

## ARCHIVES OF THE AMERICAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION

### FAQS ON THE HISTORY OF DENTISTRY

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#### **Who was the first women dentist in America?**

This distinction is often given to Emeline Roberts Jones who is known to have assisted in her husband's dental practice in Connecticut as early as 1844. She became his partner in 1859 and took over the practice upon his death.

Sometimes the distinction is given to Lucy Hobbs Taylor who was the first woman in the world to graduate from a dental school and receive a dental degree. She graduated from the Ohio College of Dental Surgery in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1866 and was granted a D.D.S. degree. At the time she received her diploma it is known that she had already been practicing dentistry for at least 5 years having learned the trade as an apprentice from Dr. Samuel Wardle, a Cincinnati dentist.

#### **Who was the first African American to receive a dental degree?**

The first African-American to receive a dental degree is Dr. Robert Tanner Freeman. He was in the first class to graduate from the Harvard Dental School in 1869.

Dr. Ida Gray Nelson Rollins (born Ida Gray) was the first black woman to receive a dental degree. She graduated from the University of Michigan Dental School in 1890.

#### **When was the toothbrush invented?**

We know that people have cleaned their teeth with some type of tool since ancient times. In ancient times a frayed end of a stick was generally employed to clean the teeth. The earliest known mention in written history of a toothbrush as we know it, i.e. a long narrow handle with bristles standing at right angles on one end, is in a 17<sup>th</sup> century Chinese encyclopedia which shows a drawing of the toothbrush and states it was invented in China in 1498. In Europe the earliest records of toothbrushes date to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **When was toothpaste invented?**

There is no one person or time associated with the invention of the toothpaste. The earliest known text on medicine, the so called Ebers Papyrus which is an Egyptian text dating to 4,000BC, includes recipes for toothpastes as does the work of Hippocrates which dates to the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century.

Before the availability of mass-produced toothpaste at about the middle of the 19th century, a dentist would provide patients with their own dentifrice mixtures in bottles and pots. Many dentists used their own formulae for these mixtures and the dentifrice of the period did not resemble the creamy toothpaste of today generally being either a liquid or more pasty concoction. Before the introduction of the collapsible metal tube, toothpaste and other sundries and cosmetics were sold in ceramic pots. The toothbrush was dipped into the pot to pick up the paste.

Although he did not invent the flexible, collapsible metal tube, Dr. Washington Wentworth Sheffield, a dentist of New London, Connecticut is credited as being the first in the United States to popularize toothpaste in such a tube. His toothpaste Sheffield's Creme Dentifrice packaged in the tubes was a big seller of its time (c. 1890-1900). The tube quickly caught on and soon became the customary package for toothpaste.

#### **What was the name of the first dental school?**

The Baltimore College of Dental Surgery became the world's first dental school when it opened in Baltimore, MD in 1840. It was the first school established to teach courses exclusively in dentistry for the purpose of granting degrees in the profession. The school merged with the University of Maryland's already established dental school (founded in 1883) in 1923.

### **Was Paul Revere a dentist?**

It is well known that Paul Revere practiced dentistry for a short time. According to advertisements which he placed in a Boston newspaper, he constructed and sold dentures as well as cleaned teeth. Dentures of the era were all hand-made using a variety of materials like metal (including gold, silver and iron), animal and human teeth, ivory, porcelain, etc. Since Paul Revere was a silver smith and thus a craftsman, denture manufacturing was perhaps a natural sideline for him.

Paul Revere is also believed to be the first person to identify a body by means of the teeth. The person who was identified was Major General Joseph Warren who was killed during the Battle of Breed's Hill (also known as the Battle of Bunker Hill) in the Revolutionary War that took place on June 16, 1775. General Warren was killed during the battle by a gunshot wound to the head. The British defeated the Colonials and stripped all the bodies and buried them in a mass grave at the site after the battle. Ten months later Warren's family instigated a search for his body and dug up the mass grave. Since the body had been stripped of its uniform there was no other way to positively identify the General's body. Paul Revere was called upon to assist in the identification because he and General Warren (who was a physician in civilian life) had been good friends and sometime prior to the battle Revere had made a silver wire bridge for him. Since all denture making was done by hand, dentures tended to be very distinctive looking and easily recognizable by their makers. Revere was able to recognize his handiwork and thus a positive identification of the body was made.

### **Did George Washington really wear dentures?**

It is well known via surviving letters and diaries that our first president was plagued by bad teeth his whole life. By the time he died it is believed that he only had one natural tooth left in his mouth. You can view his surviving dentures at his home at Mt Rushmore and the National Museum of Dentistry, Baltimore, MD. The dentures (primitive by today's standards) that were available to him gave him many problems and he had more than one set made during his lifetime. They were constructed with a variety of materials including lead, gold, porcelain, and animal teeth. Contrary to popular belief none of his dentures were made of wood.

### **What was the name of the first book on dentistry?**

The world's first printed book devoted exclusively to dentistry is *Artzney Buchlein: wider allerlei kranckeyten und gebrechen der tzeen* which was published in Germany in 1530. A translation of the book's title from the German is "Booklet of Remedies Against All Sorts of Diseases and Infirmities of the Teeth." It is also known as *Zene Artzney*, or *Teeth Remedies*, the title under which some of its fifteen subsequent editions were published from 1530 to 1576. The book is also noteworthy for its title page which bears the first known printed illustration showing a tooth extraction. The large number of editions of this book is indicative of the need for a helpful text on the subject at the time. Written for the lay public, it provided selected practical information culled from the works of other authors on the topic together in one small booklet and included information on the development of the teeth, causes of decay, remedies for toothache, filling methods and teeth care.

The first book on dentistry published in America is *A Treatise on the Human Teeth* by Richard Skinner which was published in New York in 1801. The book was intended for use by the lay public and is actually an advertisement for the author's services. The list of fees that he published in the book gives insight on how a Colonial dentist practiced. Among the services he offered was tooth transplanting, setting human teeth on silver and gold, fixing artificial teeth, filling cavities, teeth extraction, and eradicating tartar and teeth cleaning. Besides practicing dentistry the book also advertises his services for setting artificial eyes, nose, ears and limbs. It was common for dentists of this era to provide other kinds of services as a way to make ends meet.