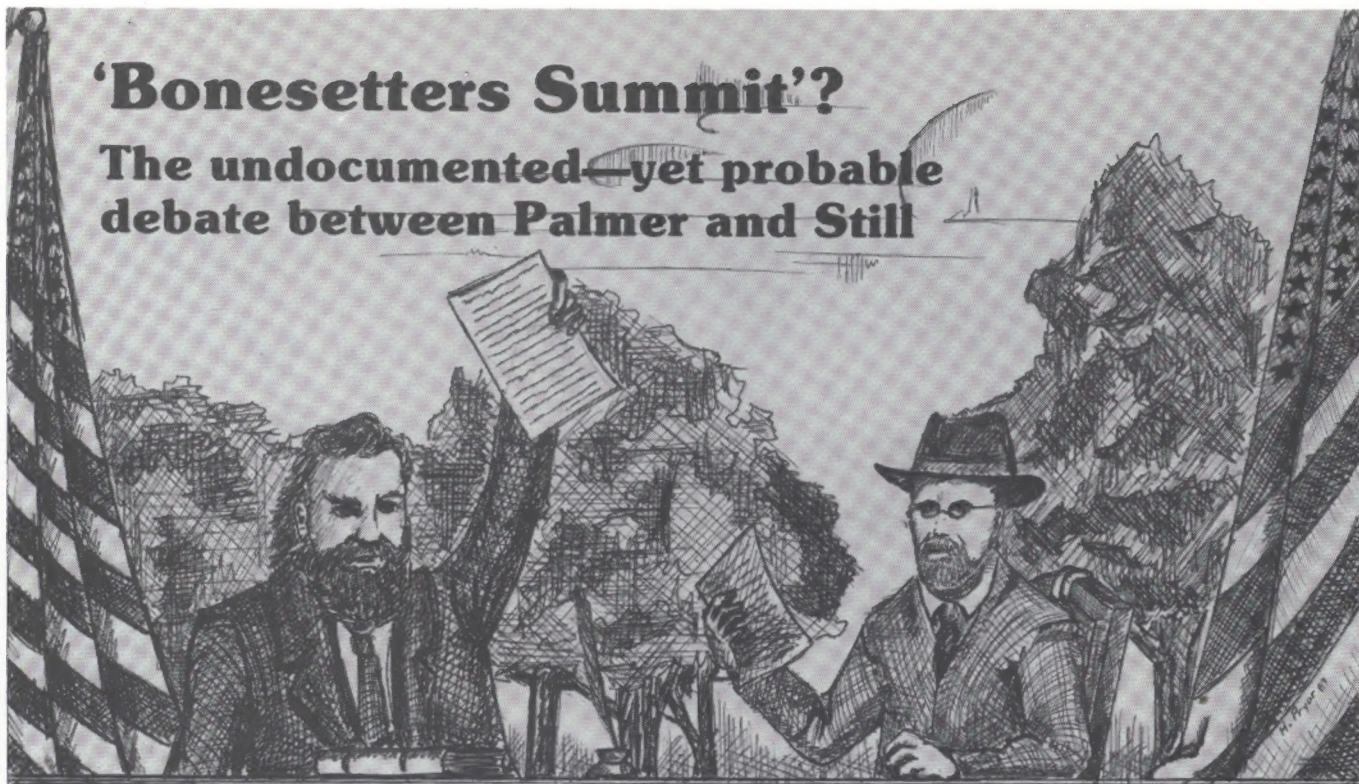


# 'Bonesetters Summit'?

## The undocumented—yet probable debate between Palmer and Still



ORIGINAL DRAWING BY HAROLD E. PRYOR

Did D. D. Palmer “steal” his theories from the newly-formulated dissenting school of osteopathy in the late 19th century? Once a burning controversy, it has all but been forgotten by contemporary practitioners of both alternative practices today.

More to the point are the intriguing questions of the possible interlocking of the movements—and possibly the ideas—of the two contemporary founders, Andrew Taylor Still (1828-1917) and Daniel David Palmer, (1845-1913). The similarities of both dissenters were remarkable. Both were born in log cabins and were products of the post-Civil War frontier experience. Both entered practice as healers through irregular routes, Still as a medical orderly and Palmer as a magnetic practitioner. Their environment was in the states west of the Mississippi, in Kansas, Missouri and Iowa.

