



Catherine Morana

How Our Association's Code of Conduct Moulded the Profession

"Very early... the leaders in dentistry realized that an Act did not automatically make a profession — legislation was only an initial advance toward professional stature, and constructive progress depended upon the efforts of dentists themselves."¹

The Ontario Dental Association has established many benchmarks since its inception, including enacting legislation to regulate the practice of dentistry (1868), adopting a resolution requesting the Ontario Board establish a school of dentistry (1875), and establishing an annual scientific session that is still in practice today, in the form of our Annual Spring Meeting (1889-2017).

Less well known is the fact that the Ontario Dental Society (as the ODA was known in its early days) lay dormant for seven years due to in-fighting among members over rules about professional advertising. As the association collapsed, the profession floundered. When the Ontario Dental Society re-formed in 1889, it enacted a Code of Conduct, which would have significant implications for the advancement of the profession as it entered the new century. Members were bound to honour the Code or face expulsion from the Society. At that same meeting, members initiated the Annual Scientific Session. Both these elements would finally set dentistry in the province on the path toward the professionalism it had sought in 1867, when the Ontario Dental Association was formed.²

The story of the re-formation of the ODS in 1889 highlights the role that the dental association plays in improving the standards and professionalism of its members.

Had you been in the City of Toronto in 1877, you would have seen many large billboards "setting forth in fourteen-inch-high letters the names and addresses of dentists who emphasized cheapness and nothing more."³ Nine years had passed since Dr. Barnabas Day and his colleagues had successfully shepherded An Act Respecting Dentistry through Ontario's first parliament on March 3, 1868, yet charlatans and their advertisements abounded. When it came to advertising, the profession was right back where it had been in 1867.

REMOVAL!

Toronto Vitalized Air Parlours:

CHAS. P. LENNOX, Dentist.

Rooms A and B, First Floor,

ARCADE BUILDING, - YONGE ST., TORONTO.

Having removed to the Arcade building, I have spared no expense in fitting up my office with every convenience and appliance necessary to the accommodation of my patients.

My prices remain the same :

CHEAP TEETH ON RUBBER,	-	-	\$6.00
BEST " " "	-	-	8.00
" ON CELLULOID	-	-	10.00

My Gold Fillings are unsurpassed and warranted for ten years. Vitalized Air used for extracting, guaranteed safe and painless.

Pamphlet for Toronto's Arcade Guide, 1870
(The "Vitalized Air" Dr. Lennox was offering was simply nitrous oxide.)
Courtesy Toronto Public Library Archives.

The Beginnings

When Canada was first settled, there were few dentists. Barber-surgeons existed in the “Province of Quebec” (as Canada was first known), but they had their activities limited in 1788 by Quebec’s Medicine Act.⁴

In 1795, the new Parliament of Upper Canada passed legislation restricting the practice of medicine to qualified practitioners. But in 1806, the legislation was repealed, as it prevented “many remotely scattered people from choosing whom they liked to draw their teeth, bleed and blister them!”⁵ Many residents in Upper Canada relied on the services of local “tooth pullers,” that is anyone who possessed an instrument and claimed some proficiency in pulling a tooth. In rural areas, this practitioner was often a local farmer.⁶ In towns, tooth pulling was offered by many tradespeople, including but not limited to, blacksmiths, gunsmiths, druggists and candy makers.

By the mid 1840s, new apprentices were arriving from Europe who practised dentistry under scientific principles learned through the publication of Pierre Fauchard’s 1728 text, *Le Chirurgien dentiste*. By 1867, you could separate dentists into two categories: those with some professional training and the “quacks.” The latter would travel from town to town duping patients by outrageous claims and offering to extract teeth for ridiculously low prices.⁷ Amidst such advertisements, the professional dentist struggled for legitimacy.

As we know, on January 3, 1867, Dr. Barnabas Day and eight dentists met at the Queen’s Hotel in Toronto to form a professional association and incorporate the profession. In March 1868, An Act Respecting Dentistry passed its third reading in the Ontario Legislature, becoming the first legislation in the world to grant dentists self-regulation. Enforcing the Act, however, was a problem, and for the next 22 years, the profession would struggle to control quack advertisements.

