advancing the art & science of dentistry for 100 years

1907-2007
A Note from the Author

I could not have completed these articles on the ODA’s first century without the kind assistance of many other writers who have chronicled the history of Oklahoma dentistry.

I extend my appreciation to those ODA past presidents who took time to answer my historical survey. During the course of this project, I was privileged to meet several times with the retired dentists of Oklahoma City and Tulsa. They proved to be charming lunch companions and a wonderful resource for these articles. I also thank Dana Davis, Lynn Means, Stephanie Trougakos and other ODA staff members who provided ongoing support for this project.

I offer special thanks to Dr. Ross Waltzer of Tulsa, who shared with me his meticulously maintained and fascinating scrapbooks documenting the history of his dental practice and involvement in organized dentistry.

The following books were a rich resource of information on the history of the ODA and Oklahoma dentistry: Open Wider Please — Dentistry in Oklahoma by J. Stanley Clark, published in 1955; Buckboards and Parlors to Bungalows and Towers, a History of Oklahoma Dentistry, 1982-1995 by William Carter, DDS and Jean Graham-Carter, PhD; and They Have Made Their Sacrifice, the History of the Oklahoma Board of Dentistry by Mary Ann Blochowiak, published in 2003.

About the Author

Chris Sutton is a freelance writer who regularly contributes to publications including Oklahoma Magazine, the Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association and the Tulsa Health Care News. She is the former vice president of communications for the Iowa Medical Society in West Des Moines and former editor of Iowa Medicine, Journal of the Iowa Medical Society. She lives in Claremore with her husband, a family physician.
2007 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Oklahoma Dental Association. From the early days of buckboard dentistry to today’s high-tech practices, Oklahoma dentists have made an amazing journey during the past century. The ODA has been beside them every step of the way.

In 1907, Oklahoma City was advertised as “the fastest-growing city in the fastest-growing state in the Union.” Though less than two decades had elapsed since the famous Oklahoma Land Run, Oklahoma City had exploded into a bustling metropolis. Such rapid progress was remarkable even for a city that was, like its archrival Guthrie, “born grown.” In a historical article published in a 1966 issue of the ODA Bulletin, Dr. Paul Plowman said, “Oklahoma City was born in a single day – April 22, 1889. That day closed with everyone in inextricable confusion. Saloons were filled with unctuous swindlers, bunco steerers, feeble and ghastly individuals, lopheads, beggars and stiffs.”

Completion of several railroad lines into Oklahoma City from the east contributed to the unbridled growth. The city’s population burgeoned to over 10,000 by 1900, and to 32,452 by 1907. As a result, Oklahoma City was locked in a life-or-death struggle with Guthrie, which in 1890 had been named the capital of Oklahoma Territory. Disappointed but undeterred, city leaders hoped to deprive Guthrie of this prize when statehood was declared. They believed that establishing Oklahoma City as a center of commerce would surely do the trick.

Oklahoma City’s downtown district, which covered a six-block area, was a frenzied construction zone. Several main streets had been paved and streetcar tracks veined the city in all directions. Packing plants southwest of the city were creating thousands of new jobs.

Though it had been just a few years since a young attorney purchased Oklahoma City’s first automobile from the Mobile Steamer Company in Chicago, the city boasted 10 auto dealerships. The dental supply firm of CD Coil — a company with foresight — came to Oklahoma City in 1903 and was doing a brisk local business. Dr. GF Dean, a college graduate who set up shop within a month of the 1889 run, was the city’s first dentist; by 1907, Dr. Dean enjoyed the company of 25 colleagues.

Oklahoma City was proud of the first-class accommodations offered by the Lee Hotel. Built in 1900 at the corner of Main and Broadway, the Lee Hotel was on a par with hotels in much bigger cities. Sold in 1906 to Joseph Huckins, the hotel had the city’s first electric elevator and had counted among its many guests Theodore Roosevelt and Buffalo Bill Cody. Rebuilt in 1908 following a fire, the Lee-Huckins is almost certainly the only American hotel to serve as a state capitol building. In 1910, following a vote in favor of Oklahoma City as the new state capital, Governor Charles Haskell led a group in a midnight road trip to Guthrie to liberate the state seal. They returned to the hotel and the governor designated it as the temporary state capitol site.

Another source of pride was Delmar Garden, located on the
The Oklahoma Dental Association is born

Activity in Oklahoma City the week of June 17, 1907 was even more frenetic than usual. The city was inundated with out-of-town visitors; every hotel and rooming house was full to bursting. Delegates to a rally of the Christian Endeavor Society were sharing the spotlight with Democrats in town for a long-awaited convention. Eager to elect one of their own as Oklahoma’s first governor when statehood was declared in five months, Democrats were busy strategizing and were looking forward to a keynote convention speech by world-famous orator William Jennings Bryan.

A prestigious party comprised of a British ambassador, the governor of Missouri, the president of the Frisco Railroad and the 1904 Democratic candidate for president stopped at the Democratic convention en route to meet with Quanah Parker, leader of the Comanche Indians.

While the future government of the baby state of Oklahoma was being decided outside, inside the Lee Hotel the future course of a profession was being charted. On June 16, delegates representing 181 dentists of the Oklahoma Territory Dental Association and 188 dentists of the Indian Territory Dental Association gathered to attend clinics, hear visiting lecturers, and somehow find the best way to join their two organizations.

Discussion of melding the two groups had been ongoing for several years. However, a sense of urgency arose on June 16, 1906 when the US Congress passed the Enabling Act. Oklahoma’s Twin Territories would enter the Union as one state, not two, and Oklahoma dentists were determined that a strong, single organization would be in place to meet the challenges sure to follow.

There was just one sticking point: Beginning in 1891, dentists practicing in Oklahoma Territory were subject to licensing provisions approved by the Territorial Legislature and administered by a Board of Dental Examiners. Though the dental law required that dentists without diplomas pass an examination, it was poorly enforced and there was concern in the Oklahoma Territory Dental Association about what was going on in remote areas. Conditions were even worse in Indian Territory, where there was no legislature and no dental law. Though there were many competent, well-educated dentists in eastern Oklahoma, there was also a plethora of “quacks” and “charlatans” seeking admission into...
“The future of the ODA and Oklahoma dentists is bright because the public is more aware of the need for basic dental care.” Dr. RC Owen

Pioneers, Quacks and Charlatans

In the late 1890s, a young dentist named WM Wilson — like many of his contemporaries — had no permanent office. Instead, he had portable dental equipment he carried via horse and buggy from one small town to another in Indian Territory. He liked the look of Muskogee, Vinita and Claremore, but found a dentist already ensconced in each of these towns. Finally, he headed toward Tulsa, where cattlemen and Indians were struggling to build a town at the intersection of the Frisco Railroad and the Arkansas River.

At the time of its incorporation in 1898, the city of Tulsa was comprised of 1,200 hardy pioneers and bore no resemblance to the bustling “Oil Capital of the World” that sprang up after the 1905 Glenn Pool oil strike. Following, is an unattributed account of Dr. Wilson’s arrival in Tulsa.

“The little town of Tulsa, Indian Territory, lay basking in the sun. False front stores lined the main street, and tied to the hitching posts in front of them were weary horses. A young man pulled his horse and buggy to a stop in front of a livery stable. He was looking for a boarding house where he could rest until the roads dried up. He was not averse to working while waiting and, pointing to his worldly possessions in the buggy, which included a complete dental outfit, asked where he might locate a vacant room in which to set them up. The young man never did get on his way. A 25-story skyscraper now stands near the site of the livery stable where he first hitched his horse and buggy.”

In April of 1948, when Dr. Wilson was 81 years old, he was still practicing in Tulsa and had played an important role in the early growth of the city. His story is typical of early pioneer dentists in Oklahoma and Indian Territories who thrived despite unbelievable hardships, establishing dental practices through hard work and resourcefulness, and contributing greatly to the communities in which they lived.

