

In the Name of Dr. John Ross Callahan

Clifton O. Dummett, DDS

Abstract

A look back at the original National Dental Association, illustrious researcher Dr. John Ross Callahan and some of the distinguished award recipients who exemplified his dedicated spirit.

Sixty-five years ago, as a dental student at Northwestern University Dental School, I first learned about Dr. John Ross Callahan's work from my beloved teacher, Dr. Edward Howard Hatton, erudite medical professor of pathology and bacteriology. He was the Callahan honoree in 1941. Dr. Robert Phelps' notification about this Callahan Award on July 12, 2001, included a brief biography of Dr. Callahan and a list of distinguished recipients of the Callahan Award over the past 81 years. Parts of the Callahan history were familiar, and among the list of former awardees were many names that recalled cherished personal relationships.

The brief biography mentioned Dr. Callahan's researches in dental pulp diseases that included papers on chloropercha as an endodontic filling material. Also cited was his profound interest and membership in the Scientific Foundation and Research Commission of the National Dental Association.¹ Inasmuch as there have been two "National Dental Associations," this reference refers to the

original organization formed more than 100 years ago in 1897, and it must be differentiated from the National Dental Association of today (NDA II). The evolution of this title and the social history embedded in it reveal an interesting facet of dental history.

NDA I and NDA II

In 1859, the American Dental Association was established. Ten years later, a smaller Southern Dental Association was formed in 1869. These two principal groups mirrored in dentistry the antagonisms emanating from the War Between the States. Eventually in 1897, a merger of the two formed an all-inclusive body called the National Dental Association. The amalgamation held fast until 1913 when internal reorganization occurred. Finally, in 1922, the name "National Dental Association" was discarded in favor of the title "American Dental Association" that initially had been the name of the larger group of dentists.

Neither the so-called "American" nor "National" dental associations of that time fully represented all American den-

tists, because the dental profession was held hostage to the prevailing customs throughout the nation regarding racial distinctions in membership acceptance. African American dentists were not welcomed into local and national organizations. Thus, to secure scientific, professional and social outlets, a number of small minority societies came into being.

Founded in 1913, the Interstate Dental Association² was, by 1922, the single multi-regional organization of African American dentists. It grew to respectable proportions with participants primarily from the southeastern states, and in 1932 the Interstate applied for the title "National Dental Association," a name vacated 10 years previously. The application was granted and a second National Dental Association was born to represent the nation's African American dentists, and it continues to serve the minority population.

Dentistry's Moses

Dr. Callahan was an active participant in the affairs of NDA I, the organization that founded the Research Institute of the National Dental Association.³ Articles of Incorporation were signed on June 24, 1915, in Cleveland, Ohio. The



Author / Clifton O. Dummett, DDS, is a distinguished professor emeritus, University of Southern California School of Dentistry, Los Angeles. He received the Callahan Award of the Ohio State Dental Association in September 2003.

moving force behind the Institute was Cleveland's Dr. Weston Price who subsequently became the 1931 Callahan honoree. Dr. Price was ably supported by NDA President Dr. Thomas P. Hinman of Atlanta, Ga., serving together on the executive board of the commission as chairman and vice chairman.

In 1915, Drs. Callahan and Percy Howe of Boston were the only dental research investigators to receive special research grants from the Institute. (Dr. Howe became the Callahan honoree in 1926.) Firmly convinced of the value of scientific dental research, Callahan fully endorsed the concept and conduct of the Institute assessed thusly in an April 1917 editorial⁴ in the *Journal NDA*:

"The Moses that is to lead the dental profession out of the scientific wilderness and into the light of scientific truths was born with the inception of the Research Institute. However, if this Moses is to lead us out of Egypt and over the Red Sea of difficulties into the land of true scientific attainment, it must be thoroughly established on a permanent financial basis."

Dr. Callahan's death the following year in 1918 at age 65 occurred while he was still an active member of the Ohio State Dental Society Board of Directors, and was busily engaged in his researches with the NDA Research Institute.

Dissolution of the Research Institute in 1920 was a special moment in American dental history. Relations between the Institute and parent NDA were fragile, and NDA financial support was less than adequate.⁵ General lack of appreciation regarding the importance of scientific research to dentistry's advancement as a credible health profession hastened the demise of the Research Institute. The National Dental Association acknowledged it did not possess the managerial instruments and finances required to adequately create, direct and maintain a Research Institute. Nevertheless, furrows in a complex landscape had been opened and seeds had been sown that would bode

well for dentistry's future. Stepping into this void were *The Journal of Dental Research*, originated in 1919 and the International Association for Dental Research established in 1920.

