

# "Heat by Nerves and Not by Blood":

the First Major Reduction in Chiropractic Theory, 1903

A Presentation to the Association for the History of Chiropractic at the

**15TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON CHIROPRACTIC HISTORY**

Davenport, Iowa, September 15-16, 1995

Joseph C. Keating, Jr., Ph.D., *Professor*

## Los Angeles College of Chiropractic

16200 E. Amber Valley Drive, P.O. Box 1166

Whittier CA 90609 USA

(310) 947-8755, ext. 633

E-mail: JCKeating@aol.com



practice four years later, which in turn created strong incentive for subsequent differentiation between "neural supremacy" and the osteopathic "rule of the artery." The nature of the 1903 insight and some of the reasons why it is not more widely remembered among chiropractors today are discussed.



### Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Glenda Wiese, M.A., chief archivist of the David D. Palmer Health Sciences Library, for calling my attention to forgotten treasures from the "elevator shaft," and Carl S. Cleveland, III, D.C. and the Cleveland Chiropractic College of Kansas City for access to the collected papers of Carl S. Cleveland, Sr., D.C. Preparation of this paper was supported the National Institute of Chiropractic Research.

### ABSTRACT

Recalled as the demarcation between D.D. Palmer's magnetic healing and chiropractic, the Harvey Lillard case holds a special place in the history of the profession and its healing art. Less familiar to chiropractors today, but of considerable significance in the subsequent development of chiropractic theories, was Old Dad Chiro's 1903 "discovery" that thermoregulation was a neural rather than a circulatory phenomenon. This Santa Barbara incident established the first major alteration in D.D. Palmer's chiropractic concepts, and would set the stage for the earliest known acquittal of a DC for unlicensed

**Figure 1:** from the first issue of the Palmer School's monthly journal, *The Chiropractor* 1904 (Dec); 1(1): 13; original caption reads: "(Note:- The cut on Page 13 was the class present when nerve heat was first announced. From left to right they were: Lucas, "Old Chiro," Collier, Smith, Wright, Paxson, Reynard.)"

# "Heat by Nerves and Not by Blood":

the First Major Reduction in Chiropractic Theory, 1903

Most if not all chiropractors know something about the Harvey Lillard case, and see D.D. Palmer's treatment of the deaf janitor as seminal in the development of chiropractic. Yet few know anything about Palmer's original chiropractic theory, the basis for Lillard's care, nor of the magnetic concepts from which first stage chiropractic derived. Even less well known is the theoretical turn that Palmer took while teaching and practicing along the West Coast in 1903. Yet the events in Santa Barbara that year would have profound effects for the theory and legal standing of the new profession. What was the 1903 insight and why is it not more widely remembered among chiropractors nowadays? Here's how Old Dad Chiro described the discovery in 1904:

## Who Discovered That the Body is Heated by Nerves During Health and Disease?\*

"It will be of interest to "The Chiropractor" reader to learn how Dr. D.D. Palmer discovered that the body is heat by nerves, and not by blood.

In the afternoon of July 1, 1903, in suite 15 of the Aiken block, Santa Barbara, Cal., D.D. Palmer was holding a clinic. The patient was Roy Renwick of that city. There were present as students, H.D. Reynard, Ira H. Lucas, O.G. Smith, Minora C. Paxson, A.B. Wightman and M.A. Collier, in all told, eight witnesses.

"The patient, A.R. Renwick, had the left hand, arm, shoulder and on up to the spine, intensely hot. Dr. Palmer drew the attention of the class to the excessive heat condition of the portion named; the balance being normal in temperature. He then gave an adjustment in the dorsal region which relieved the pinched nerve on the left side, also the excessive heat of the left upper limb; but he had thrown the vertebra

too far, which had the effect of pinching the nerves on the right side, and immediately causing the upper limb to be excessively hot. He asked the class, "Is the body heat by blood or by nerves?" he then left them for two or three minutes. He returned and asked them, "Is the body heat by blood or by nerves?" The class unanimously answered "Nerves." Thus was this new thought originated.

"The above circumstance is substantiated by a letter written that evening to the doctor's son, B.J. Palmer, D.C., also several following letters which further explained that the caloric of the body, whether normal or in excess, was furnished by calorific nerves. These letters were placed with other original writings in one of the ten bound volumes in order to prove the autobiography of Chiropractic from its birth. Here are the original writings which show beyond the shadow of a doubt who originated the principle of Chiropractic. The doctor's son anticipated that some sneak thief would try to appropriate the credit of originality, and would desire to rob his father of the honor justly due him, thus, his reason for compiling his original writings."

The implications of Palmer's reduction in his chiropractic theory can be understood by comparing his earliest and later theories of cancer:

**Table 1:** Contrast between D.D. Palmer's two theories of cancer: 1897 vs. 1904

**Cancers: Their Cause and Cure**  
*The Chiropractic* 1897a (Jan); 17: 2

...The cause is an obstruction to the blood circulation and an injury to certain nerves. Show us a case of cancer - no matter in what portion of the body that cancer may be - and we will at once show you two injuries which obstruct the blood circulation and injure certain nerves. It is this combination of injured nerves and obstructions which cause cancers.

**Cancers: Their Cause and Cure**  
*The Chiropractor* 1904 (Dec); 1(1): 15

Cancers are but the symptoms of impinged nerves. We no longer wonder that there are so many kinds when we consider that no two of us sense alike. All cancers, no matter in what part of the body, have one and the same cause; they are all produced by injured nerves, but the effect of these irritated nerves show their dissimilarity in the great diversity of cancers.

## \*Reference:

Palmer DD. Who discovered that the body is heated by nerves during health and disease. *The Chiropractor* 1904 (Dec); 1(1):12