Not all of the early dental practitioners were so admirable.
In the years before statehood, the unregulated and ungoverned Twin Territories presented an ideal field of operations for quacks and charlatans who preyed on the poor and ignorant. According to Buckboards and Parlors to Bungalows and Towers, in the early days you needed only “impudence, some steadiness of hand, and a case of reusable instruments” to call yourself a dentist.

Some itinerant dentists were legitimate, but many were nothing more than unscrupulous con artists. They transported foot-powered dental drills on buckboards and used handbills to advertise their visits. Dental “assistants” told jokes to entertain the crowd or held down the unfortunate person being “treated” by the dentist. These quacks disappeared as quickly as they came, often in the middle of the night. They left behind debts with local merchants and people in pain from bungled dental work.

As legitimate dentists came into the territories and began organizing themselves, their first order of business was regulating their profession. In early 1891, the legislature in Oklahoma Territory enacted a dental law. On May 5, 1891, Dr. David Peoples of Guthrie, Dr. George Dean of Oklahoma City, and Dr. John Nicholson of El Reno met in Guthrie to organize the Territorial Board of Dental Examiners. The next day, the Oklahoma (Territory) Dental Association was founded. In 1903, ethical dentists in Indian Territory organized the Indian Territory Dental Association and joined the struggle against the “bushwhackers” whose substandard practices created fear and mistrust of all dentists. The book They Have Made their Sacrifice credits these early pioneer dentists with “setting the frontier territory on the path to the ethical practice of dentistry.”

Because of Oklahoma’s unique beginnings, the path toward the ethical practice of dentistry was strewn with obstacles. Compared with other states, Oklahoma’s law was weak. Most states required dentists to have a college education; in Oklahoma, some had no education at all. Also, the board’s sole income was derived from the $10 license fee and there was no money to pay dentist board members to leave their practices and travel around enforcing the law, though they tried to do just that.

By 1906, the board had granted licenses to over 200 dentists in Oklahoma Territory. When statehood was declared in November of 1907, 128 dentists in Indian Territory were licensed. With the territories combined into one state, the board could begin the process of writing and enforcing effective and equitable dental law.

In 1912, the board began requiring a practical demonstration of skills as part of the dental examination. In 1913, a rewritten dental act gave the board the authority to revoke licenses and, for the first time, Oklahoma dentists were required to be graduates of a reputable dental college.

Throughout the 1920s, 30s and 40s, the dental act underwent major revisions. Every year, the board reviewed the act and made suggested changes. In the early 1940s, the board faced its first case of dental labs practicing in violation of the dental act.

Throughout its early years, the Board faced a perpetual shortage of money and equipment. Dr. George Ballew of Broken Arrow reports that, in 1952 when he was set to take his practical exam, he brought the chair his mother used for shampooing in her beauty shop because he had been warned there was a chair shortage. In the early 1950s, after decades of...
renting and borrowing space, the board had its first permanent office. The board hired its first full-time paid executive secretary in 1956 and, in 1962, moved into permanent offices in the state capitol complex.

In the 1960s, denturists flourished, examining and fitting patients for dentures without the involvement of a licensed dentist. They faced prosecution for violating the dental act, and their activities sparked a range war between dentists and denturists that raged for nearly 20 years.

The practice of dentistry changed dramatically as more dentists began using auxiliary personnel, and it was up to the board to define their roles. During the ODA annual meeting in April of 1970, the board held its first public meeting for the purpose of discussing expanded functions of dental hygienists. In 1974, a dental hygienist position was added to the board; in 1979, the board had its first public member. In 1991, the board celebrated its centennial. By the time this milestone was reached, 130 dentists, four dental hygienists, and 13 public members had given of their time and talent to serve on the board. The author of They Have Made Their Sacrifice summed up the board's first 100 years very effectively.

“Dentistry in Oklahoma evolved from a craft of sometimes untrained, unlicensed and unregulated practitioners to one of highly skilled dentists who represented the best their profession had to offer.”
Oklahoma Territory
Dental Association
J.S. Nicholson, El Reno  1891-94
M.L. McConn, Purcell 1894-95
E.E. Kirkpatrick, Ok. City 1895-96
J.B. Gillespie, Woodward 1896-99
E.E. Kirkpatrick, Ok. City 1899-1901
G.A. Hughes, Guthrie 1901-02
J.A. Wells, Shawnee 1903-04
F.H. Colter, Ok. City 1904-05
Theo Bringhurst, Shawnee 1905-06
A.A. Doughty, Ok. City 1906-07

Indian Territory
Dental Association
J.E. Wright, McAlester 1903-04
C.W. Day, Vinita 1904-05
A.E. Bonnell, Muskogee 1905-06
S.A. Long, McAlester 1906-07

Oklahoma Dental
Association
C.L. White, Ok. City 1907-08
A.L. Walters, Tulsa 1908-09
F.D. Sparks, Ponca City 1909-10
B.L. Shobe, Tulsa 1910-11
C.R. Lawrence, Enid 1911-12
S.A. Long, McAlester 1912-13
R.S. Parsons, Ok. City 1913-14
J.M. Temple, Tulsa 1914-15
W.E. Flesher, Ok. City 1915-16
N.C. Wood, Ardmore 1916-17
T.H. Williams, Chickasha 1917-18
J.A. Morrow, Enid 1918-19
A.E. Bonnell, Muskogee 1919-20
C.W. Day, Tulsa 1920-21
A.B. Walker, Norman 1921-22
I.M. Doss, Ok. City 1922-23
C.A. Ruhlen, Gushing 1923-24
A.F. Sebert, Clinton 1924-25
W.T. Jacobs, Muskogee 1925-26
T.W. Sorrels, Norman 1926-27
C.A. Furrow, Tulsa 1927-28
W.J. Scruton, Ok. City 1928-29
R.H. Ellis, Okmulgee 1929-30
C.A. Debeer, Enid 1930-31
O.H. McCarty, Tulsa 1931-32
A.C. Seids, Ok. City 1932-33
E.E. Overmeyer, Muskogee 1933-34
J.A. Wells, Shawnee 1934-35
C.B. Ball, Ardmore 1935-36
A.B. Rivers, Okmulgee 1936-37
W.S. Phillips, McAlester 1937-38
F.J. Reichmann, Ok. City 1938-39
O.F. Sinks, Tulsa 1939-40
H.H. Sorrels, Ok. City 1940-41
S.P. Bowyer, Tulsa 1941-42
G.E. Roland, Ok. City 1942-43
G.A. Roelke, Tulsa 1943-44
C.A. Hess, Durant 1944-45
J.B. Ratliff, Hobart 1945-46
H.O. Warrick, Enid 1946-47
M.G. Armstrong, Tulsa 1947-48
D.W. Matteson, Ok. City 1948-49
R.M. Dunn, Tulsa 1949-50
F.O. Pitney, Ok. City 1950-51
H.N. Wagner, Henrietta 1951-52
W.P. Rango, Bartlesville 1952-53
R.C. Calkin, Guthrie 1953-54
A.E. Bonnell, Muskogee 1954-55
D.L. Rippeto, Ok. City 1955-56
V.C. Tisdale, Elk City 1956-57
L.A. Lucas, Ok. City 1957-58
R.T. Oliver, Tulsa 1958-59
W.E. Cole, Ok. City 1959-60
O.R. Whiteneck, Enid 1960-61
L.D. Wright, Ok. City 1961-62
H.A. Sims, Tulsa 1962-63
J.A. Teaff, Muskogee, 1963-64
W.C. Hopkins, Ok. City 1964-65
T.B. Scott, Stillwater 1965-66
F.D. Riddle, Shawnee 1966-67
D.E. Brannin, Tulsa 1967-68
J.D. Robertson, Ok. City 1968-69
C.M. Kouri, Chelsea 1969-70
B.H. Benson, Woodward 1970-71
J.R. Berry, Tulsa 1971-72
P.E. Plowman, Ok. City 1972-73
J.A. Saddoris, Tulsa 1973-74
R.C. Owen, Ok. City 1974-75
E.J. Crowder, Ponca City 1975-76
G.D. Gardner, Lawton 1976-77
H.W. Barnes, Ardmore 1977-78
A.B. Holt, Ok. City 1978-79
R.L. Bartheld, McAlester 1979-80
F.E. Hickman, MWC 1980-81
W.E. Goodman, Miami 1981-82
J.L. Limestall, Yukon 1982-83
R.R. Cohlmia, Ok. City 1983-84
J.H. Patton, Stillwater 1984-85
W.R. Haught, Tulsa 1985-86
J.N. Miles, Norman 1986-87
L.D. Whitlock, Altus 1987-88
J.T. Torchia, Tulsa 1988-89
W.D. Freeman, Ok. City 1989-90
W.W. Brewer, Ok. City 1990-91
J.C. Simmons, El Reno 1991-92
D.K. Keeter, Frederick 1992-93
K.S. Gluski, Stroud 1993-94
P.M. Abshere, Ok. City 1994-95
J.B. Miller, Ok. City 1995-96
C.C. Collier, Norman 1996-97
A.C. Keenan, Tulsa 1997-98
G.A. Mead, Purcell 1998-99
V.L. Andrews, Ponca City 1999-2000
S.W. Hogg, Tulsa 2000-01
R.A. Cohlmia, Ok. City 2001-02
W.S. Waugh, Edmond 2002-03
S.O. Glenn, Tulsa 2003-04
W.L. Beaasley, Ok. City 2004-05
J.S. Nicholson, Muskogee 2005-06
P.G. Low, Tulsa 2006-07
K.M. Jones, Edmond 2007-08

