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History of the Greater New York Dental Meeting*

LEO E. SHERMAN

Without a past we can have no future. I thought, therefore, it might be of interest to the members of our committee to hear about how this Meeting got its start and how it developed to its present size and reputation.

The original idea came from the Bronx County Dental Society at their meeting in 1919. In the year 1924 Dr. Armin Wald was President of the First District Dental Society. He realized the necessity for an intensive series of postgraduate courses for dentists of that day, and he gathered together a few men of vision and imagination.

The men who formed the first Executive Committee were: Dr. Theodore Blum, Dr. Herman Chayes, Dr. Martin Dewey, Dr. Waldo Mork, Dr. John Peters, Dr. Charles Vetter, Dr. Alfred Walker, Dr. John T. Hanks.

The story of the first few years is not clear, but from personal communications I quote as follows: (1) Dr. Walter Quinn states that "at least on one occasion a meeting was held in the old Grand Central Palace and a later meeting was held at Bryant Hall on Sixth Avenue between 41st Street and 42nd Street." (2) Dr. Jacob Shapiro remembers that "in the beginning the meetings were held also at the Commodore Hotel and there was an admission charge of five dollars." He also believes that "Dr. Armin Wald was the first chairman and Dr. John Peters was its first secretary." (3) Dr. Russel Tench remembers "that under the leadership of Dr. Armin Wald as Chairman of the First District President Dr. Hasbrouck's Executive Committee, the first program of the Better Dentistry Meeting was completed. He sat on this committee as advisor. Dr. Tench also remembers that Dr. James C. Allan, an orthodontist, was an active member. Dr. Allan was an associate of Dr. Tench. (4) Dr. Waldo Mork in his history of the Greater New York December Meeting written in 1943 states that the first meeting in 1924 was conducted at the Hotel Pennsylvania by the First District Dental Society as part of their activities. Small rooms in the hotel were used during the meeting for progressive clinics and the same plan has been repeated at each December meeting since with unvarying satisfaction. The meeting met with enthusiastic response, and it grew to such an extent that the Executive Committee could no longer handle the resultant manifold details of its management.

In 1929 largely through the efforts of Dr. Charles M. McNeeley, the Second District Dental Society was convinced to join the First District as co-sponsor of the meeting. By this consolidation it was believed that the scope of the Meeting would be enlarged and it would provide a greater participation.

* This history was compiled and presented by Dr. Sherman at the pre-meeting dinner, Nov. 30, 1965.

Working together they formed the Organization Committee of the Greater New York December Meeting. This committee does in essence continue to this day and its first General Chairman was Dr. John T. Hanks who held it for three years. In 1932 he was succeeded by Dr. Carrol B. Whitcomb of the Second District who was Chairman for three years.

Miss Edith Davies acted as Executive Secretary serving until 1934 and in 1935 Mrs. Mabel Purdy became the Executive Secretary. As you well know Mrs. Purdy is still serving in this capacity and under her administration all various details of office procedure were developed.

Since the time of Dr. Whitcomb the following men have held the position of General Chairman: Waldo H. Mork, 1935-37; Charles M. McNeeley, 1938-39; Percy T. Phillips, 1940-41; Gustav P. Frahm, 1942-43; Walter A. Quinn, 1944-45; Willard S. Bell, 1946-47; J. Neil Donally, 1948-49; Stanley G. Standard 1950-51; Arthur E. Corby 1952-53; Matthew Besdine, 1954-55; Roland E. Morse 1956-57; Adolph G. Wagner, 1958-59; David Tanchester, 1960-61, Leo E. Sherman, 1962-63; Alfred A. Lanza, 1964-65; George E. Muller, 1966-67.

In 1934 the Centennial of Organized Dentistry was celebrated by a huge meeting of historical significance. The entire story of dentistry from its inception was revealed. Exhibits of priceless value to dentists and the public were assembled and placed on view. This was largely accomplished with the help of Dr. B. W. Weinberger who was recognized as dentistry's historian. It was at this time that the committee first sold space directly to commercial exhibitors and the groundwork was laid for the present format.

In 1937 the name of the meeting was changed to the Greater New York Dental Meeting. It now needed additional personnel to administer its affairs which ran from year to year with ever increasing momentum. The subcommittees were enlarged and the Rules and Regulations were formulated and approved by both Societies and today they are in force and unchanged.

In 1940 when Dr. Percy Phillips was General Chairman, the first Advisory Chairman, Dr. Charles McNeeley, was appointed. Since that time every General Chairman at the completion of his term of office has served as Advisory Chairman. It was a splendid arrangement whereby a General Chairman had an experienced aid when he encountered difficulties. Today a General Chairman is chosen after he has served four years as a Committee Chairman. He is, therefore, familiar with the operation of the meeting from all positions. Without this background it would be an impossible task.

Some spectacular stories have originated at our meeting. In 1953 Dr. Arthur E. Corby decided to present a symposium on the harmful effects of cigarette smoking. He invited Dr. Ernest L. Wynder of Memorial Hospital of New York, Dr. Grace Roth of Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota, Dr. Irving S. Wright, Cornell University Medical School in New York, Dr. Alton Ochsner, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Surgery of Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, Louisiana.

This battery of experts covered the subject of nicotine and its effects on the

cardiovascular system, the lungs, and the clinical aspects of the relationship of smoking to cancer.

I was present at the symposium as I was serving on the Press and Publications Committee. The Penn Top was filled to capacity and the panel was so frank with its report of its investigation that everyone present was stunned. The newspapers covered the symposium in great detail and the next day on the New York Stock Exchange all tobacco stocks dropped sharply. The controversy concerning the cigarette has still not been settled but we stirred up a hornet's nest that will continue the arguments for many years to come.

In 1962 when I was General Chairman, I asked Dr. Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb and the present day expert on Nuclear Energy to speak to us on the subject of the radiation hazard. This time we had to arrange for special security measures with the New York Police Department. We had received threatening letters and phone calls protesting his appearance. Dr. Teller spoke to a capacity audience but there were no incidents the night he appeared.

Over the years the ten men who constitute the Organization Committee have contributed new ideas and innovations. Educational television for dental teaching was first used on our Program. It was sponsored by two Pharmaceutical concerns. We presented the first practical dental clinics on television from Walter Reed Hospital using the long lines of the American Telephone and Telegraph for this purpose.

Many "firsts" were originated at our meeting, later to be copied by other meetings.

About a year ago Dr. Percy Phillips showed me a card which he carried in his wallet. It read: "This is to certify that Percy T. Phillips is a life member of the 'Nine Old Men,' the most exclusive dental society in the world. Founded in New York City in 1935. The nine signatures were, Percy T. Phillips, Glen Whitson, George Douglas, Waldo Mork, Jerome Trier, Walter A. Quinn, Russel Tench, Charles Wilkie and Charles M. McNeeley". I assume that in 1935 these distinguished gentlemen constituted the Organization Committee.

Younger men are always being appointed to the committee. They bring with them new enthusiasm and strength which keeps the meeting progressive and vigorous. The social part of the meeting developed under their leadership. The format is changed yearly to accommodate any and all new ideas.

We are now the largest Dental Meeting in the world and we register 20,000 visitors from all parts of the United States and Europe. The first meeting in 1924 registered 250.

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