

This Day in History... April 19, 1897

The American Osteopathic Association

On April 19, 1897, the American Osteopathic Association was formed.

Dr. Andrew Still created the practice of osteopathic medicine. Dr. Still had helped found Baker University, the first four-year university in Kansas. He also served as a hospital steward during the Civil War.

When Dr. Still lost three of his children to spinal meningitis in 1864, he became dissatisfied with the crude medical methods of the day. At the time, many of the medicines, surgeries, and other treatments often caused more harm than good. Dangerous medicines and unsanitary surgical practices often led to more deaths than cures.

Dr. Still began to look for a better way to treat patients. He looked into several alternative treatments including hydropathy, diet, bonesetting, and magnetic healing. He found that these treatments had fewer severe side effects and began to envision a new “rational medical therapy” that would center around the manipulation of the musculoskeletal system, surgery, and less dependence on drugs.

From these ideas, Dr. Still established what he called osteopathy, an alternative medical practice that focuses on the manipulation of muscle tissue and bones. The name comes from the Greek words *osteon* (bone) and *pathos* (sensitive to or responding to). It was Dr. Still's belief that by treating the musculoskeletal system, doctors could treat a number of diseases and prevent them from suffering some of the severe side effects of drugs.

Also known as the locomotor system, the musculoskeletal system is an organ system that provides the human body with form, support, stability and movement. It is made up of bones, muscles, cartilage, tendons, ligaments, joints, and connective tissue that supports and binds the tissues and organs together.

In 1892, Dr. Still founded the American School of Osteopathy (today called A.T. Still University), the first such school devoted to osteopathy. Five years later, 16 students from this school held their first meeting to establish a national organization. They held their first annual meeting on April 19, 1897, in Kirksville, Missouri, the date celebrated as the founding of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA). At the time, they called themselves the America Association for the Advancement of Osteopathy (they adopted the current name in 1901). During that first meeting, the AOA also declared that Dr. Still was an honorary member, “by virtue of his unique position as founder of osteopathy.”

In 1901, the AOA began publishing its own scientific journal. In the 1950s, the AOA was recognized as the official accrediting body for osteopathic medical education by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Now headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, the AOA has over 197,000 members in the US, though the practice of osteopathy has spread to countries around the world.



Issued for the AOA's 75th anniversary.



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Every year, doctors and students go to Washington, DC, for “DO Day on Capitol Hill” – a chance for them to meet with members of Congress to discuss important healthcare initiatives.

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