"but our young leadership will certainly exceed past future.” Dr. JH Patton, ODA President 1984-85
The Bulletin and The Journal

For the past 96 years, the Journal of the Oklahoma Dental Association has kept dentists connected to the association and kept them abreast of the latest developments in their profession. The JODA began life as the Bulletin on June 11, 1911, and was one of the country’s earliest state dental publications.

Dr. CR Lawrence, described as a serious thinker who refused to tolerate mediocrity, came to Enid from Illinois in 1908. By 1911, he had launched the Bulletin and a successful campaign for the ODA presidency. An excellent writer, Dr. Lawrence believed wholeheartedly in organized dentistry and went on to be elected ADA trustee and ADA vice president. Even without an organized campaign, he came within four votes of being elected ADA president.

For dentists in rural Oklahoma in the first half of the 20th century, the Bulletin must have been extraordinarily important. It was the only means of getting news about colleagues, the latest clinical information and updates on the activities of the ODA.

Renamed the Journal in 1951, the Bulletin contained reports from ODA district and component societies and news items concerning the activities of ODA members around Oklahoma. These member news columns were often highly entertaining. For example, a column in an early Bulletin informed readers that Dr. Charles Hess of Idabel had pulled the tooth of an elephant with the Barnum and Bailey Circus. The January, 1942 Bulletin contained another interesting bit of news:

“Dr. Mervin Howard, accompanied by Dr. PG Ledbetter of Marlow, OK, went quail hunting in the Mena, Arkansas vicinity in January. We can’t find out how many birds they killed, but they report the Arkansas hard cider is up to its usual good quality.”

Editors of the Bulletin and ODA presidents established a tradition of using their columns to comment on a wide range of topics and issues affecting dentistry. They weren’t afraid of controversy, and often used their bully pulpit to advance the cause of quality dentistry. In the very first issue of the Bulletin, Dr. AE Bonnell of Muskogee wrote an editorial pleading for new laws regulating dentistry.

At a May, 1913 meeting of the Board of Dental Examiners, a longtime board member got into a political argument that erupted into a fist fight punctuated by swearing. The next issue of the Bulletin contained Dr. Lawrence’s stingingly sarcastic account of “the clinic in pugilism and foul language” put on by the dentist, which Dr. Lawrence said was rendered even more inappropriate by the presence of a lady at the meeting.

The next issue of the Bulletin carried the dentist’s public apology and pledge not to seek reappointment to the board.

Many presidents’ columns through the years have been not only enlightening, but also refreshingly honest. In April of 1946, President JB Ratliff of Hobart wrote of attending the 25th anniversary of the Southwestern Society of Orthodontists, a group he called “wire twisters”:

“I have always thought orthodontists were just a little superior or high hat. Maybe I am envious of the skill it takes to be one. Anyway, I was surprised — you get a group of them together and they act just as any other group of dentists.”

Though there have been major changes in design and format, the Journal continues today as a valuable communications tool for the ODA and its members.
The future is bright and our profession is second to none.”
Dr. R Cohlmia, Oklahoma City, ODA president 1983-84

The Oklahoma Way and Dr. BL Shobe

In 1950 when the American Dental Association honored “dentists of the half century,” Dr. BL Shobe of Tulsa was prominent on the list. In 1910, Dr. Shobe came up with an idea that revolutionized dental meetings across the country. The idea, perfected by Dr. Shobe, Dr. Lawrence, Dr. AL Walters of Tulsa, Dr. AL Bonnell of Muskogee and Dr. CW Day of Vinita, became known as the Oklahoma Way.

Like most really good ideas, the Oklahoma Way was brilliantly simple. How can dentists get the latest clinical information when they lack the means for traveling to large centers of academic excellence? By bringing the mountain to Muhammad, of course.

Dr. Shobe and his ODA colleagues created the first post-graduate lecture series by bringing outstanding dental leaders to the ODA spring meeting. At the first post-graduate course in 1912, three speakers from Chicago presented lectures on the latest dental instruments, modern crown techniques, operative dentistry and diseases of the dental pulp.

As word of the Oklahoma Way began to spread, Dr. Shobe and other ODA officers were invited to neighboring states to explain the idea. The Oklahoma Way gained national fame in 1917 when the ADA published and distributed an article by Dr. Lawrence entitled “The Post Graduate Dental Meeting.”

ODA Journal Editors

1911 CR Lawrence, Enid
1912 AL Walters, Checotah
1913 CR Lawrence, Enid
1914 WE Flesher, Frederick
1916 JA Morrow, Enid
1921 CR Lawrence, Enid
1922 AB Walker, Fairview
1925 CL White, Oklahoma City
1926 FJ Reichmann, Oklahoma City
1929 EE Sanger, Oklahoma City
1932 FJ Reichmann, Oklahoma City
1936 OW Bowyer, Perry
1941 EW Wise, Tulsa
1948 FH Binkley, Hennessey
1949 Bill Hopkins, Oklahoma City
1951 AR Drescher, Oklahoma City
1955 WB Haynes, Tulsa
1964 BH Benson, Woodward
1968 TA Murdoch, Oklahoma City
1972 James Whitehead, Tulsa
1973 EH Mabry, Enid
1974 French Hickman, Oklahoma City
1975-90 EH Mabry, Enid, and Tom Murdoch, Oklahoma City, served alternately
1991 JB Miller, Oklahoma City
1992 S Shapiro, Oklahoma City
1993 RT Glass, Oklahoma City
1994-95 KT Avery, Oklahoma City
1996 JT Biggs, Oklahoma City
1997 Linda Miner, Oklahoma City
1998 Perry Brooks, Norman
1999-2000 Manville Duncanson, Oklahoma City
2001-02 David Shadid, Oklahoma City
2003 Frank Miranda, Oklahoma City
2004 Raymond Cohlmia, Oklahoma City
2005 Dennis Weibel, Muskogee
2006-07 Raymond Cohlmia, Oklahoma City
Women Dentists: The New Pioneers

In an article published in the Winter, 1988 ODA Journal, Dr. Thomas Murdoch described Dr. Theresa Hunt’s arrival in Oklahoma Territory on December 19, 1901:

“The northbound Rock Island train from El Reno ground to a halt at the small station of Watonga, Oklahoma Territory. Among the passengers was a sturdy looking young woman, Dr. Theresa Hunt, with her new Oklahoma dental license, No. 134, packed in her valise. A graduate of Western Dental College in Kansas City, she had come to Oklahoma to seek her fortune.”