Both Still and Palmer were influenced greatly by the spiritualist movement of their day and attended meetings of the Mississippi Valley Spiritualists. The proximity of Kirksville, Mo. to Davenport suggests that the senior Palmer made the journey on several occasions. Still had “unfurled the banner of osteopathy” in Kirksville in 1874, over a decade before D. D. began his practice as a magnetic in Burlington, Iowa.

Charles Still, a son of the founder of osteopathy, said that Palmer had even been a guest in Still's home. Several Missouri chiropractors who visited the original Still homestead on the campus of what is now the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine had reported seeing D. D.'s name in the guest book in the early 1890s. The younger Still also wrote that an osteopath by the name of Obie Stother had passed on the manipulative techniques of the man who became known

to early osteopaths as “the Old Doctor” to Palmer, who soon called himself “Old Dad Chiro.” This assertion was in Booth's *History of Osteopathy* (1924).

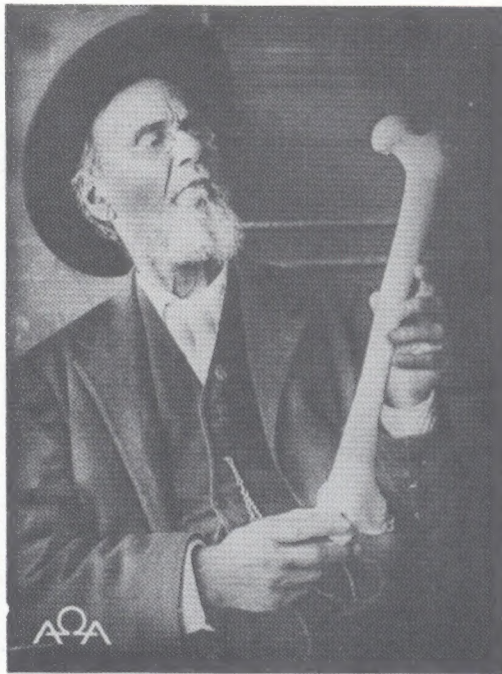
Yet undocumented, however, is the reference to the so-called “Bonesetter's Summit” at Clinton which supposedly took place in 1906 at a meeting on the Spiritualist campgrounds. In his 1950 book *Fight to Climb*, B. J. Palmer recalled “vividly the occasion on Sunday at Clinton” when his father and Dr. Still “got into a heated argument . . . and they created quite a crowd” (page 57). Like so many of the Palmer writings, however, the precise date and even year are not mentioned, though 1906, the year of D. D.'s conviction and imprisonment for practicing medicine, is mentioned elsewhere. Charles Still's biography makes reference to a Still-Palmer meeting in Kirksville, but not a debate in Clinton.

The following account by Dr. L. Ted Frigard, a Palmer graduate, now practicing in Beverly Hills, Calif., is offered as B. J.'s version of “the debate.” Again, there is no date, and the implication is that there was not a formal setting, yet B. J. is quoted as saying that “our job was to distribute copies of *The Chiropractor* to everyone in the crowd and then we would listen to the debate.” This *does* suggest the formality of a prior arrangement, of a scheduled debate or discussion.

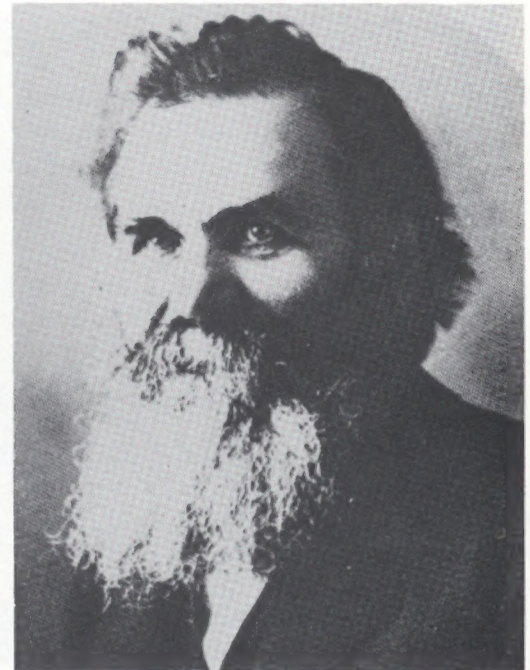
The account by Dr. Frigard on pages 6-7 is offered as an extension of the B. J. Palmer style, of an event of historic significance in the twilight years of the profession, but with the caution that there are no known third-party accounts or confirmations. It remains as one of the events of early chiropractic that no doubt took place, but without the documentation acceptable to historians.

