . . that we achieve results bordering on the miraculous [and] that we draw patients and students from the length and breadth of our land; it is by working on these same principles, fully explained and illustrated in the following pages, that any family can attain some very remarkable results." (5)

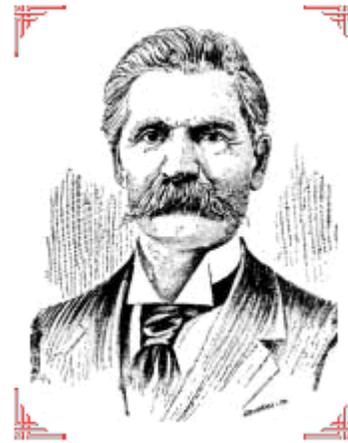
In 1897, the Barbers moved their school to Kansas City, Missouri. This was too much for Still and his colleagues at the ASO, who believed the National School to be nothing more than a diploma mill. Shortly after the founding of the AOA, (6) its members undertook the cause of closing down the National School. Dr. William Smith, who was not known to the Barbers, went to Kansas City under the alias of Dr. G.H.B. Stewart. There, after a short conversation with Elmer Barber and payment of a \$150 fee, he was given a diploma. In the ensuing legal case (brought by the Attorney General of Missouri), the court held that, although the National School had acted illegally by giving Smith a diploma without his actually taking classes, the officers had done so in good faith. "[Smith] was examined and found, not only to be a physician learned in all the ranches of medicine and surgery, a graduate of two of the most noted colleges, but besides was found thoroughly educated and equipped in that peculiar system, or science, called Osteopathy." (7) In other words, the school had not issued a diploma to an unqualified person, but to one who did in fact have the knowledge and training to practice osteopathy, even if he had not received those qualifications from the National School as the diploma would suggest. As a result, the court declined to revoke the school's charter.

The matter did not end there. In 1900, the National School brought a \$100,000 libel suit against

the ASO because of articles in the *Journal of Osteopathy* calling the National School a diploma mill. (8) A court in Sullivan County, Missouri, decided the case in the ASO's favor. Soon thereafter, the National School, which had always had financial problems and which had never been accredited by the Associated Colleges of Osteopathy, closed its doors.

Columbian School of Osteopathy, Medicine and Surgery

The Columbian School was an even greater affront to A. T. Still and his supporters than the National School had been. For one thing, it was established right in Kirksville, on the site of what is now Brashear Park. For another thing, its founder, Marcus L. Ward, D.O., M.D., had not only been one of Still's first students but was also a stockholder in the ASO and its first vice president.



Dr. Marcus L. Ward

Marcus Ward was introduced to osteopathy in 1890, when Still treated him for severe asthma. Soon thereafter Ward and two other former patients, J.O. Hatten and William Wilderson (both former patients as well), persuaded Still to teach them osteopathy. They signed up for a year's instruction for a fee of \$500 and thus became the first osteopathic students outside the Still family.

Soon after the ASO opened in 1892, Still and Ward had a falling out. The original cause is not known, but throughout 1893 the local newspapers recorded their battle. Still and his supporters claimed that Ward was not qualified to practice osteopathy and Ward countered that Still was jealous and inconsistent. The exchange ended when Ward left town in 1894.

In April 1897, Ward received a degree from the Medical College of Ohio. He returned to Kirksville in June, announced his intention of opening a medical school, and set about constructing a building. The school opened in the fall of 1897, with several program options. Students could take a 20-month course in "mechanical manipulation" and receive the degree of Diplomat of Osteopathy (the same degree being offered by the ASO at that time). They could then opt to take an additional two terms in medicine and surgery and receive a medical degree or a combination medical/osteopathic degree. An M.D. could receive an osteopathic degree after a 10-month course of study.