Callahan Memorial Awards

In 1920, the Ohio State Dental Society decided to perpetuate the memory of its illustrious researcher by initiating the Callahan Memorial Award Commission.⁶⁻⁸ This confluence of dental historical events culminated in an

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annual procession of dental luminaries befittingly memorialized as recipients of the prestigious decoration "In the Name of Dr. John Ross Callahan." Until 2003, all recipients were male, a situation that will be remedied with the first female honoree in 2004.

The roster of designees contains general practitioners, dental specialists, teachers, researchers, public healthers, administrators, journalists, authors, historians, editors, dental deans, university presidents, vice presidents for health and medical affairs, foundation presidents, and high-ranking officers of dental industrial and pharmaceutical institutions. Among this roster of distinguished Callahan honorees, I have selected seven over the last 35 years who exemplify the variety of disciplines represented in the list of awardees. They are individuals whose

scientific contributions to dentistry's professional advancements would have received Dr. Callahan's full approval and gratitude.

During the mid-1900s, Ralph Wilbur Phillips,^{9,10} of Indiana University, the 1968 Callahan honoree, was highly respected by dental researchers and educators. In addition to being among the profession's most admired dental pedagogues, he helped develop the physics of dental materials into a formidable scientific specialty. His abilities and devotion to dental research would have received Dr. Callahan's approbation.

Maynard Kiplinger Hine of Indianapolis was selected by the commission as the 1974 honoree, thereby again, adding luster to Indiana University. Always benevolent and approachable, Maynard Hine was one of the nation's most beloved dentists. During his lifetime, he received every outstanding award in American dentistry. It was, however, in academic administration that he excelled, becoming Indiana's dental dean at a young age, and eventually achieving the rare distinction of being chancellor of Indiana/Purdue Universities in Indianapolis.

David Walter Cohen, the 1993 Callahan honoree, was university professor, expert clinician, periodontal researcher and dental dean of the University of Pennsylvania.¹¹ A cultured gentleman, diplomat and brilliant administrator, Walter Cohen belongs to a select club of superior dental administrators who were elevated to the highest academic offices in the land. He became president of the Medical College of Pennsylvania and then, chancellor of Allegheny University of Health Sciences.

Paul M. Flory, manager of professional services at the world-renowned Procter & Gamble Company in Cincinnati, Ohio, was the 1994 recipient of the Callahan award. During his 22 years as an able administrator in the dental products industry, Paul Flory was highly effective in directing professional dental research affairs, and spreading the gospel

of caries control and prevention via Crest dentifrice. Included, as one of his dental consultants was chairman of the Callahan Awards Committee and ODA past president Jack Gottschalk who along with fellow consultants under Flory's expert tutelage learned about industrial promotion of public school dental health education and preventive oral habits, especially among America's impoverished children and adolescents.

The decade of the '70s closed with Joseph Francis Volker of Birmingham, Ala., as the 1979 Callahan awardee. One of modern dentistry's premier architects of interdisciplinary health professional education, he began his career as a dental researcher, was appointed dental dean of Tufts University, Boston, Mass., and later, founding dental dean of the University of Alabama. A competent and practical visionary, Joe Volker moved steadily up the administrative hierarchy. He was designated director of research and graduate studies; vice president for health affairs; executive vice president of the University of Alabama at Birmingham; president of the University of Alabama at Birmingham; and finally, chancellor of the University of Alabama system. His genius as educator, administrator, scientist and humanitarian rendered him effective in promoting policies, and precluding partisan polemics.^{12,13} He was resolute in his dedication to fairness, honor and justice, a characteristic faithfully emulated by one of his highly esteemed students, the personable Charles A. MacCallum, MD, DMD, eminent oral and maxillo-facial surgeon, the 1990 Callahan recipient who succeeded Volker as dental dean and ultimately became University of Alabama president.

The 1969 Callahan honoree was the incomparable Harold Hillenbrand¹⁴ of Chicago. No person in history has done more to engender genuine world respect for American dental education, research, practice and health administration. Hillenbrand's innumerable contributions are firmly etched in our collective memories, although experienced dental profes-

sionals may extol the magnificent ADA Building at 211 East Chicago Avenue as "Harold's building, his monument, his testimonial." All dentists are eternally beholden to him for the legacy of respect our profession enjoys as a reputable health services occupation. **CDA**

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To request a printed copy of this article, please contact / Clifton O. Dummett, DDS, 5344 Highlight Place, Los Angeles, Calif., 90016-5119.