

The First Osteopathic Treatment—1874

Introduction: Andrew Taylor Still recounted this case history in the “Autobiography of A. T. Still.”¹ It represents the first documented Osteopathic Treatment and it took place in the autumn of 1874. At this point, Dr. Still had not fully formulated the principles of Osteopathy. The ultimate development of Osteopathy as a healing art then took 18 years of empirical experimentation and intense study. Still’s earliest style of manual medicine was based upon the hands-on healing practices of Magnetic Healing combined with traditional art of bonesetting. He blended the metaphysical concepts of Magnetic Healing with the physical principles of biomechanics found in bonesetting. He further developed his technique, evolved his style, integrated precise anatomic diagnosis, created a philosophy of healthcare, and called this system Osteopathy.

From the *Autobiography of A. T. Still* first published in 1897:

During the autumn I had an excellent opportunity to test Osteopathy on fall diseases, such as flux among children, bowel complaint, and fevers. My first case of flux was a little boy of about four summers. I was walking down the streets of Macon in company with a Colonel Eberman, when I drew his attention to fresh blood which had dripped along the street for fifty yards. A little in advance of us was a lady and two or three children slowly moving in the same direction we were going. We soon caught up with them, and discovered that her little boy, about four years old, was very sick. He had only a calico dress on, and to our wonder and surprise his legs and feet, which were bare, were covered with blood from his body down to the ground. A single glance was sufficient to convince us that they were poor, and the Colonel and I, feeling a wave of pity in our hearts, spoke gently to the mother, and offered our aid to get her sick children home. She accepted. I picked up the little sick boy, while the Colonel took one from the mother's arms that she had carried until she was almost exhausted. I placed my hand on the back of the little fellow I carried, in the region of the lumbar, which was very warm, even hot, while the abdomen was cold.

My only thought was to help the woman and her children home, and little dreamed that I was to make a discovery that would bless future generations. While walking along I thought it strange that the back was so hot and the belly so cold; then the neck and back of his head were very warm, and the face, nose, and forehead cold. I began to reason, for I knew very little about flux, [other] than it killed young and old, and was worse in Kentucky in warm weather than in some other States. In all my life I had never asked myself what flux was

I did not know how to reason on diseases, because all the authorities I had read or met in council could not get their eyes off the effects rather than cause. They met pain by anti-pain medicines, and bleeding of bowels by astringents that closed the tissues from which the blood came, following such remedies to death's door, and then lined up for another battle and defeat with the same old failing remedies, and open fire all along the line on symptoms only. I wondered why doctors were so badly frightened when flux visited their own families if their remedies were to be trusted.

I knew that a person had a spinal cord, but really I knew little, if anything, of its use. I had read in anatomy that the upper portion of the body was supplied with motor nerves from the front side of the spinal cord, and that the back side of the cord gave off the sensory nerves, but that gave no very great clue to what to do for flux. I began work at the base of the brain, and thought by pressure and rubbing I could push some of the hot to the cold places. While so doing I found rigid and loose places in the muscles and ligaments of the whole spine, while the lumbar was in a very congested condition. I worked for a few minutes on that philosophy, and told the mother to report to me the next day, and if I could do anything more for her boy I would cheerfully do so. She came early next morning with the news that her child was well. Flux was in a large percent of the families of Macon. The reader will remember that my home at that time was still in Baldwin, Kans., and I was only visiting in Macon. The lady whose child I had cured brought many people with their sick children to me for treatment. As nearly as I can remember, I had seventeen severe cases of flux in a few days, and cured them all without drugs.

¹ Still, A. T. *Autobiography of A. T. Still*, (Revised Edition, 1908; reprint, American Academy of Osteopathy, 1981), pages 104-106