



Figure 1. Dr. Newell Sill Jenkins.

Dr. Newell Sill Jenkins: Progenitor of Cosmetic Dentistry

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Abstract

Dr. Newell Sill Jenkins was one of the pioneer American dentists who took "American dentistry" to Europe. Among his patients were composer Richard Wagner, and among his friends, author Mark Twain. He treated some of the crown heads of Europe, and yet found time to participate in organized dentistry and conduct research in cosmetic dentistry. He was the father of the porcelain revival in both Europe and America. Unfortunately, Jenkins' legacy as the chief proponent of cosmetic dentistry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has been largely ignored by dental historians. In a 20-year period (1896 to 1916), Jenkins published 32 articles in the dental literature on the esthetic advantages of porcelain fillings. It is time to give Jenkins his just recognition.

Newell Sill Jenkins (Figure 1) was born on Dec. 29, 1840, at Falmouth, Mass. His ancestors had arrived in America aboard the Mayflower. His grandfather, Capt. Weston Jenkins, had served in the War of 1812 and distinguished himself by capturing a British privateer that had wreaked much havoc on American commerce. When Jenkins was 5 years old, his family moved to Bangor, Maine. At age 18, Jenkins apprenticed himself to Dr. Philander Evans for a year or two for a fee of \$100 a year. After attending lectures at Jefferson Medical School, he matriculated at the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery and graduated in 1863. After returning home, he temporarily took over the practice of a Dr. Lincoln at Bangor and married in 1865. Long desiring to practice abroad, Jenkins and his wife sailed for Europe aboard the Saxonía on Oct. 7, 1866.¹

Jenkins' Office: Dresden, Germany

Jenkins was greeted in Germany by Dr. Frank P. Abbot of Berlin. Abbot was an 1851 graduate of the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery and one of the most distinguished American dentists in Europe. For several weeks, Jenkins remained in Berlin studying Abbot's methods and being introduced to his patients.² The German dentists were intrigued by Jenkins' demonstration of the rubber dam, which had only recently been invented by S.C. Barnham. In his 1875 article on tin and gold combination

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Figure 2. Jenkins' dental chair.

fillings, Jenkins mentioned using the rubber dam for cavities that extended “deeply under the gum.”³ Jenkins was determined to set up his office in Dresden and specialize in operative dentistry since there were no German dentists at that time who were skilled in that area.⁴ Abbot gave Jenkins letters of introduction to important people in the Saxon capital and wrote to his Dresden patients that they no longer had to come to him in Berlin, but should consult Dr. Jenkins.⁵ Dr. Jenkins set up his office using a wooden dental chair (Figure 2) and soon acquired a large practice. His reputation brought him many patients from among the German nobility and royal families of Germany, Austria, Russia, and Italy during the 45 years he practiced in Dresden. He also practiced for one month each year in Vienna and Warsaw, and in 1874 established a branch office in Leipzig. A prominent member of the American community in Dresden, he never renounced his American citizenship.⁶

In 1886, King Albert of Saxony, in northwest Germany, awarded Dr. Jenkins the Knight of the Albrecht's Order, first class, and the title of *Geheimer Hofrat* (privy counselor).⁷ The king later became a patient. Jenkins had many royal patients, including the Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg, in northeast Germany.⁸

Richard Wagner's Dentist

One of Jenkins' patients and closest friends was composer Richard Wagner (Figure 3). They met after Wagner's wife, Cosima, took their children to Jenkins' office for treatment.⁹ They corresponded frequently and exchanged many gifts.

“I speak not of the tooth of time,
The tooth's own time is drawing nigh.
Is Jenkins then within this clime?
Time and its tooth I will defy”



Figure 3. Composer Richard Wagner.