Dr. Theresa Hunt — later Dr. Hunt Tyler — was the first graduate woman dentist in Oklahoma Territory. The world of higher education in those days was almost exclusively male, and only a very special young woman would have had the courage and confidence to enroll in dental college. Even in states to the east — settled long before Oklahoma — the percentage of women dentists was minuscule.

Not only did Dr. Hunt graduate, she struck out on her own far from her hometown in Missouri. She stopped in a place that was remote, unsettled and totally without the patina of civilization typically required to attract women. Perhaps she was shrewd enough to foresee that she would be accepted immediately because people were so glad to have a dentist.

Even for male dentists, working conditions were less than ideal. According to Backboards and Parlors to Bungalows and Towers, Dr. Hunt’s first office was sandwiched between two saloons and her patients frequently showed up inebriated. Once, a patient drew a gun on her, demanding she hand over the false teeth she had made for him without being paid. Later, when she was married with children, she often took one of her sons with her when she journeyed by horse and buggy to see patients in outlying towns.

Even given the harsh conditions, Dr. Hunt did very well. She practiced 40 years in Watonga and died in 1972 at the age of 94. At least one early woman dentist was involved in the Oklahoma Dental Association prior to statehood. According to

June, 1911
— Over 150 Oklahoma dentists attend the fourth annual meeting of the OSDA in Enid.

March, 1912
— The ODA annual meeting features lectures by three visiting experts from Chicago and the “Oklahoma Way” is born.

Sept, 1913
— The ODA Oral Hygiene Committee has a moving picture entitled “Toothache” which is being shown in schools across Oklahoma.

“All through my presidency, I had one thought. If we could stick together, we could weather these storms and prevail.” Dr. JT Torchia, Tulsa, ODA president 1988-89

Dr. Theresa Hunt-Tyler was the first graduate woman dentist in Oklahoma Territory. She came to Watonga by train in 1901 after graduating from Western Dental College in Kansas City.
1916
— Dr. Earl Ammons of Coweta, fresh out of dental school, gives a clinic on making gold crowns at the Northern District meeting in Tulsa. An “old timer” at the meeting offers to show him how to make a crown with a pair of pliers because, as he put it, “you'll starve to death making them your way.”

1916
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1919
— The Oklahoma State Board of Dental Examiners recognizes dental hygienists and issues two dental hygienist licenses.

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1923
— A group of Oklahoma dentists meets with Dr. LeRoy Long, dean of the OU School of Medicine, to establish a dental service at University Hospitals in Oklahoma City.

They Have Made Their Sacrifice, the Territorial Board of Dental Examiners issued a license to six dentists at its third meeting in 1891, one to Dr. Laura Davis, the first woman dentist in the territory. Two years later, Dr. Davis attended the World Columbian Dental Congress in Chicago with several other members of the ODA. Coincidentally, it was at this Dental Congress that the Women's Dental Association of the United States — later renamed the American Association of Women Dentists (AAWD) — was founded. The Bulletin notes that, in 1912, six women dentists attended the ODA spring meeting.

In 1970, only two percent of America's practicing dentists were women, but great strides were made in the next two decades. By 1985, Dean William Brown noted that women comprised 25 percent of the freshman class at the OU School of Dentistry. In that same year, the Oklahoma Chapter of the AAWD was organized with Dr. Mary Martin of Oklahoma City serving as the group’s first president. Though there is still pioneering to be done — particularly in dental specialties — Oklahoma's women dentists have come a long way towards equality. Today, the ODA has its first woman president, Dr. Pam Low of Tulsa.

“I am honored to be the first woman president. However, I feel that gender should not be an issue. I believe that our officers should be elected because of their abilities and desire to serve,” says Dr. Low. “Dr. Kathy Roth is currently president of the ADA. With the number of women in positions of leadership in the ADA and other constituents, having a woman president is no longer the novelty it might have been in the past.”

Dr. Pamela G. Low, Tulsa
ODA’s 100th (and 1st woman) President
Oklahoma Dentists in War

In the July, 1942 issue of the ODA Bulletin, the editor had stern words for some of his Oklahoma colleagues.

"Twenty-three years ago, a lot of us came back from World War I and, in too many instances, were not received too well by those who stayed at home," he said. "Don't send a man off to fight our battles and while he is gone, steal his practice."

There is some evidence that dentists who served with both the Union and Confederate Army were among early settlers in the Twin Territories, but the first organized effort to recruit Oklahoma dentists to serve in the military occurred in 1917, when the ODA was 10 years old. Dr. TW Sorrells of Oklahoma City was appointed by Governor Williams to head up the WW I Preparedness League. The League’s assignment was to recruit Oklahoma dentists to "improve the dental condition of all draftees" free of charge and in one visit.

Oklahoma dentists served in every conflict in ensuing years — Korea, Viet Nam, Desert Storm, and currently in Operation Enduring Freedom — but by far the largest involvement was World War II. In 1941, at the start of the conflict, ODA membership was 400; by July of 1943, 144 ODA members were in active military service.

In early 1941, talk of war was on everyone’s lips, though America had yet to enter the war against Hitler’s Germany. The ADA’s Preparedness Committee had sent questionnaires to all Oklahoma dentists. Dentists in the reserve were being called to active duty.

In April of 1941 — eight months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor — the theme of the ODA Annual Meeting was “National Preparedness and Oklahoma Dentistry’s Part.” Guest speaker was Brigadier General Leigh Fairbank, commander of the US Army’s Dental Corps.

After Pearl Harbor, thousands of young American men enlisted. Others waited to be drafted and Oklahoma dentists were warned against those who might “show up asking to have teeth pulled in an attempt to be rendered unfit for service.” Dentists were advised not to pull teeth unless x-rays proved the teeth could not be restored to use. Dentists were further encouraged to provide a record of the man’s mouth to the local draft board.

By early 1942, dental requirements for draftees were lowered, with men accepted even if they had full dentures. In July of 1943, the maximum age of dentists eligible for military commissions was raised from 39 to 42.

Throughout the war years, the pages of the Bulletin reflected the staunch patriotism typical of Americans in those days. In late 1941, the ODA suspended payment of dues for dentists active in the military. A Dental Salvage Committee was organized to gather old rubber and metal instruments from dental offices to use in the drive against the Axis.” Columns by ODA presidents urged all dentists to buy war bonds.

In early 1943, the editor wrote “we have not any idea of the numbers, names or ranks of our fellow dentists in the service of stopping Hitler and pals” and urged District Societies to send the names of dentist-soldiers to ODA headquarters. A concerted effort was made to send the Bulletin to all ODA members in the military, including those serving overseas. By late 1943, the Bulletin published letters from a number of these men, and all were extremely grateful to receive this reminder of home.

In October of 1943, Dr. Albert Bonnell wrote, “We started in combat back on the southwest coast of Sicily and have moved quite a distance since then. Capt. Charles Blum of Hominy, Capt. Hugh Hays of Clinton, Bishop Shields of Enid, and Capt. Clifford LeHew of Pawnee should all be able to give interesting clinics upon their return on ‘Exodontia and Operative Dentistry accompanied by Artillery Shells and Air Raids’.

The April, 1944 Bulletin contained a letter from Oklahoma dentist Clarence Richardson, also stationed in Italy. In eloquent understatement, he summed up the actions of the many ODA members who served admirably in wartime.

“Oklahoma dentists are doing plenty of good work here under very unfavorable conditions,” he concluded.
April, 1925
— Tenants move into Oklahoma City’s new state of the art Medical Arts Building, which was built by the Physicians and Dentists Building Company.

April, 1926
— Dental assistants form the Oklahoma State Dental Assistants Society and hold their first meeting in conjunction with the OSDA meeting.

1930
— Dental “bungalows” - converted homes with drive-through entryways - begin to appear in many Oklahoma towns.

