

CHAPTER XXXI

DENTISTRY IN BROOKLYN

THE history of dentistry in Brooklyn dates back nearly one hundred years. The first authentic record of any borough dentist is that of T. Jefferson Jones, who in 1828 practiced dentistry and kept a drug store at 4 Sands Street. One of his advertisements in 1832 reads:

T. JEFFERSON, JONES, M. D.,

would inform his friends that he continues to officiate in the capacity of a dentist at his residence, No. 4 Sands Street, Brooklyn, where teeth of every description, from one to an entire set, can be inserted. Teeth cleaned, filed and filed so as to add much to their durability and beauty. He would also recommend the Persian Dentifrice (teeth powder) kept by him to all those who are desirous of having their gums healthy and teeth white and clear from tartar without any injury to either. Also a general assortment of drugs, medicines and perfumery for sale."

It would seem that the Brooklyn population was solely dependent upon Dr. Jones' ministrations—with the possible exception of some doctors who pulled teeth as part of their medical practice—until the year 1831, when W. K. Northall, Jr., opened a dental establishment at 79 Fulton Street. His father, W. K. Northall, F. S. A., was principal of Mount Pleasant Academy, 278 Fulton Street. In 1833, when Dr. Jones died, Dr. Northall was left alone in the field, and removed his offices to 56 Fulton Street. His advertisement in the directory of that year showed that he not only replaced lost teeth with Premium Incorruptible Teeth of the very best quality, but of every variety of shade, durability, cleanliness and natural appearance, "which rendered them permanently superior to all other kinds," while they were also available for all purposes of articulation and mastication. Cavities in teeth were filled with cement, gold or silver. Teeth loosened by tartar, disease or mercury were, by a course of treatments, almost always restored to their pristine firmness, while irregularities in children's teeth could, in most instances, be obviated by well-directed aid. Dr. Northall published two books, one called "Hints to Parents on the Importance of Early Attention to Children's Teeth," and one entitled "Five Minutes' Advice on the Teeth."

Dr. Martin K. Bridges settled in Brooklyn in 1837 and commenced practice at 118 Fulton Street. He edited the "Dental Mirror," a leaflet for free circulation, in which appeared conspicuously in 1843 the following notice:

"Two hours in each week day, from 7 to 9 o'clock in the morning, are devoted to the service of the poor without charge." Dentists arose early in those days.

Ten years later—in the autumn of 1853—the first society of dentists on Long Island was organized, and was called "The Long Island Association of Dental Surgeons." This preceded any dental organization in New York City proper. At its first meeting, held in the office of Dr. H. N. Stratton, 137 Atlantic Avenue, the following were elected officers: recording secretary, D. H. Nulford; corresponding secretary, G. A. Cooper; treasurer, James

E. Miller; librarian, Martin K. Bridges; examining committee, John Branique, James E. Miller and J. B. Frederics; executive committee, B. S. Lyman, A. H. Griswold, and C. B. Hammond.

Its declaration stated: "This society is organized for the improvement and elevation of dental science, and the establishment of a proper sentiment of respect among dental practitioners." The constitution provided that "The Examining Committee shall have been practicing dentists in good standing for at least five years," "the yearly subscription shall be \$3, payable in advance," and that "members of the association shall not take students for a less term than two years."

The society never had a president, but elected a chairman for each meeting. Its object was more of a social than of a scientific character. Interest soon subsiding in it, it passed out of existence after two or three years of an uneventful career.

A group of dentists, June 12, 1862, met at the office of Dr. O. E. Hill, Fulton, near Clinton streets, and organized the "Brooklyn Dental Association." Its first officers were: President, W. C. Parks; vice-president, A. C. Hawes; treasurer, John Allen; secretary, William B. Hurd. This society, largely composed of the most able and progressive of New York dentists, had, as its Brooklyn members: O. E. Hill, A. Appleton Wheeler, C. A. Marvin, and William Jarvie, Jr., Williamsburg was represented by W. B. Hurd, W. C. Parks and W. C. Horne. It met every two weeks at the offices of the members, and during a five years' existence, was the most useful and active society of the time.