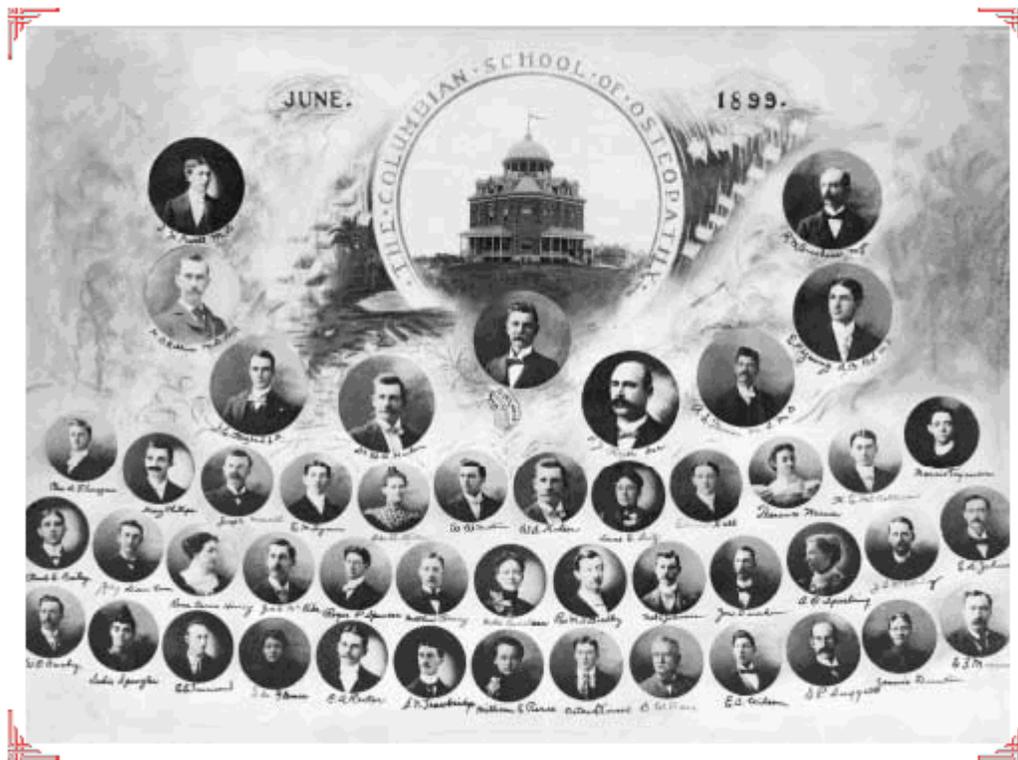
Ward's medical philosophy was based on his belief that osteopathy should be studied and practiced in combination with medicine and surgery. *The Columbian Osteopath* states:

Osteopathy and medicine are compliments of one another . . . [T]he body is more than a machine. Chemical changes are continually taking place within

its tissues, injurious and poisonous substances may be introduced into the system, disease germs derange and destroy its tissues, and other disorders may occur which do not have their origin in mechanical displacement or obstruction . . . While Osteopathy is made the basis of practice, medicine and surgery are recognized as indispensable in many cases. Thus we have a blending of the old and the new.(9)

Today, this viewpoint may seem reasonable, but to Still it was heresy. His position was clear: "If drugs are right Osteopathy is all wrong" and "Osteopathy and drugs are so opposite that one might as well say white is black as speak of Medical Osteopathy." Finally, he confronted the Columbian School directly; after recounting the history of his acquaintance with Ward (referred to as "the ex-lightning rod peddler"), Still asks, "Can an institution be an institution of Osteopathy, when it teaches the very evil which Osteopathy cures, viz., drugs?"(10)

Ward also held that osteopathy had not been discovered by Still but was in fact a revival of a "lost



Columbian School Class of 1899

science of healing, practiced at Athens, Greece during the Olympiad age." Here he was being somewhat inconsistent, for in various places in his publications, he and his supporters also refer to osteopathy as "the young science" and claim "Dr. Ward has worked along this line of thought since 1862."(11) (It should be noted that in 1862 Ward was 13 years old.) Not surprisingly, Still's followers countered with articles such as J.R. Musick's "Is Osteopathy of Greek Origin?" (12) which begins with references to "archaic cranks" and goes on to deny any similarity between osteopathy and Greek medicine.