In 1877, Jenkins was called to Bayreuth, northeast of Nuremberg, to treat Wagner's dental emergency; and, in appreciation, Wagner sent him the piano scores of the opera *Der Ring*, which had successfully opened the year before.¹⁰ On the flyleaf, Wagner inscribed:

*I speak not of the tooth of time,
The tooth's own time is drawing nigh.
Is Jenkins then within this clime?
Time and its tooth I will defy.*¹¹

In February 1880, Wagner was contemplating immigrating to America with his entire family and wrote to Jenkins asking for \$1 million to make the move, which would be a permanent one. He promised to hold up the first performance of his latest opera, *Parsifal*, until he reached the United States. Jenkins found little interest among American musical impresarios for importing Wagner, and so the intriguing venture never materialized. Wagner's *Parsifal* had its first performance in Bayreuth in July 1882, and Wagner died on Feb. 13, 1883, in Venice.¹²

Porcelain Enamel

Although he was living in Europe, Jenkins kept up with the progress of dentistry in America. He noted the increase in the display of gold, even full-shell crowns, in American mouths. At the same time, he recognized his European patients' determination to have tooth-colored fillings even though they were not as durable as gold. In Europe, William Herbst had developed glass fillings, which, “though beautiful to look upon, rapidly disintegrated in the mouth.” Jenkins sought to find a material of a lower fusing point than the porcelain used by Dr. Charles H. Land, but of a higher grade



Figure 4. Jenkins' Porcelain Enamel.

than that of Herbst. In his research, he visited practically all the ceramic works of Austria and Germany. Eventually, he found the formula for "Jenkins' Porcelain Enamel" (Figure 4). In his experiments, which ran into the thousands, he was ably assisted by his wife, who did most of the laboratory work.¹³ In 1895, Jenkins founded a firm to manufacture and distribute his porcelain enamel. It was called the Klewe Company after his technician, Herr Klewe.¹⁴ In 1898, Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain) (Figure 5), Jenkins' "personal friend," offered to buy the American rights to his porcelain enamel and manufacture and distribute it in America.¹⁵ It seems that Clemens had had a tooth restored with Jenkins' porcelain enamel in London in which he previously had "worn cement and other kinds of mud." Clemens remarked, "The plug fits like nature, and of course does not endanger the walls with pressure of any sort. I am not aware it is there, and that old snag is as serviceable a tooth as any one has."¹⁶

At the meeting of the National Dental Association in 1899, Jenkins presented a paper on porcelain enamel inlays. In his article, Jenkins described the attributes of a "perfect filling." It had to fill the cavity "so exactly as to exclude moisture"; be a substance which will not "disintegrate nor change its original form either through chemical action or mechanical force"; have a smooth surface easily kept clean; be a poor conductor; must restore the "color and shape" of the teeth; be applicable to difficult cases; must have a technique that is not too strenuous to the operator; and be possible for a "good dentist" to use with "infallible results."¹⁷ The porcelain inlay met these requirements. He had devised a system to make custom-shaded porcelain inlays using an oven heated by a jet of gas and air and using gold foil for the matrix.¹⁸

"The plug fits like nature, and of course does not endanger the walls with pressure of any sort. I am not aware it is there, and that old snag is as serviceable a tooth as any one has."

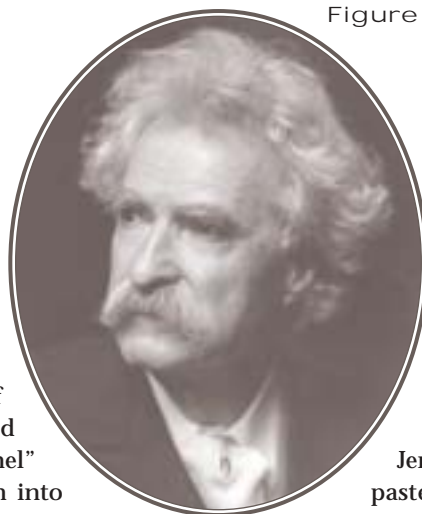


Figure 5. Samuel L. Clemens.

