



## Orthodontics with a tender touch

By Norman Wahl, DDS, MS  
Part II

Dear Sandra,

The first woman I know of who taught orthodontics in a university was Marie C. Alkon, who taught undergraduate students at Tufts University from about 1927 to 1947. She obtained her initial orthodontic training in the office of Dr. J. M. Jones of Wichita, Kansas, between 1924 and 1927. While at Tufts, she received her orthodontic certificate (1940).

She also taught for seven years at the Forsyth Dental Infirmary at Boston and for eight years assisted at one-week postgraduate courses at Columbia University. She practiced in Boston as well as in Nashua, New Hampshire, becoming president of the Nashua Dental Society.

Dr. Alkon was very active in dental affairs and a seasoned traveler, having visited 35 countries. She also had the distinction of representing the AAO at the University of the East in Manila in 1961.<sup>13</sup>

Another early Bostonian, Suzanne Rothenberg, died only recently (1918-1991). While she did not receive formal orthodontic training, she was well-schooled by her mentor, Herbert Margolis, with whom she was associated for 10 years. She became one of the earliest teachers in the orthodontic department at Tufts, a department founded by Margolis in 1945. She continued teaching there and practicing in Boston almost to her death.<sup>27</sup>

### Later Angle Graduates

In 1922, Edward Angle reopened his school in Pasadena and, for the next five years, trained a small number of dentists. Two members of this select group were women.

Helen A. Gough could claim three firsts: first woman to graduate from the Angle School in Pasadena, first woman to practice orthodontics in Brooklyn, and the first daughter of an orthodontist to limit her practice. After completing Angle's course in 1924, she practiced with her father, Frank A. Gough, himself an Angle graduate, until his death in 1938.<sup>12,28,29</sup>

A foreign dentist who remained in this country was Marie (or Mary) N. Bercea. Born in Romania, she was trained at the New York College of Dentistry. Immediately after her

**Above:**  
Enjoying a picnic in 1927 Pasadena are: Edward H. Angle (right of center), Anna Angle (standing), Mrs. Tweed (behind Anna Angle), Charlie Tweed (at left) and Alice "Pete" Tweed (next to her father). Courtesy Alice T. Peak.



Alice C. Kinneringer

graduation in 1919, she signed up for the American Women's Medical Unit, where she became a captain. She then returned overseas for three years to minister to Serbian war orphans. In 1926, upon the advice of Milo Hellman (a prominent New York orthodontist and anthropologist) and Genette Harbour, Bercea joined one of Angle's last classes (now renamed the Angle College of Orthodontia). She opened an office in Los Angeles, then practiced in Hollywood until her death in 1942.<sup>30</sup>

That brings to at least eight, the number of women orthodontists trained by Angle. So you see, Sandra, no one can accuse him of being an orthodontic chauvinist!

#### USC's Kinneringer

The first woman to teach orthodontics at the University of Southern California was Alice C. Kinneringer (1908- ). She was accepted at USC at the age of 16, but, because of university age restrictions, had to wait a year to be admitted. Graduating in 1928 at the age of 20, she again met the age barrier when she was denied permission to take the state board until age 21.

In the meantime, Alice assisted Dr. C. Stenson Dillon in opening and operating USC's new orthodontic clinic. After Dillon bought a practice in Hollywood, Dr. Kinneringer worked alone in the clinic most of the time. She was later promoted to assistant professor of orthodontics.

Incidentally, one of her patients, Harry Cimring, must have come under her spell because he, too, became an orthodontist. And, since the 1950s, he's been dentistry's leading feature writer.<sup>31</sup>

Alice practiced orthodontics in downtown Los Angeles with pedodontist Floride (Finney) Frost (her husband was Jack Frost, M.D.) for about 15 years. I once discussed the '30s with Alice, and she told me, "The depression years were a challenge. Orthodontic services were sometimes exchanged for commodities. One patient's father was in the laundry and dry cleaning business, so all my office linens and uniforms, as well as personal attire, were taken care of. Another, a cabinet maker, presented me with a beautiful desk which I still use and enjoy."

When Kinneringer started having children, she went to work for the Los Angeles school system because of the more favorable hours. Within a year she was promoted to dental supervisor, with 55 persons under her. She remained with the schools until her retirement in 1973.

Her other accomplishments include fellowship in the American College of Dentists and Academy of Dentistry International, and the invention of a space maintainer for fractured incisors (published under the name of Alice Maurer), which was considered a milestone in pedodontics. Among her nondental distinctions is the title "Halley's Comet Two-Timer" (one who's seen the comet twice—it appears only once in 76 years). Now in her eighties, Dr. Kinneringer enjoys bicycling with her husband and remains active in dental, as well as world, affairs. (Kinneringer, Alice C., personal communication, September 22, 1991.)

Following Dillon's and Kinneringer's pioneering efforts on the undergraduate level, a graduate orthodontic department was opened at USC in 1934 under the chairmanship of Spence Atkinson. During

its first 20 years, USC turned out six women orthodontists.<sup>32</sup> One of them, Ruth Allen, taught there and associated with Dr. Atkinson for 16 years.<sup>11</sup>

#### **"Dr. Emily"**

Back in the 1930s, Emily T. Hicks had some interesting ideas on marketing. (Of course, what she called marketing was something else.) She was the first woman orthodontist in the Texas panhandle, and possibly the southwest, to limit her practice. She was also recognized for her many contributions to the community.