The dispute between the ASO and the Columbian School was not completely philosophical. According to Still's grandson Charles, "[R]epresentatives of the Columbia [sic] School began meeting trains to recruit prospective students, offering them an Osteopathic education at a much lower cost, free clinics, and other services, also free." (13)

The Columbian School graduated just three classes, in June of 1899 and in January and June of 1900. It then closed, apparently due to internal disagreements among the shareholders. The students were allowed to enroll in the ASO to complete their training; Marcus Ward left Kirksville and moved to California. The school building was sold to R.M. Brashear in 1901 and stood empty for many years except for brief periods.(14) Drs. George and S.S. Still acquired the property in 1914 and promptly announced their plans to open yet another school on the site. The purpose of the Missouri Valley Medical College would be "to offer medical work to those osteopathic students and graduates who wish to study medicine at an institution which cannot be hostile to the ASO."(15) The plan met with so much opposition that it was quickly dropped. The building was sold to the ASO in March 1914 and later burned down.

How did the founders of the National and Columbian Schools feel about each other? In the December 1898 issue of the *Columbian Osteopath*, Ward wrote that he had recently received a copy of *Osteopathy Complete*. He characterized its author as "scientifically considered, far superior to any man now connected with his Alma Mater, Dr. Still not excepted. Dr. Barber has the M.L. Ward idea of Osteopathy reduced to an absolute science."(16) We don't know whether Dr. Barber ever returned the compliment.

Few of the schools that opened in the early years of osteopathy survived as long as 10 years. Most

died from lack of patients, financial backing, or both. Some were bought out by other schools, primarily by the ASO and the S.S. Still College of Osteopathy. Others succumbed to legal challenges by the allopathic profession. The National and Columbian Schools went head-to-head with the mother school and its founder . . . and lost.

1. Three of these early schools—those in Des Moines (1898), Philadelphia (1899), and Chicago (1900)— still exist today. The Des Moines school's ancestor, the S.S. Still College of Osteopathy, actually closed in 1905 but was replaced immediately by the Still College of Osteopathy (today UOMHS/COMS). Because of this continuous presence, we consider Des Moines to be the second oldest of the existing schools, after Kirksville.
2. Gevitz, N. *The D.O.'s*, 1982, p. 45
3. "Pap," *J.Ost.*, 1898 Mar., p. 211
4. Barber, E., *Osteopathy, the New Science of Healing*, 1896, pp. 11-12
5. Barber, E., *Osteopathy Complete*, 1898, pp. 30-31
6. Then known as the American Association for the Advancement of Osteopathy.
7. Booth, E.R., *History of Osteopathy*, 1924, p. 167
8. See, for example, "By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them," *J.Ost.*, 1899 Jan, pp. 416-417
9. Carman, E.M., "An Epitome of the Art of Healing," *Columbian Osteopath*, 1898 Mar, pp. 6-7
10. Still, A. T. "Medical Osteopathy," *J.Ost.*, 1898 Sep, pp. 166-168
11. *Columbian Osteopath*, 1898 Mar, p. 5-6
12. *J.Ost.*, 1898 Oct, pp. 221-225
13. Still, C., *Frontier Doctor, Medical Pioneer*, 1991, p. 190
14. For example, it served as the Theta Psi fraternity house from 1910-11.
15. "Will Open New College in Ward Infirmary Building," *Kirksville Daily Express*, 1914 Feb 24
16. *Columbian Osteopath*, 1898 Dec, p. 188 Cheryl Gracey, MA, Collections Manager

NATIONAL SCHOOL ARTIFACTS SURFACE IN OREGON

Several items from Dr. E. D. Barber's National School of Osteopathy were recently obtained for the Museum collection. Three of the monthly magazines distributed by his school, dated June 1898 (volume 1, number 4), July & August 1898 (volume 1, numbers 5 & 6), and June 1899 (volume 2, number 4), were located in Oregon from a collection that has been stored for over fifty years. The staff found an article by Dr. Barber in the June 1899 magazine that criticizes Dr. A. T. Still's attack on the National School's credibility.