“Our membership has been lowered considerably, but not as much as conditions would indicate. At this time we have 215 paid members of this society. All who have not paid their 1933 dues have been notified by letter that they must pay or be dropped from the Society. They will be dropped September 1st, and thereafter will be considered as non-members. All non-members who have ever been members of the State Society must pay one year’s back State Dues in addition to current dues before they are eligible for membership.”
- August 1933 Bulletin

The Father of Oklahoma Dentistry

In an obituary in the April, 1941 issue of the ODA Bulletin, Dr. J.D. Hart called Dr. Charles Lincoln White “the father of Oklahoma dentistry.”

Dr. White was born in Rogersville, Tennessee in 1877. He graduated from the University of Tennessee dental school and, in 1901, made his way first to Granite, Oklahoma and later to Oklahoma City. He helped secure Oklahoma’s dental act and was instrumental in uniting the two territorial dental societies into the Oklahoma State Dental Association.

Active in the ODA until his death, Dr. White was also chief of the dental staff at University Hospital and was an ADA trustee representing the 9th district for nine years.

“Known for his hearty handshake, he was a capable dentist and a leader of men,” concludes his obituary.

Feb, 1926
— Dr. Frank Mayfield, J.D., appointed the first dental examiner for the state of Oklahoma.

Jan, 1933
— Dr. Francis Reichman begins oral surgery training at the OU School of Medicine.

April, 1933
— The Oklahoma Section of the American Academy of Orthodontics is formed. The first orthodontic specialists in Oklahoma are Drs. TW and Harry Sorrels, WE Flesher and Marion Flesher, Oren McCarthy and Forris Woodring.

1935
— The Oklahoma State Board of Dental Examiners decides to “deal kindly” with dentists who are unable to pay their license fees due to conditions caused by the Great Depression.
A School of Dentistry Becomes a Reality

When the Epworth Dental College failed in 1910, members of the Oklahoma Dental Association and the Oklahoma County Dental Society were encouraged to establish a dental school in Oklahoma. Dr. Francis Reichmann helped establish a dental clinic and oral surgery program at the University of Oklahoma, and Dr. LeRoy Long and Dr. Samuel Cunningham received training from him.

On August 28, 1972, 24 eager young men, selected from 192 applicants, began the first day of instruction at the OU College of Dentistry. This class graduated in 1976.

The first significant steps toward establishing a proprietary dental school in Oklahoma were taken in 1923 when Dr. Francis Reichmann helped establish a dental clinic and oral surgery program at what was then the University of Oklahoma. Reichmann, who came to Oklahoma from Michigan, is considered the father of dental education in Oklahoma.

The ill-fated dental school was part of Oklahoma City's Epworth University, which opened in September 1904. A college of medicine was added in 1906, a college of pharmacy in 1907 and a dental college in 1908. After spending two years exclusively at University Hospitals, Dr. Reichmann opened a private practice in Oklahoma City in 1933. In a 1953 interview with the author of Open Wider, Please, Dr. Reichmann said he stayed in Oklahoma because he was "tremendously impressed by the eagerness of Oklahoma dentists to advance their profession." Reichmann continued to visit the university dental clinic every morning and for about six years, was the only dentist to do so. He went on to become editor of the Bulletin and president of the ODA in 1953. However, there was still no state dental college.

The Board of Dental Examiners recognized early on that their work would be much easier if the board could work directly with an Oklahoma college to develop curriculum and educational standards. On at least one occasion, the board asked the Oklahoma Legislature to establish a dental school in Oklahoma. Dr. Reichmann and Dr. Charles Kochakian established a research fellowship program for dentistry.

Finally, in early 1968, the Board of Regents gave its approval for dental education in Oklahoma. Dental Association leaders recognized the difficulty of attracting the best students to the profession when there was no state dental college. The Board of Regents, 1985-86, Dr. WR Haught, Tulsa, president.

"With dedicated leadership, a growing membership and the excellent ODA staff, we can maintain but improve the oral health of all Oklahomans." Dr. Haught.
April, 1941
— The theme of the ODA annual meeting is “National Preparedness and Oklahoma Dentistry’s Part.” The keynote speaker is Brigadier General Leigh Fairbank, commander of the US Army Dental Corps.

July, 1941
— Dr. OW Boyer, editor of the ODA Bulletin, announces he’s been drafted and must resign his post.

approval and $50,000 was allocated for initial planning and selection of a dean. Later that year, a dean search committee was appointed. In December of 1968, a $99 million bond issue was passed and, in early 1969, Dr. William Brown, director of the graduate dental program for the WW Kellogg Foundation in Michigan, was named dean.

Following his 1987 retirement, Dr. Brown returned to Michigan. In 2001, he wrote of his experience establishing the OU School of Dentistry:

“When I arrived in Oklahoma, I was struck by just how much needed to be done. There was no program for dentists, no program for dental hygienists, and no program for dental assistants anywhere in the state. My office consisted of a single desk and a chair near the Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City.”

The first dental students entered in September of 1972, attending classes in the Medical Center Basic Science Building until a permanent structure was completed three years later.

In a welcoming address to the first class, ODA President Dr. Paul Plowman recalled early discussions of the dental school proposal:

“I recall driving to a state dental convention in Tulsa in 1955 so I could vote on the endorsement by the association of the proposal for a new dental school. The hall was reverberating with lively debate and grave pronouncements of the multitude of starving dentists following establishment of a dental school. Dr. Francis Reichmann was defending the proposition. A tall man of Prussian daring and forceful personality, Dr. Reichmann was also known as the General. Before the evening ended, the General accepted an invitation to meet one quarrelsome character outside for a physical challenge. It was like a Wild West movie with everything but guns and horses.”

In early 1987, controversy erupted again when a group of Oklahoma dentists initiated a proposal with the governor’s office to close the school of dentistry and use the money for other activities at the OU Health Sciences Center. ‘Town vs. Gown’ debates have occurred in many other states for the same reasons the disagreement occurred here.

An editorial in the ODA Journal advised dental school officials to reduce class size and get in touch with the concerns of practicing dentists.

“The astonishment of school administrators and faculty when the proposal was read by Governor Bellmon is a key to the gap between the school and the dental community,” stated the editorial.

In April, the ODA Board voted unanimously in support of the dental college. However, ODA leaders were determined to find out why practicing dentists were disenchanted with the OU School of Dentistry. Dentists around the state were polled via the ODA’s newsletter and, according to then-executive director Bob Berry, “cards came flooding in, and they all said the same thing.”

In December of 1987, Dean William Brown retired and Dr. Russell Stratton was named as his successor.

“One of the first acts by the new dean was to mandate ODA membership among the faculty at the school of dentistry,” recalls Berry.
Advocates for Dental Health

Dr. WR Haught of Tulsa, ODA president in 1985-86, says one of the ODA’s most significant accomplishments during the past century is “improving the oral health of Oklahoma’s citizens through education and prevention.”

“Providing dental care to the underserved in Oklahoma is a real accomplishment,” echoes Dr. WL Beasley of Oklahoma City, ODA president in 2004-05. “I hope in the future we can greatly expand this care to all Oklahomans.”

The long-standing tradition of concern for public health and education began with the founding of the ODA and continued into the second half of the century with the creation of the Oklahoma Dental Foundation.

One of the very first issues of the ODA Bulletin in 1911 contained a notice that Bartlesville dentists were doing “illustrated lectures on oral hygiene” in public schools. Dr. Charles Hess of Idabel, an early leader in preventive dental care for children, examined 227 children in local schools in 1912.

That same year, the ODA launched a campaign for “dental inspections” of all Oklahoma school children. The ODA Oral Hygiene Committee was created and, in 1913, sponsored a contest with a $50 prize for the child who wrote the best essay on care of the teeth.

As the ODA’s oral hygiene movement gained momentum, dentists across the state worked closely with local service clubs, county health departments and local PTA groups to provide care to poor children and educate parents on the importance of proper diet and preventive dental care.