Unfortunate differences arose in 1867 and the society disbanded, some of its New York members organizing the "New York Odontological Society," while, on December 14th of that year, thirteen dentists met at the office of Dr. George A. Mills, 133 Henry Street, and formed "The Brooklyn Society of Dental Science and Art." These dentists were: George A. Mills, H. G. Mirick, O. E. Hill, A. H. Brockway, L. E. Brockway, William Jarvie, Jr., I. C. Monroe, John Scott, N. M. Abbott, Thomas Fry, E. L. Childs, H. E. Bird and George E. Bretz. They named as first officers: President, H. G. Mirick; vice-president, C. D. Cook; recording secretary, E. L. Childs; corresponding secretary, William Jarvie, Jr.; treasurer, I. C. Monroe; executive committee, G. A. Mills, O. E. Hill and John Scott.

The society changed its name to the Brooklyn Dental Society January 4, 1869, and the following made application to have the organization incorporated: C. D. Cook, O. E. Hill, E. L. Childs, William Jarvie, Jr., I. C. Monroe, James H. Race, H. G. Mirick and George A. Mills. The application was granted April 5, 1869.

The society was composed of a group of thoughtful workers. Their minds were pregnant with new projects. Splendid results were attained. Experimental ideas were advanced and developed which proved of benefit to the dental fraternity in general. The keen desire was carried out to elevate the beneficent as well as the social and scientific side of the profession.

The society organized a dental infirmary January 10, 1870, locating it at 260 Washington Street. It was open every week day, and dental operations were performed for the worthy poor without charge. A superintendent was employed, and a member of the society placed in charge each afternoon. Members not only volunteered their services, but aided by a few public-spirited citizens, paid all expenses for one year. After this, the city of Brooklyn contributed \$1,500 annually toward the infirmary's support. It existed about four years, the society,

through it, endeavoring to teach the people to appreciate the value of their teeth and to educate them in their proper care.

To many dentists, these infirmary studies became a post-graduate course. Clinics were frequently given, and Brooklyn dentists and the public owe a debt to Dr. William H. Atkinson, who at great personal loss and inconvenience, would frequently leave his private patients in New York and come to Brooklyn to conduct them. Dr. John M. Riggs was invited from Hartford, and gave clinics concerning his original treatment of what was popularly known as "Riggs' Disease"—now called pyorrhea. Dr. Riggs spent a week at the infirmary, which created great interest, and brought numerous dentists and visitors of prominence from many parts of the country.

As far as is known, this infirmary was the first institution of its kind ever in existence. It accomplished great good, and its relinquishment was forced principally because people able to pay endeavored to obtain good dental service free, thereby defeating the charitable object for which it was established.

The Brooklyn Dental Society in 1882 opened a library and reading room in connection with the Kings County Medical Society in Everett Hall, 398 Fulton Street. It was afterwards removed to the rooms of the Medical Society in Bridge Street and much enlarged. It is now owned by the Second District Dental Society, and is in the new home of the Kings County Medical Society in Bedford Avenue.

It was in 1895 that the Brooklyn Dental Society retired from the field of scientific activity in favor of its somewhat younger brother, the Second District Dental Society. The State Legislature passed a law April 7, 1868, entitled: "An Act to Incorporate Dental Societies for the Purpose of Improving the Regulating the Practice of Dentistry in the State." This provided for a dental society in each of the eight judicial districts, eight delegates from each of which were to meet at the Capitol at Albany and organize what was to be known as The Dental Society of the State of New York. In accordance with the law, 38 of the dentists of the Second Judicial District, which comprised the counties of Kings, Suffolk, Richmond, Westchester, Orange, Rockland and Putnam—and to which Nassau was added in 1897—met at the Brooklyn City Hall June 2, 1868. There was organized the Second District Dental Society, and the following officers named: President, W. B. Hurd; vice-president, George A. Mills; recording secretary, William Jarvie, Jr.; corresponding secretary, L. S. Straw; treasurer, H. G. Mirick. Delegates to the State Dental Society: C. D. Cook, W. B. Hurd, O. E. Hill, H. G. Mirick, A. H. Brockway, G. A. Mills, L. S. Straw, and C. L. Houghton.