Hicks married a dentist she met in school (Hardy H. Hicks). They were graduated from the Baylor College of Dentistry in 1924 and married soon thereafter. They practiced together as general dentists, initially in Stamford, Texas, moving to Pampa in 1927.

Emily learned orthodontics by taking short courses; she became the first orthodontist in Pampa, about the mid-'30s. She promoted her practice by teaching schoolchildren brushing techniques and handing out buttons bearing the likeness of "D.K." Brownie. (A lesson for you, Sandra: The first step in treating a malocclusion is getting the patient into your office.)

In 1937 she became the first woman member of the Southwestern Component of the AAO. "Dr. Emily" was named, among other things, Woman of the Year, Business Woman of the Year, and national secretary of Upsilon Alpha (dental) Sorority.<sup>2,13,33,34</sup> She retired in 1978 after a 54-year career in dentistry. As of this writing, Emily Hicks is a very active 90-year-old who has lost none of her charm. (Hicks, Emily T., personal communication, April 17, 1989.)

#### **Northern California**

In 1930, George W. Hahn inaugurated the Curriculum II Program at the University of California at San Francisco, where you could receive your orthodontic training during the regular dental course. Two women were trained there about that time but, strangely enough, not in Curriculum II.

Margaret B. Black (1901- ?), Class of 1924, finished her orthodontic training in 1929 and associated with Dr. Hahn in Berkeley, where she stayed for many years, possibly beyond 1952.<sup>11,35</sup>

Betty Selmer (1909- ), trained for six months at the school immediately following her graduation in 1931. She associated with Cecil C. Steiner in Los Angeles and Beverly Hills from 1933 to 1943. During this time, she became secretary of the Southern Component of the Edward H. Angle Society of Orthodontia. In 1942, Selmer bought Mary Bercea's practice (after the latter's death) and practiced there in Hollywood until her retirement in 1971. She presently lives in Irvine, California. (Selmer, Betty, personal communication, August 18, 1991.)

#### **Women in the Midwest**

In the first two decades of its existence (1931-1950), the University of Illinois Department of Orthodontics, under the chairmanship of Allan G. Brodie, graduated only two women: Olga Tobias (1934) and Beulah G. Nelson (1936).<sup>36</sup>

When Nelson opened her office in Oak Park, Illinois, an affluent suburb of Chicago, she had been preceded by Ione Krall and Florence Lilley. After meeting Dr. Albin Oppenheim, a Viennese



Emily T. Hicks, Courtesy Amarillo Globe News and Marie N. Bercea.



Carlotta A. Hawley; Beulah G. Nelson, courtesy Dr. Abraham Goldstein.

who did landmark research in root resorption, Beulah became an advocate of light forces and the use of the headcap. Prior to studying orthodontics, she taught in the pedodontic department of the University of Illinois, where the ortho and pedo departments shared quarters.

In 1951, Nelson became the second woman president of the Chicago Association of Orthodontists. At the time of her death in 1955, she was vice-president of the Midwestern Component of the Angle Society. Allan Brodie described her as "modest, thoughtful, kind and warm, and enjoyed nothing more than to laugh at herself. Because of her personality and her lofty ideals she enjoyed the highest respect and admiration of her colleagues."<sup>37,38</sup>

From a list of Northwestern University theses, I found four women mentioned before 1948, the first one being Ella Ruth Lichenov (1929). (Thompson, John R., personal communication, February 8, 1992.) Between 1928 and 1976, the University of Iowa graduated only one woman in orthodontics--Martha J. Spence (1933).<sup>19</sup> The department at the University of Michigan, although founded in 1924, listed no women's names during its first quarter-century.<sup>39</sup>

### Namesakes Make Good

If Helen Gough was the first woman orthodontist to follow in her father's footsteps, I'd say that Carlotta A. Hawley and Alice Tweed Peak walked in the footsteps of giants. The names of their fathers are so well-known to the profession that, well, every dentist knows what a Hawley is and tell any orthodontist that you use the Tweed and he or she would know right away that you're talking about a triangle.

Growing up as Alice and Carlotta did in homes where the greats of orthodontics were like uncles to them, it's no wonder that some of that greatness brushed off on them. But the paths they took were entirely different.

Charles A. Hawley, the first orthodontist in Washington, D.C., didn't want his daughter to be a dentist. He thought it would be too hard a life for a woman. Instead, he suggested she study music, his avocation. But being exposed to the likes of John Mershon, Paul Simon, Benno Lischer, and Harry Kelsey during her impressionable years had its effect. When Carlotta was 15 her father died and she was free to pursue her dream--with her mother's blessings.

In 1932, Georgetown University's charter precluded the acceptance of women, so Hawley obtained her dental education at the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery (University of Maryland). The only woman in her class, Carlotta was too shy to ask for the ladies' room. She nearly fainted her first day in the dissection lab, until she was distracted by a male student doing so! Her instructors' attempts to flunk her only compelled her to work harder and she graduated with honors. After dental school she interned at the Forsyth Dental Infirmary for Children.