The push toward oral hygiene suffered a setback in the 1930s when the Great Depression hit Oklahoma with a cruel vengeance. Fifteen percent of Oklahoma’s people immigrated west, and many who remained were homeless and starving. Oklahoma doctors examining school children in the Panhandle found rickets, pellagra and other diseases directly linked to poverty, and Oklahoma dentists made similar observations about the children’s dental health. In 1933, as part of a nationwide survey, Oklahoma dentists examined 18,677 children and found diseased teeth and mouths caused by severe nutritional deficiencies.

In the post-Depression era, Oklahoma dentists tried hard to refocus the public’s attention on preventive dental care for children and adults. In 1943, the Bulletin quoted a national study that found 70 percent of Americans did not regularly clean their teeth and were in dire need of “education to the use of the toothbrush.”

In 1944, the Bulletin editor wrote a column about a typical boy he called Donny, whose parents brought him to have permanent teeth extracted because he had not received timely dental care.

March, 1942
— Lieutenant Harry Buford McInnis, a 29-year-old dentist from Enid, is in a Japanese POW camp.

April, 1942
— ADA President Dr. Oren Oliver attends the ODA annual meeting in Tulsa, the first time an ADA president comes to Oklahoma.

Oct, 1942
— The ODA officially endorses the SW Dental Congress but withdraws from participation in out-of-state meetings due to gas rationing and a shortage of tires.

ODA Executive Secretaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1947 - 1948</td>
<td>Richard Tunnicliff</td>
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<td>1948 - 1952</td>
<td>H. Leon Snow</td>
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<td>1952 - 1956</td>
<td>Bill Howard</td>
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<td>1956 – 1968</td>
<td>Bert Castleberry</td>
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<td>1969 – 2003</td>
<td>Bob Berry</td>
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<td>2003 – present</td>
<td>Dana Davis</td>
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Oct, 1942
— ODA membership tops 500 for the first time, earning the ODA another ADA delegate.

July, 1943
— The age of dentists eligible for military commissions is raised from 39 to 42. Ten percent of America's 75,000 dentists are serving in the military.

Oct, 1944
— In an article in the Arkansas City Tribune, Dr. Earl Ammons, a hometown boy now practicing in Tulsa, says he solves the problem of halitosis by squirting oil of cloves in the patient's mouth. In dire cases, he reveals, he employs the “deep sea diver's method” of holding his breath until he reaches over to get an instrument.

“Bad teeth are killing children in your community every year,” said Dr. Eugene Wise. “It is a slower process than a circus fire, but in the end, just as potent.”

In a 1948 Bulletin, Dr. Frank Bertram of the Oklahoma State Health Department discussed the need for fluoride for control of dental caries and advised all Oklahoma dentists to treat children beginning at age three. A “topical fluoride demonstration unit” came to Oklahoma City, and 10,000 children were treated.

The water systems of Tulsa and Oklahoma City were fluoridated in 1955. According to Buckboards and Parlors to Bungalows and Towers, Tulsa dentists initiated a groundbreaking survey of school age children to establish a baseline for assessing the impact of water fluoridation. The 24-year follow-up report in 1979 showed that fluoridation had sharply reduced dental caries in children.

Meanwhile, the ODA's Dental Health Division expanded its education program and began establishing dental clinics for the indigent in several communities.

Public health initiatives played an important role when the ODA celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1957. The association sponsored a Smile of the Year contest, and member dentists examined the teeth of 50,000 school children. The event received coverage in national publications including Life Magazine.

By 1960, the Smile of the Year contest was expanded. The Journal reported that a large crowd attended the Smile Coronation Banquet and the crowning of “dental royalty for 1960” by guest host Will Rogers, Jr. Winners received a $250 scholarship from the Oklahoma Dental Foundation.

Since its creation in 1959, the Oklahoma Dental Foundation has played a vital role in dental education and public health. In 1966, the ODF produced its first dental health guide to be distributed in Oklahoma schools. The generous support of ODA members has enabled the ODF to be involved in this and other projects including dental health workshops at colleges, dental health services for senior citizens, state dental exhibits and underwriting of student loans for deserving dental and hygiene students.

Establishment of the OU College of Dentistry in 1972 added another dimension to dental public health in Oklahoma. With assistance from ODA member dentists, the school's division of community dentistry has implemented service programs for special groups such as the elderly, American Indians, other minorities and the indigent. It has also been involved in efforts to recruit young dentists to practice in underserved areas of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma dentists continue to participate in a number of activities sponsored by ODA for “Give Kids a Smile Day” during Children's Dental Health Month each February. Dentists conduct brushing and flossing demonstrations for school and community groups and provide free dental services to hundreds of low-income children.

Drs. Stephen McCullough and David Deason screen Yukon 1st graders as part of Children's Dental Health Month and Give Kids a Smile!
The Game of Politics

In an editorial in a 1913 ODA Bulletin, Dr. CA Lawrence decried his perception that “knowledge of the game of politics” was the main requirement for an appointment to the Board of Dental Examiners.

Dr. Lawrence’s obvious distaste for politics has been echoed by many professionals through the years. No one goes to dental, medical or pharmacy school with the idea of getting involved in political issues — in fact, quite the opposite. People traditionally choose these professions because they have a passion for patient care and are more than happy to leave politics to politicians.

By the 1960s, this attitude had begun to change. In 1966, the ODA followed the lead of dental societies in other states and began sending a delegation of dental leaders to Washington, DC each year “to develop a close understanding” with Oklahoma’s congressmen. Formation of a political action committee was the next logical step.

Bob Berry, who retired in 2003 after 34 years as ODA executive director, says creating a PAC was one of the first things on his agenda when he was hired in 1969.

“It was debated in the House of Delegates and there was lots of opposition,” Berry recalls. “One dentist stood up and said ‘If we are honest and do good work, the politics will take care of itself.’ Some dentists truly believed it was unethical to get involved in politics.”

Despite this, the idea was approved and DenPac was born. The timing was fortunate considering the coming decade would see culmination of a long-standing battle with an extremely adaptable opponent. The ODA was about to face a modern reality — practicing quality dentistry isn’t enough to protect patients.

During the past 20 years, advances in preventive dentistry have caused a significant attitude shift. With assistance from dentists, people now enjoy a lifetime attachment to their teeth. Someone recently suggested that dentures will eventually become a historical curiosity and that a set of dentures should be placed in a time capsule. Not that long ago, people were resigned to losing their teeth. People in their 50s, 60s and 70s — some younger — had all their teeth pulled and replaced with dentures. Denturists did a brisk business in Oklahoma and other states.

Since the beginning, it has been illegal in Oklahoma to practice dentistry without a license; and this included making and selling dentures without the involvement of a dentist. Much to the consternation of dentists, denturists circumvented the law and lured unsuspecting customers with promises of quality dentures at half the cost.

In Oklahoma, denturists had a booth at the 1976 legislature. Denturists took their case directly to the public. In the fall of 1976, denturists had a booth at the Oklahoma State Fair. The booth had a large sign that read, “A local dentist charged $1,000 for this set of dentures. We do it for $350.” People stopping at the booth were asked to sign a petition that denturists planned to present to the Oklahoma Legislature.

In a 1979 ODA Journal, editor Earl Mabry reported that a truck carrying a large billboard was parked in front of ODA headquarters. The billboard said, “Dentists are ripping off the public.” Denturists also paraded up and down the sidewalk in front of dentists’ offices carrying signs. According to Dr. Mabry, dental patients who were union members called union officials to ask if this constituted a picket line they shouldn’t cross.
The ODA’s most important accomplishment is improving our standing in the legislature and increasing awareness among dentists that we can be legislated in or out of business.

Dr. RL Bartheld, McAlester, ODA president 1979-80

the house JD McCarty. At that time was former speaker of the most effective lobbyist in Oklahoma According to Dr. Barnes, the members were to defeat this effort, “My marching orders from ODA say Dr. Barnes. Denturists continued to be a problem on Indian lands, but other issues soon came to the forefront of the ODA agenda. The dental hygienists wanted to be independent practitioners with a separate board,” says Berry. “This was difficult, and it was a family fight.” Professional associations will always face difficult issues, but the ODA now had the infrastructure and leaders in place to meet the challenges ahead. Rather than simply reacting to a crisis, the ODA became involved in key issues in a positive way, building long-term credibility with lawmakers. ODA leaders and members began educating legislators and actively campaigning for legislators who understood dentistry’s concern for quality care.