## Clinton, Iowa c. 1906(?) 'The Old Doctor' vs. 'Old Dad Chiro'

L. TED  
FRIGARD, D.C.



STILL (about 1910)



PALMER (about 1905)

Dr. B. J. Palmer had finished his lecture and was smoking a cigar as he relaxed in a large leather chair. I approached him to autograph my copy of his latest book, *Fame and Fortune*. He was my first hero, at a time when I desperately needed a hero. I studied the impressive face of the man who was destined for history, as he scrawled "B. J. — Baltimore — 4/17/55" on the inside first page and then handed it back to me.

It was with trepidation that I asked, "B.J., is it true that Dr. D. D. Palmer stole chiropractic from Dr. A. T. Still, the founder of osteopathy?"

B.J.'s eyes flashed with anger, "Dr. Still must not have been short of cash, because he never collected the ten thousand dollars that my father offered if he could prove it!" Then he looked kindly at me and smiled, "Sit down, son. You are the future of chiropractic, perhaps you should know more about its past."

I sat down as B.J. laid his cigar aside. "Father often attended the annual Mississippi Valley Spiritualists Camp Meeting at Clinton, Iowa," began B.J. "That is where he first received messages from Dr. Jim Atkinson on the principles of chiropractic. We attended some of the meetings at Spiritualist Camp with father. We can recall vividly, even now, the heated argument between Dr. Andrew T. Still and Dr. D. D. Palmer on the merits of chiropractic and osteopathy. Dr. Andrew Still argued the rule of the artery was supreme and my father took the position that nerve impulses are the primal mover of all function. Both men were well known characters and they attracted a large crowd, which gathered around them on the lawn.

"Andrew Taylor Still was a medical doctor in the Civil War and then he developed the principles of osteopathy. He was a tall, big-boned, rough-hewn man. A strong-willed, rugged individualist. His grey beard was cropped about four inches from his chin. He was an imposing man. Our job was to

distribute copies of *The Chiropractor* to everyone in the crowd and then we would listen to the debate."

Then B.J. took a puff on his cigar and proceeded to tell me the story of the epic debate between Dr. A. T. Still and Dr. D. D. Palmer.

"You're a thief!" shouted an angry Dr. Still, as Dr. D. D. Palmer approached him. "You stole my work and labeled it chiropractic!"

"How could I steal that which you never owned!" answered D. D. Palmer.

"I founded osteopathy in 1874," said Still. "It is based on the manipulation of the bones of the spine to allow the blood to flow smoothly and without interruption."

"I founded chiropractic in 1895," replied Palmer. "It is based on the fundamental of the specific adjustment of the subluxated bones of the spine to free impinged nerves and allow nerve impulses to flow to the body without interruption."

"I am a physician!" shouted Dr. Still. "I am not a physician!" bellowed Dr. Palmer.

"I was a medical doctor long before I founded osteopathy," retaliated Still. "About thirty years ago I began to realize the power of nature to cure after a skillful manipulation of conditions to allow pure and healthy blood to flow into the diseased area. With this faith and by this method of reasoning, I began to treat diseases by osteopathic means and obtained good results."

"I was not a medical doctor before I founded chiropractic," answered D. D. Palmer. "Therefore my mind was not burdened with medical theories to conflict with the pureness of the chiropractic principle. Chiropractic had no previous theories to wrestle with. It deals with the life force which flows over the nervous system. This power flows from the brain over the nerves as an impulse. This is the primary source of life and health."

"I hesitated years before proclaiming my new discovery," boomed Dr. Still. "I finally took my stand on this rock upon which the science of osteopathy was built, where I have stood and fought mighty battles!"

"Perhaps you waited because your education was medical and it is difficult to get away from those ideas which were thoroughly instilled in your mind," countered D. D. Palmer. "The circulation of blood is simply a channel by means of which food in liquid form is carried to all tissues. Blood is secondary and under the control of the nervous system."

"The source of energy within the body is a dark red fluid called blood," answered Still. "Pure blood is essential to good health. A disturbed artery marks the moment when disease begins to sow its seeds of destruction in the human body."

"The source of energy is the vital force which flows over the nervous system," countermanded Palmer. "Nerves control all function including the musculature of the arterial walls which controls the force and flow of blood by contracting and relaxing. The moment disease starts in the human body is when the vertebra slips into a position of misalignment called subluxation. This narrows the opening between the vertebrae and impinges the nerve causing its expression to become abnormal resulting in disease. The body is controlled by nerves, not blood!"

