

Early medical organizations of Sacramento

By Irma West, MD

The Medico-Chirurgical Association 1850-1856

Dr. J.B.D. Stillman headed 31 other pioneer Sacramento physicians in forming the first medical organization in California. Sacramento was awash with all manner of unqualified persons of ill repute who were posing as doctors, fleecing the poor and the ill, and thereby giving reputable, qualified physicians a bad name. The intended purpose of this organization was to get rid these impostors. The stated purpose was the cultivation of science, honor, dignity and interests of the profession. Unfortunately, the cholera epidemic, floods and fires forced the fledgling organization to disband in 1856.

The Sacramento Medical Society 1855-63

This society, consisting of 23 physicians, was organized in 1855 for the express purpose of protecting the public and regular practitioners from the irregular practitioners and "quacks." They disbanded eight years later when they could not agree on whether to accept physicians who had gained their training through preceptorships rather than graduation from a medical school.

The California State Medical Association 1856-1860

The first State Medical Association began in Sacramento through the efforts of two well-known local physicians--John Morse, MD and Thomas Logan, MD-- and a San Francisco physician, E.S. Cooper, MD. The purpose of the organization was to promote scientific truth, ethical standards and communication among the state's physicians. They, too, hoped to rid the state of quackery and, to that end, established a Board of Censors to examine the credentials of applicants for membership and others. A recognized medical diploma or a special examination for those who had completed preceptorships only was required. This organization published the *California State Medical Journal*, the first for the state. Both the *Journal* and the Association were short-lived, however, as there was more competition and disagreement than cooperation among its 56 members.

The Sacramento County Pathological Society 1858

This group of 10 physicians started an organization for those who possessed a diploma from a recognized medical school. They were interested in research and following the medical literature.

The Sacramento Board of Health 1862

After years of prodding by Sacramento physicians, the Board of Supervisors established a Board of Health. The same pioneer physicians, leaders in promoting community welfare, were asked to draft the ordinance: Dr. Logan, who served as its first secretary; Dr. Hatch, who served as its first president; Dr. Harkness, Dr. Montgomery

and Dr. Oatman. Believed to be only the second such organization in the country, it predated the State Board of Health by two years and pioneered public health legislation in California.

The Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement 1868

A small band of 12 physicians met in the office of G.L. Simmons, MD to form a society for their own improvement. Most of the members had come from previously disbanded medical organizations. This time they were led by an unusually gifted diplomat and leader, Dr. Frederick Hatch, who served for six successive terms as president. Members were graduates of recognized medical schools who adhered to the American Medical Association's Code of Ethics. The objective was to promote medical science and a good feeling among the members. Today, it is the oldest continuously operating local medical society in the state.

The California State Board of Health 1870

Dr. Logan used his influence with the state legislature to establish a State Board of Health, the second in the nation by a few months. Seven physicians were appointed from differing areas of the state to serve for four years. Dr. Logan was the secretary, and meetings were initially held in his office. Their first concern was to gather information on a regular basis about deaths, marriages, births, and disease in the state, as well as water supplies and sanitation so that public health and preventive medicine could be properly deployed. Local boards of health were encouraged.

California Medical Association 1870

Dr. Logan, subsequently elected president, was the prime mover in reestablishing the state medical organization. The American Medical Association had accepted his invitation to hold their next annual meeting in San Francisco. Lacking a State Medical Association to serve as host was an embarrassment. Initial membership was 156. Its first success was passage of the Medical Practice Law of 1876, establishing a seven-member Board of Medical Examiners that would grant certificates to those with diplomas from recognized medical schools. These certificates, which were to be registered with the appropriate county clerk., could be revoked for various offenses. Additional boards were added from time to time for homeopaths and eclectics but were soon discontinued. By 1876, 900 physicians were registered. By 1990, there were 4500.