“We had just returned from a sentence in the penitentiary because he took the rap for politicians still active in the legislature, over issues unknown to me,” recalls Dr. Barnes.

Dr. Barnes and Bob Berry determined that McCarty was the politically shrewd choice and retained him to lobby for ODA. The denturist bill languished and died in committee. Dr. Barnes recalls that some ODA members did not approve of this particular lobbyist but that “everyone was happy with the results.”

Later, denturists tried another tactic. They sued the ODA in district and federal courts on antitrust violations, but lost both suits. “After that, they were less active. I think the lawsuits depleted their funds,” says Berry.

Dr. Gardner was right. A special dues assessment of $200 was approved by the ODA House of Delegates “to combat the illegal practice of dentistry.” On the public relations front, the ODA and the Tulsa County Dental Society began sponsoring low-cost denture care for low-income elderly patients.

The Oklahoma Denturist Association was founded in Shawnee the same day Dr. HW Barnes of Ardmore was sworn in as 1977-78 ODA president. The denturists had already acquired house and senate sponsors for legislation to recognize denturism as a profession.

“My marching orders from ODA members were to defeat this effort,” says Dr. Barnes.

According to Dr. Barnes, the most effective lobbyist in Oklahoma at that time was former speaker of the house JD McCarty.

Dr. JT Torchia, Tulsa, ODA president in 1988, looks back to a time when the dental profession did not always speak with one voice in the face of divisive issues.

“I was afraid organized dentistry appeared to be fragmented and weak,” he says. “Through my presidency, I had one thought — if we could stick together, we could weather these storms and prevail.”

Outsiders took note of the transition being made by the ODA. An editorial in the Tulsa World said, “In Oklahoma, the dental profession has emerged into a sensitive and articulate participant in the topsy-turvy world of politics.”
June 1, 1947
— Richard Tunnicliff is hired as the ODA’s first full time executive secretary.

Oct, 1948
— For the first time, a clinical article in the ODA Bulletin discusses smoking as a cause of mouth cancer.

Jan, 1949
— The ODA formally resigns from the National Committee of Dentists because of their favorable position on compulsory national health insurance.

July, 1957
— The ODA holds its Golden Jubilee celebration commemorating 50 years of dentistry in Oklahoma. The theme of the celebration is “From Teepees to Towers.”

Aug, 1959
— The Oklahoma Dental Foundation is created for the purpose of dental education and research.

Oct, 1960
— The Bulletin publishes a column advising what to do if a nuclear bomb is dropped on your town, commenting “If you can stay in your home and protected for 30 days after the attack, you have survived.”

“In years past a man of fifty was considered a person up in years, one in retrograde losing more than just his hair, push, drive, along with other things we will term vitality. We no longer believe this is necessarily true of mankind. We know that it is not true with our organization. We feel that in this year, our 50th year, our association is hail and hearty, and I am sure that our incoming president, Dr. L.A. Lucas, will start the next 50 years with drive and vigor.”

— from ODA President, Dr. V.C. Tisdal, Jr.’s address during ODA’s semi-centennial state meeting. The theme was “Tepees to Towers in 50 Years”.

PAST PRESIDENTS’ BREAKFAST

Past ODA presidents posed on April 13, 1948 at the ODA annual meeting in Tulsa. Pictured are: (front row, from the right) AL Walters, RS Parsons, WE Flesher, TH Williams, AB Walker, CA Ruhlen, AF Seibert, WT Jacobs, TW Sorrels and CA Furrow. Second row, from the right: WJ Scruton, Roy Ellis, CAD Beer, EE Overmeyer, JA Wells, CB Ball, AB Rivers, Francis Reichmann. Third row, from the right: Harry Sorrels, Scott Bowyer, GA Roelke, CA Hess, JB Ratliff, HO Warrick and Max Armstrong. Dr. Overmeyer died not long after the photo was taken.

Dr. BL Shobe, Tulsa, originated the idea of post-graduate lectures at dental association meetings. The idea, known nationally as the “Oklahoma Way,” earned Dr. Shobe a spot on the American Dental Association list of the most influential American dentists of 1900-1950.

“...In years past a man of fifty was considered a person up in years, one in retrograde losing more than just his hair, push, drive, along with other things we will term vitality. We no longer believe this is necessarily true of mankind. We know that it is not true with our organization. We feel that in this year, our 50th year, our association is hail and hearty, and I am sure that our incoming president, Dr. L.A. Lucas, will start the next 50 years with drive and vigor.”

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The Bulletin publishes a column advising what to do if a nuclear bomb is dropped on your town, commenting “If you can stay in your home and protected for 30 days after the attack, you have survived.”

“It’s the way we do it in Oklahoma.”

— Dr. BL Shobe, Jr.
The Oklahoma Denturist Association was organized in Shawnee at the Holiday Inn on the same day I was sworn in as ODA president.

Dr. HW Barnes, Ardmore, ODA president 1977-78

Jan, 1949
— Oklahoma dentists pledge $250,000 to the new Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. Dr. Fred Pitney is chair of the ODA fundraising committee.

Jan, 1950
— American candy makers are upset when the ADA produces “phonograph records” by Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and others warning against candy and soft drinks.

Jan, 1966
— Dr. Robert Taylor, an Okmulgee dentist, is the first African American to be chair of the Oklahoma Parole Board.

Sept, 1950
—The ODA Bulletin reports that the average cost of a dental education is $3,429.

Apr, 1965
— The ODA House of Delegates approves an expenditure of $8,200 for redecorating the association’s new central office at 222 Plaza Court Building in Oklahoma City.

April, 1969
— Dr. William Brown, associate director of the graduate dental program for the WK Kellogg Foundation in Michigan, is named the first dean of the OU College of Dentistry.
The Inevitability of Change

What would Oklahoma's early pioneer dentists say if they could be transported forward in time to the dental office of 2007? It's easy to imagine their excitement and astonishment at the clinical advances that have taken place in the last century and the amazing tools and techniques available to their colleagues today.

However, those early pioneers would probably feel bewildered at the momentous transformation in the way dentists practice. From managed care and marketing to warp-speed office computers, today's dental practice bears little resemblance to the practices of 100 years ago.

Two significant trends have emerged during the past century, and both have been made possible by advances in equipment, techniques and anesthesia. Both trends represent cultural shifts in what the public expects from the dental profession.

The first revolution began in earnest in the years following World War II when dentists began educating people about the value of prevention. According to the ADA, the average 60-year-old American in 1940 had only two of his original 32 teeth. Thanks to the efforts of organized dentistry across the country, that was about to change.

In the April, 1944 issue of the ODA Bulletin, the editor observed that, while people traditionally came to a dentist to have teeth filled or pulled when the pain became unbearable, they were beginning to get “prosthetic appliances and have small cavities filled.” This is one of the first mentions in the Bulletin of the subtle shift to preventive dentistry.

During the post-war years, clinical articles in the ODA Bulletin dealt with controversies caused by advances such as “pulpless” teeth and root canals. In a letter to the editor published in the July, 1960 ODA Journal, Dr. James Russell discussed “the old fight concerning inlays or alloys.”

“The fact that one patient gets gold and another silver is not a moral issue. It's a financial issue,” he wrote. Dr. Russell went on to conclude that gold was superior since “most dentists use gold in their own mouths.”

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Oklahoma dentists worked hard to convince people dental care is an important part of overall health maintenance. The attitude shift took place slowly, much to the consternation of the dental community. In a January, 1969 Journal column, a “Dr. Bucholic Bucca” noted cryptically that at the OU-Missouri football game that fall “four of the five people sitting in front of me had missing incisor teeth — unrestored.”

In 1975, the ODA surveyed attitudes of Oklahomans toward dentistry and got discouraging results. Over half of those surveyed said dental care is a luxury rather than a necessity.