This society with an uninterrupted career of activity and usefulness, is one of the most prosperous and influential in the State. It meets once a month, from October to May, at the Kings County Medical Society Building, at 1313 Bedford Avenue, and has about 600 members—dentists of Brooklyn and Long Island. Scientific papers are read, clinics and practical demonstrations in dentistry given. Post-graduate classes in various subjects are held each year under the society's auspices.

The officers for 1923-1924 were: President, Fred R. Adams; vice-president, Henry M. Childs; recording secretary, George C. Douglas; corresponding secretary, Henry Bade; treasurer, Walter C. Riggs; librarian, Mr. Shapiro. The board of directors consists not only of these, but of the chairmen of all the committees: F. O. Kraemer, J. A. Burgun, A. Frank Zalauf, K. E. Hillyer, LeRoy S. Edwards, P. J. Phillips, William Steinbuch.

Life members, elected only after 30 years of service to the society, include many prominent men who have worked untiringly to bring the organization to its present standard of usefulness. They are: Drs. F. P. Abbott, F. S. Emerson, H. C. Ferris, H. C. Gilcrest, R. T. Holly, P. L. Hull, E. G. Parker, W. M. Ramsdell, E. T. Rippier, J. W. Russell, H. L. O'Brien, F. C. Walker, W. H. Johnson, J. B. Brown, L. A. Cuniet, F. P. Hamlet, C. B. Parker, V. F. Parker, F. C. Royce, A. D. Seaver, W. M. Turner, F. T. VanWoert, R. Ottolengui, Ernest C. Huskinson, G. W. White, Charles F. Ash, and R. G. Hutchinson, Jr.

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Since the old days when anybody who had sufficient nerve or knowledge to pull a tooth could practice dentistry, and the fashion was to advertise a dental business, dentistry in Brooklyn has traveled a far pace. These days, a man must complete a four-year course before being allowed to practice, and he must be at least a high school graduate. In certain colleges, entrants must have an A.B. degree. These conditions have been brought about by the State Board of Dental Examiners, Board of Regents at Albany, members of the boards of dental faculties and members of the State dental societies.

Few Brooklyn hospitals now are without dental clinics, and all public institutions are equipped with dental departments, to care for the inmates. From the practice of dentistry in general, many men have broken away and joined the modern ranks of specialists. It has become the custom more and more with each passing year that the general practitioner uses the specialist and does not attempt to do his work. Dentists are specializing in these lines, there being numerous ones in each such specialty in Brooklyn: Regulation of teeth, extraction of teeth, surgery of the mouth, X-ray examinations of the oral cavity, treatment of pyorrhea and the making of artificial teeth.

Each member joining the Second District Dental Society, or any district society, automatically becomes a member of the State Society and the National Dental Association. Under these organizations, much demonstration work is done and dental education promoted.

The Second District Society has furnished eight presidents to the State organization: W. B. Hurd, 1871; C. A. Marvin, 1872; O. E. Hill, 1880; F. T. VanWoert, 1893; William Jarvie, Jr., 1904; W. J. Turner, 1905; Ellison Hill-yer, 1911, and Horace P. Gould, 1919.

Practically every well-known dental man in the country has spoken before the present Brooklyn organization. These include many professors of dental institutions who are specialists in their branch of work.

While working scientifically with the Second District Society, the old Brooklyn Dental Society is not out of commission. It retains its charter and is kept together for social purposes, one meeting being held each year, which takes the form of a banquet. Such dinners are usually held in a hotel or club, among the favored spots being the University Club, the old Union League Club and the Clarendon Hotel. It has about 70 members, two of the oldest being Dr. E. T. Rippier and Dr. F. C. Walker. There are only two officers: Dr. Walker, who is president, and Dr. Warrington G. Lewis, who for many years has been secretary and treasurer. It is due to the efforts of this society that much of the history of dentistry in Brooklyn has been preserved.