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A Committee of One



Barnabas Day and the Founding of the Ontario Dental Association

The members of Ontario Dental Association owe their success to the vision and perseverance of a single person, Barnabas Day.¹

His ambition and determination to become an outstanding dental practitioner are revealed through this brief story of his life. His writings not only describe the founding of the Ontario Dental Association, but his own adventures in operating a dental practice in the middle of the 19th century.

Barnabas Woster Day was born on July 2, 1833, the son of Calvin and Elizabeth Day. He grew up on a large farm about five miles west of the city of Kingston, Ont.² However, Day was not destined to become a farmer. As he noted, "I attended the country schools as farmers' sons do, but was obliged to leave the farm on account of Spasmodic Asthma and was sent to Newburgh Academy for several terms."³

On November 1, 1855, Day began to study dentistry, articling with Dr. J.P. Sutton of Kingston, "the leading dentist in that part of the country." For his training, Day paid Sutton \$200 for one year. However, Day's training turned out to be sharply abbreviated.

He recalled, "Dr. Sutton was born and raised in the Province of Quebec, near Montreal, then Lower Canada. I do not know with whom he studied. He had practiced in Kingston about twelve years. He was a fine mechanic and



Dr. Day's first office and home at 251
Princess St., Kingston, Ont. as seen today.

was called a genius in his profession. ... I was articled to the Doctor for one year, but he left Kingston sometime in April 1856, and went to Brantford, Ontario, after which I scarcely heard from him, so you will observe I had but six months pupillage. I remonstrated with the Doctor that this was not according to the agreement of our articles. He justified himself by saying that it was useless to remain any longer, that I could (to use his expression) do anything that he could in Laboratory or Operating Room."⁴

Because of Sutton's move, Day was forced to open his own practice. "I commenced practice on my own account in April 1856 in the city of Kingston, feeling somewhat timid in assuming the responsibility. I felt my way carefully and determined to make no mistake, for I knew in my own mind that I was not qualified, but was forced to make up what I did not know with cheek or a bold front."³

Day occupied various offices and homes in Kingston. His listing in the 1857 *City Advertising Directory* read,

Day, B. W., Surgeon Dentist,
over P. Delany's dry goods store,
251 Princess Street.

Day's dental equipment was typical for the period. "My laboratory equipment consisted of a charcoal furnace, anvil, sledge hammer, work bench and a reasonable set of bench tools necessary for gold base plate work, the only material used for artificial dentures at that time (1856-7). My operating, which is unnecessary to say, was limited as to furniture. All instruments consisted of a few long handled burs, rotated between thumb and finger, a little later a stud thimble with a cup in the palm of the hand for pressure. I had a fine set of forceps, much the same as are in use at present, but not the variety. The filling materials consisted of gold and tin foil made in ropes to be stuffed in the cavity prepared by the already described instruments."

In 1858, the ambitious young dentist decided that he required further education and he entered the Medical College in Kingston, Queen's University, graduating as a physician in 1862. However, during this time and after graduation he continued to limit his practice to dentistry.

In 1865, Day had a new office location. His newspaper advertisement read,

B.W. DAY, M.D.,
PHYSICIAN, SURGEON
And
DENTIST
Residence and Office, first door above
Mr. Alex. Bruce's Block
156 PRINCESS STREET, KINGSTON

DENTISTRY — All operations in Dentistry performed
with care and in the most improved style, and warranted
to give satisfaction. Office as above
PRICES MODERATE⁵

During this period, Day travelled to New York to spend six weeks in the office of a "Dr. Allen" to learn how to manufacture "continuous gum," which was a pink porcelain denture material fused to a metal base plate. Later, he recalled, "I then purchased my oven and all the necessary equipment and returned. The introduction of continuous gum in my practice gave me more pleasure and satisfaction than any other system that has been introduced in mechanical dentistry since its introduction."⁶

Day was still living and practising at this location when he decided to form an organization of dentists. The idea came about because of a breakthrough in dental technology — the invention of vulcanite rubber, which could be used to make dentures.

He recalled, "Then rubber was introduced, which afforded an opportunity for the itinerants, which rapidly increased to that extent that I decided to make an effort to ask assistance of the other and older members of the profession to join me in such an undertaking and accordingly I issued a circular to all of the reliable members of the profession in Ontario from Ottawa to Hamilton. The substance of my circular was as follows to each one; 'Will you kindly inform me if you will attend a meeting if notified when and where, to assist in forming an association with the view of incorporating the profession.'"⁷

Day held his meeting at the Queen's Hotel, Toronto, on January 3, 1867. Although Day recalled that, "I had thirteen responses [to my circular] and I think that all attended," in fact only eight other dentists showed up at the meeting. They were D. A. Bogart, Franklin Callender, Curtis S. Chittenden, Antoine Lalonde, John O'Donnell, J. Stuart Scott, M. Edward Snider and Henry Wood.

Although the group was small, Day could take some consolation from the fact there were some influential dentists present. As Henry Wood wrote later, "[It was rather discouraging for those [of us] who had travelled from 150 to 200 miles; but we had men of the right metal, each was determined to do his duty."⁸

Among the dentists, "of the right metal," one was unable to attend the meeting. Nevertheless, the inclusion of George Van Nest Relyea was regarded as so desirable that the nine attendees elected him to membership anyway, "he being unavoidably prevented from attending this meeting."⁹

The outcome of the meeting, Day recalled, was that "The association was formed and I was appointed a committee of one to draft a Bill of Incorporation, which was to be considered at the Cobourg meeting the following summer, which was adopted and presented to the Ontario Legislature of 1867,¹⁰ I think at which session the Bill was presented and passed, incorporating the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario."¹¹

[The primary purpose of forming the Ontario Dental Association (ODA) was to put organized pressure on the government of Ontario to create an Act Regulating Dentistry. When Barnabas Day talks about drafting a Bill of Incorporation, that is what he means. Consequently, it was the successful actions of the ODA that resulted in the Act Respecting Dentistry and the subsequent formation of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario (RCDSO). As a result, all of the members of the RCDSO were members of the ODA. This did not change until the Woods-Gordon reforms of the mid-1960s.

The ODA, after falling apart and reforming as the Ontario Dental Society, was not incorporated until 1920. At that point, the Ontario Dental Society was dissolved and incorporated as the Ontario Dental Association.

Day was rightfully proud of his achievement. In 1898, on the 30th anniversary of the founding of the ODA, he wrote a letter to the *Dominion Dental Journal* saying, "I am proud to know that both the association and the incorporation are in existence today and have done good work in raising the standard of the profession to a grade that it never would otherwise have attained. Now, while I had something to do in bringing this about, it would have been a useless undertaking had I not associated with me those who showed energy and ability, and used it to place the profession where it belonged before the public."¹²

Day's highest approbation, however, came from the members of the association at the ODA meeting at St. Lawrence Hall meeting on January 23, 1868. His colleagues passed a motion that, "Your Committee wishes to record their appreciation of the valuable services of the President, Dr. Day. He has laboured as perhaps few others have done. When success seemed doubtful, he still exerted himself for the elevation of our own specialty, for which he is entitled, as he will receive, the hearty thanks of the whole profession of this Province."¹³ 