However, in the ensuing years the evolution toward prevention was complete and another revolution began. A century ago, people wanted teeth that didn't hurt. Next, they wanted teeth that would serve them well throughout their entire lifetime. In the 21st century, people want teeth that look good, and the field of esthetic dentistry has exploded.

Today, younger people prefer implants to false teeth. A 1997 survey of Oklahoma dentists showed 40 percent were involved in some aspect of implantology. A menu of designer aesthetics and a myriad of new techniques and materials allow dentists to transform imperfect teeth into a smile worthy of Hollywood. It's certain even more cosmetic options will be available in the future.

The past 30 years have also seen big changes in the economic aspects of a dental practice. In today's world of hyper-vigilant antitrust enforcers, it's difficult to imagine that in the early 1940s, dentists in Ardmore met every two weeks to compile update and circulate a list of non-paying patients who were seeking care from multiple dentists.

Since the early 1970s when the ODA formed a corporation through which Oklahoma's Delta Dental plan could be implemented, dentists have seen continuous change in how they're paid for their services. The advent of HMOs, capitation and other alternatives to fee-for-service dentistry has presented a real challenge for dentists who refuse to allow cost-cutting to affect the quality of care they provide. The ODA Journal has repeatedly decried the fact that managed care plans are created with scant input from dentists. Dentists have joined the growing number
The most important accomplishments of the ODA are providing information to the membership and helping us maintain good relationships with our patients. — Dr. DK Keeter, Frederick, ODA president 1992-93

Clearly, not all the socio-economic changes have been positive for dentists. A 1995 issue of the ODA Journal contained an article about a new phenomenon in dentistry — professional burnout. Underlying factors discussed in the article include disputes with third party payors, lingering school debt, the costs of establishing and maintaining a dental practice and feelings of diminished status and professional isolation.

In the late 1960s, articles in the ODA Journal noted the advent of group practice and the trend toward team dentistry. In July of 1969, ODA president Dr. CM Kouri said, “group practice and the utilization of auxiliary personnel seem to be a natural development in dentistry’s quest to serve the population more efficiently.” In 1974, Dr. Thomas Bomberg, associate professor with the OUCOD, accurately predicted team dentistry would usher in a new era in dentistry.

Finally, there has also been a significant change in the way dentists get and keep patients. In 1973, Journal editor Dr. Earl Mabry discussed the fact that public relations firms were being retained to represent the profession, a trend that did not have his approval.

“How is there no television program ‘Marcus Welby, DDS’?” he asked. “Dentistry is a proud profession. Its image is good. There is one great public relations man who can do far more for our image than any other. He stands before you, in the mirror.”

In 1982, as the ODA celebrated its 75th anniversary, the Supreme Court removed the final legal barriers to advertising by professionals. Some ODA members reacted negatively, harkening back to the early days when ODA member dentists fought to keep unscrupulous “Painless Parker” charlatans from making false claims about their abilities. In a January, 1985 Journal column, a retired dentist said he felt shame when he saw dentists’ ads in the yellow pages.

Today’s dentist understands that Dr. Mabry was correct in 1973 when he said the best public relations program is practicing quality dentistry. But today’s dentist also knows that effective marketing is essential to the success of the 21st century dental practice.

ODA member, Dr. James Saddoris, and wife, Wanda, at the ADA President’s Dinner/Dance honoring him as the incoming ADA President, October 1988, in Las Vegas.

Winter, 1982
— Members of the Oklahoma Dental Association Auxiliary raise $50,000 for a new dental exhibit at the Omniplex in Oklahoma City.

Fall, 1985
— Dr. Geraldine Morrow of Alaska is the first woman dentist elected to the ADA Board of Trustees.

Summer, 1986
— Dr. Mary Martin is president of a newly created group, the Oklahoma Association of Women Dentists.

Sept, 1972
— The OU School of Dentistry admits its first class of 24 students. The students will attend classes in the medical center’s basic science building until permanent structures can be completed.

Jan, 1977
— Will Rogers, Jr. narrates four dental health television commercials produced by the ODA.

April, 1982
— The ODA celebrates its 75th anniversary.

Sept, 1972
— The OU School of Dentistry admits its first class of 24 students. The students will attend classes in the medical center’s basic science building until permanent structures can be completed.
The Future is Bright

Dana Davis, ODA executive director for the past five years, says the ODA’s longevity is due to strong leadership and professional unity.

“The ADA Tripartite Membership requirement has held dentistry together,” she comments. “ODA has had tremendous and dedicated leaders. I also credit the dedication of the staff. They provide backbone, expertise and infrastructure that makes the association function efficiently.”

ODA past presidents say a number of accomplishments have contributed to ODA’s long-term success.

“We have kept our profession together as a whole,” says Dr. RA Cohlmia.

“ODA has a stable, growing membership that promotes professional practice by example,” says Dr. JH Patton.

“Because of the vision of those before us, we have developed a great professional organization with over 90 percent of dentists in Oklahoma participating,” says Dr. AC Keenan.

Dr. Pamela Low, Tulsa, 100th ODA president, is not at all surprised that ODA has remained vital and relevant for a century.

“The ODA can attribute its longevity and success to the dedicated leaders we have had. In addition to those who have unselfishly served their components and the state organization for many years, we have had dentists who have served at the national level,” says Dr. Low. “We have had two national presidents and members who have served on national councils. This service has given us additional knowledge, experience and insights.”

Dana Davis believes the ODA will face a number of challenges in the future. Some of these challenges have been around since the beginning; others are new. These issues include the income discrepancy between academic dentistry and private practice, the increase in the number of uninsured people, access to care in rural Oklahoma, and the escalating cost of care.

“Getting care to those who need it but can’t afford it will present a growing challenge in the future,” says Davis.

“The ODA is addressing the access problem through the Dental Loan Repayment Program in the State Department of Health. This program provides incentives for new dentists to establish practices in underserved areas, mostly in rural Oklahoma,” she explains. “The ODA has also helped the Oklahoma Dental Foundation establish the Mobile Dental Care program by getting $100,000 per year from the legislature and providing volunteer dentists to provide treatment.”

The brave new world of technology presents organizational challenges for the ODA staff.

“One of the biggest challenges from a staff member’s point of view is being able to serve several generations of members, from the high tech generation to the generation that doesn’t have a computer or an email address. ODA needs to meet the needs of all the members. The day will come when we don’t produce a paper Journal or membership directory, but in the interim, all forms of media must be used,” Davis explains.

Davis and past presidents are confident the ODA will meet future challenges in a way that ensures the association’s continuing success.
Lauren Nelson, Miss America 2007, poses for a picture after singing “Happy Birthday” to the ODA at the Centennial Annual Meeting, April 2007.

1988
— Dr. Jim Saddoris, Tulsa, is elected president of the ADA. He is the first Oklahoma dentist to serve as national president.

Fall 1995
— The ODA Journal contains articles on lessons learned about forensic dentistry in the wake of the April 19, 1995 terrorist bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Twenty-six percent of the 168 victims were identified solely by dental records.

1995
— The ODA Journal editor says women now constitute one-third of those admitted to the OU College of Dentistry.

1998
— Over 1,000 dentists attending the spring ADA meeting take AIDS tests with no positive results.

1998
— Dr. Jim Saddoris, Tulsa, is elected president of the ADA. He is the first Oklahoma dentist to serve as national president.

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2004
— Dr. Richard Haught, Tulsa, is president of the ADA, becoming Oklahoma’s second national president.

April, 2006
— Dr. Pamela Low, Tulsa, begins her term as the first woman president of the ODA.

Unveiling of the donated Pierre Fauchard statue at the ODA building in April 2007.

Lauren Nelson, Miss America 2007, poses for a picture after singing “Happy Birthday” to the ODA at the Centennial Annual Meeting, April 2007.

Congresswoman Mary Fallin and ODA President Dr. Pamela Low toast to ODAs 100th year during the 2007 Centennial Gala.