"The rule of the artery is absolute!" shouted Dr. Still. "The nerve system is supreme!" roared Dr. Palmer.

"I discovered that health is the result of free and uninterrupted flow of blood through the arteries and veins. Disease results from the obstruction to the free flow of blood," explained Still. "An osteopathic manipulation releases adhesions of the muscles and joints which permits normal blood flow to the diseased area resulting in health. As a means of relieving human suffering, allopathy, homeopathy and now osteopathy has each improved upon its predecessor."

"If you combine osteopathy with other therapeutical methods, the world will believe that osteopathy is insufficient," retorted Palmer. "What of your practitioners? They are not satisfied with osteopathy, so they combine it with drugs and surgery. In the future, without your influence, they will become physicians and surgeons. Eventually, your fundamentals will be lost in the practice of medicine. Doesn't that jar your mother's preserves?"

"Osteopathy is a pure and drugless science," shouted Still. "It will survive as such!"

"It is a drugless science in definition only," countered Palmer. "It is well known you frequently prescribe drugs and perform surgery. Your school in Kirksville has a hospital where surgery is the last osteopathic manipulation!"

"It is true that we use the best therapies of all therapeutical systems," answered Still. "But the practice of osteopathy is pure and drugless!"

"And there is the difference!" exclaimed Palmer. "Chiropractic is not a therapeutical system. It deals exclusively with the cause of disease. It is a separate and distinct science based on giving a spinal adjustment for the cause of disease!"

"What is your position on micro-organisms?" questioned Still. "Germs are the cause of many diseases and healthy blood is the greatest germicide!"

"Germs are scavengers which feed on dead and dying tissue," replied Palmer. "Return the tissue to a state of good health and there is no food for the scavengers!"

"The chiropractor is a limited mechanical manipulator, while the osteopath is an all around physician," challenged Still. "The osteopath treats the body and all its ailments!"

"The chiropractor treats the cause of those ailments!" countered Palmer. "The subluxation of the vertebrae as the cause of disease was an original principle. No other science has even taught it before! From this foundation, step by step, I have evolved the original and distinct science of chiropractic!"

"I maintain that chiropractic is a child of osteopathy!" shouted a belligerent Still.

"Of all the known therapeutic systems, osteopathy is the only one which bears any similarity, because both work on the spine," answered Palmer. "If related, they would be distant cousins!"

"Bull dribble! Chiropractors have usurped part of osteopathy and are faking it shamelessly!" challenged Still.

"The practitioners of massage and Swedish movements have made the same claim about osteopathy," countered Palmer.

"The general osteopathic treatment is far more than a combination of massage and Swedish movements," retorted Still. "It includes rib stretching, modified spinal column stretching and spinal manipulation."

"Why not include chiropractic as well?" questioned Palmer. "The world benefits all the more when osteopathy advances toward chiropractic principles."

"The human race is in need of the benefits of pure osteopathy," replied Still.

"Humanity cries out for pure chiropractic care," said Palmer. "The premise of chiropractic is simple, as all great truths are simple." Dr. D. D. Palmer smiled as he needled Still. "It may be too simple for your complex mind to understand!"

"Osteopathy is only complex when practiced by some, other than the founder," said Still, "because they often dilute it from its original premise!"

"The same can be said about the practice of chiropractic," agreed Palmer. "It is when you drink from the fountainhead of each system that the difference becomes very noticeable."

"If the fundamental principles of chiropractic and osteopathy are different," summed up Still, "time will tell which is correct and will survive."

"Time always has and always will perpetuate those methods which better serve mankind," answered Dr. D. D. Palmer. "Only time will prove which is superior and will survive."

Then B. J. stopped and took a deep puff on his cigar. "After this debate," said Dr. B. J. Palmer, "my father wrote that he was more than pleased to read that our cousins, the osteopaths, are adopting chiropractic methods and advancing along scientific and philosophical lines."

B.J. rose from the chair. "There were giants in those days," he remarked and then this chiropractic giant walked away.

I sat there for a long time. I felt that I had been privileged to hear a great moment in history. Years later, I tried to locate this debate. It was nowhere to be found in written literature. I made me realize that it is not always what happens in history, but more important, what is written about what happened in history, which is important.