Dr. Hawley was the first female to be accepted for graduate ortho training at Harvard Dental School. She and her three male classmates were referred to as "Goldilocks and the Three Bears."

With war imminent, many young dentists were entering the service. The few who were left were too busy to take children, so in

1940 Hawley opened an office in downtown Washington as a double specialist (ortho/pedo). After four years, she limited her practice to orthodontics. About that time she married Horace E. Johnston, a major (non-dentist) in the Surgeon General's office.

Hawley was a member of Omicron Kappa Upsilon (OKU), the Edward H. Angle Society of Orthodontia, and was ABO-certified. She was the first woman secretary (later, president) of the now-defunct Washington-Baltimore Society of Orthodontists.<sup>40</sup> (Hawley, Carlotta A., personal communication, June 7, 1989.)

Dr. Paul Hoffman, Sr., with whom she once shared an office, said that "her work looked like it came straight out of a textbook. As far as I'm concerned, she stood head and shoulders above 80% of the profession." Carlotta Hawley died in 1989 after eleven years of retirement. (Hoffman, Paul, personal communication, July 10, 1989.)

Charles H. Tweed earned his tuition for dental school by working the copper mines of Arizona. Later, he was the only dentist in the town of Ray, where Alice was born, the second of three daughters. After the mine was depleted, the Ray Company moved out. So Alice Tweed's first distinction was being born in a town that no longer exists. From then on, her distinctions were of her own doing.

Unlike Carlotta Hawley's father, who tried to dissuade his daughter from becoming a dentist, Charlie Tweed was determined that one of his children would follow in his footsteps. He and his wife, Elizabeth, were hoping for a boy when Alice was born, so she was nicknamed "Pete." That, plus the fact their two other daughters flatly refused, was how Pete came to carry the torch. She got her first exposure to orthodontics acting as a guinea pig for Charlie's impression-taking.

The Tweeds were frequent visitors to the Angle home in Pasadena, and vice versa. Ten-year-old Pete was the one who told her parents about Edward Angle's death. Later, she became an admirer of Angle's widow, Anna. During high school, she spent her summers in her father's office as a lab and chairside assistant. In 1943, her USC dental class graduated three months early because of the need for dentists in the armed forces. Laying to rest the California and Arizona dental boards only a weekend apart, Alice was ready to rejoin her father, now in Tucson, as a full-fledged dentist. (Later, she passed the Texas board, also on the first try.)

By this time Charles Tweed had attracted a large following and his office had become a mecca for those seeking to learn his technique of extraction treatment. In those days, it was chic to say, "I'm going down to Tucson and spend a couple of weeks with Charlie." Young Dr. Tweed soon found herself in the company of the orthodontic elite. "Charlie expected a great deal of me," she once said. "I was expected to know things by osmosis. He was a real fanatic about cleanliness, which wasn't easy to achieve when doing plaster models." In addition to putting in 48 hours a week at the office, Alice had household duties to share.

After a two-year stint in the navy, where she was one of only two women dentists in that service,<sup>31</sup> Dr. Alice Tweed opened her own office in the affluent Los Angeles suburb of San Marino in order to escape the fierce Arizona summers. Close at hand were Mother Angle, hosting Angle Society meetings in Pasadena, and Cecil Steiner,



**Alice Tweed Peak**

who helped Alice get her practice off the ground.

The going was slow. Alice used up all her savings and went into debt. "I'd just turned the corner financially when I met Joe (D. Peak, a Texas orthodontist) at the first Tweed seminar. Courting long-distance is not easy, and Joe and I saw each other a total of three weeks over a six-month period."

But love overcame her dread of the southwestern sun and in 1948 Joe and Alice Peak settled into their home and practice in Austin. With three children in rapid succession, Alice was able to practice only intermittently or part-time. She and Joe retired in 1980.

Now enjoying her children and five grandchildren, Alice Peak can look back on a life of challenges met and a legacy fulfilled. (Peak, Alice T., personal communication, December 2, 1990.)

#### **Tenderness and skill**

Well, dear, that about covers all the women wirebenders I know of who gained some kind of distinction during the first half of this century, and it seems like a good place to stop. I suspect you got more than you bargained for!

In 1932, when I got out of school, there were only about 21 women orthodontists in the whole United States,<sup>12</sup> representing 2-1/2% of the total. In those days, merely achieving the title "orthodontist" was no small accomplishment. Today you are entering the profession in the company of about 350 (my estimate, including Canada)<sup>41</sup> of your sex. While that seems like a sizable increase, it's gone up only about 1-1/2% in a 60-year period. You and others of your caliber are helping to change that.

It's been a revelation for me, as well. Until you wrote, I hadn't realized how important a part women have played in our profession. While they never became household names, they did the important thing: They served their patients with tenderness and skill. I know you'll do the same.

Your loving grandfather

#### **Author Address**

Norman Wahl, DDS, MS  
166 No. Moorpark Road  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

*The concludes "Orthodontics with a tender touch."  
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