In 1903, he presented a special "Prosthetic Porcelain" designed for crown and bridge-work. He was responsible for the "Porcelain Renaissance" in Europe and America.¹⁹ The same year, the Jenkins Society was organized to promote the use of porcelain in dentistry.²⁰

Kolynos Toothpaste

After 18 years of experimentation, believing that the "mouth and throat must be regarded as a unit in sanitary treatment,"²¹ Jenkins worked out a formula for a new toothpaste that would not only clean and polish the teeth but also destroy oral bacteria. Practicing under the ethical guidelines of the time, he did not sell dentifrices in his office as did his German colleagues, but wrote prescriptions for dentifrices. Various apothecaries in Europe had tried to prepare his formula, but it was too expensive for general use when made in small quantities, and the results were too inconsistent among different pharmacists. That led Jenkins, in his own words, "to consider the practicability of making a dentifrice which would not only thoroughly, yet harmlessly, cleanse the teeth, but through the use of which the soft tissues of the mouth and throat might regularly be placed in a degree of sanitation which would reduce liability to contract infections or disseminate them."²² It seems that his wife had found a neutral soap in Paris suited to his needs. With this key ingredient, he sailed to America during the winter of 1907-1908 to start the first experiments with Professor Harry Ward Foote at Yale University.²³ Jenkins presented his formula for Kolynos toothpaste (Figure 6) to the dental profession at the 1908 meeting of the American Dental Society of Europe in London.²⁴

The name "Kolynos" came from the Greek *Kolyo nosus*, meaning "Disease Preventer."²⁵ The first tubes of Kolynos were sold on April 13, 1908; and the private company was merged into the "Kolynos Company" and later "Kolynos Incorporated." A European branch was established in Berlin, and later a factory was set up in London. The American Dental Association endorsed Kolynos, the only toothpaste at the time so honored.²⁶

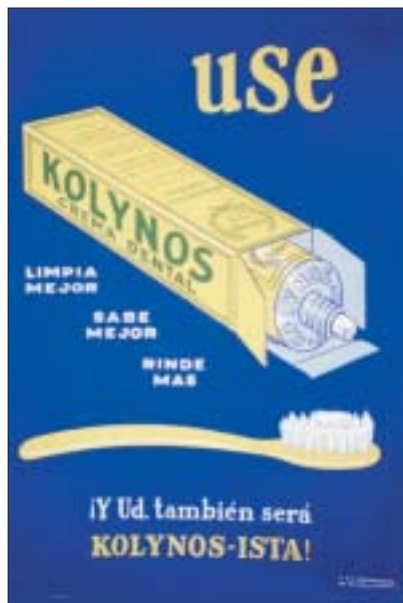


Figure 6. Kolynos toothpaste.

During World War I, the Kolynos Company published a booklet, Parley Voo, for American servicemen, which provided them a brief knowledge of French and German phrases and expressions for use overseas. In July 1928,

Kolynos merged with the American Home Products Corporation,²⁷ which is still in business as a consumer health care holding company called Wyeth. Kolynos today is a subdivision of Colgate Palmolive and is manufactured in Brazil.

Conclusion

Jenkins was president of the American Dental Society of Europe in 1878 and 1908.²⁸ He was also a member of the American Dental Club of Paris and the International Dental Federation. In addition, he was a member of the National Dental Association, and an honorary member of the New York State Dental Society, the Second District Dental Society of New York, the Connecticut State Dental Society, and numerous other societies in America.²⁹ On Dec. 29, 1910, a banquet was held by the American Dental Club of Paris to honor Jenkins on his 70th birthday.³⁰

Five years before World War I, Jenkins retired from practice and moved to Paris, where he spent his time in research and writing.³¹ He even developed his own brand of barbed broaches, which was sold by Claudius Ash of London.³² After the outbreak of World War I, Jenkins was forced to leave Europe and return to America in 1916. He died at age 79 in Havre, France, on Sept. 25, 1919. Jenkins' remains were brought back to the United States; and he was interred in the family plot in Bangor, Maine.³³

Jenkins was one of a group of distinguished American dentists who brought to Europe the "ideals and methods of American dentistry." These early pioneers established standards of excellence and ethical ideals which made the phrase "American dentistry" an "open sesame" to a successful foreign practice.³⁴

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