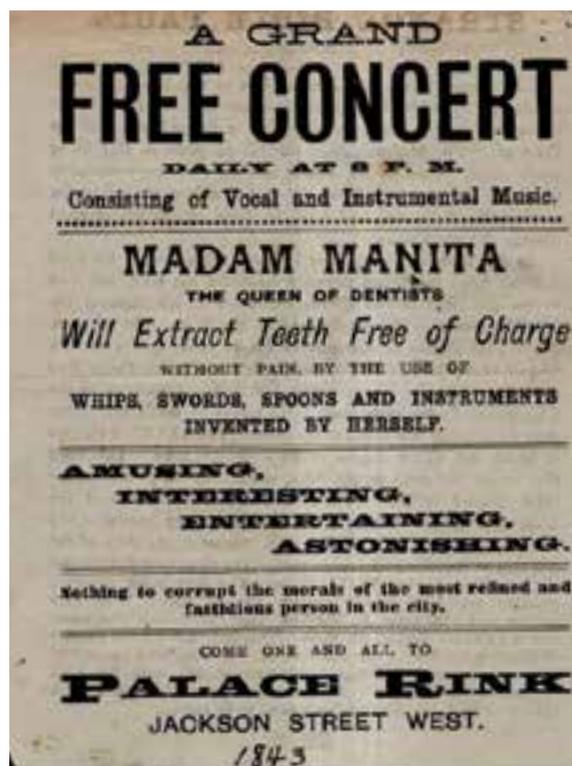
The problem lay with the Dental Act itself, which permitted anyone engaged in dental practice for five years or more to receive a licence. At the July 25, 1877, meeting of the ODS, the newly elected President, Dr. Bosanko, read a paper on dental ethics “...in which the evils of advertising low fees, and specialties in treatment together with the assumption of titles were dealt with.”⁸ He wanted the Society to work together to stop this quackery, and proposed a constitution and a code of ethics to which all members should adhere.⁹

Dr. Willmott pointed out “that the largest percentage of the offenders consisted of those who were practising dentistry before the era of Canadian legislation on dentistry.”¹⁰ Dr. Chittenden noted that, “as the offenders were not members of the Society, the Society could do no more than bring moral pressure to bear upon them.”¹¹ Despite the creation of a dental school in 1875 and the

hiring of a detective, Mr. William Smith, to locate those who were practising illegal dentistry, the problem of charlatans persisted.

An advertisement in *The Globe* on July 19, 1883, illustrates how lax the situation had become. Two dentists, named Riggs and Ivory, advertised teeth sets for five dollars, while offering “painless extraction” through the use of gas and “vitalized air.” Above this advertisement was a disclaimer by H. Hipkins, LDS, wishing to correct rumours spread by interested parties of his imminent departure to Florida. In October 1883, even former ODS President C.P. Lennox became involved in a controversy when he laid claim to exclusive rights to the “Vitalized Air” apparatus, which allowed painless extraction of teeth. Some offense must have been taken, since the public was warned in print that someone was falsely claiming to offer this copyrighted process.

By 1883, divisions among ODS members had deepened, especially since some of the chief culprits behind the problems were officers of the Society. There is no record of the ODS meeting in 1883, and the Society collapsed, a victim of an over-reliance on the *Dental Act* to regulate the profession.¹² But on June 27, 1889, in London, Ont., 46 dentists met to re-form the Ontario Dental Society. The first item on the agenda was to present a Code of Conduct. All those in attendance signed the Code, which dealt largely with unprofessional advertising.



An advertisement from a Hamilton newspaper, 1843. Thanks to Dr. Ann Dale at the Museum of Dentistry, U of T.

THE CODE

I shall not be guilty of any unprofessional conduct more especially in the manner of advertising.
The following shall be deemed unprofessional advertising:

- 1st Hand-bills, or circulars distributed on the streets or through the newspapers
- 2nd Advertisements in the newspapers offering to do Dental Work at certain prices
- 3rd Advertising as the only Dentist using certain process or processes either in Operative or Prosthetic Dentistry
- 4th Advertising to extract teeth free on certain dates
- 5th Advertising by the use of photography, lithographs or engravings made from steel, wood or other material
- 6th Advertising by the use of Show Cases placed at office door or window or exhibited at public fairs or in any public place displaying specimens of the work done by the exhibitor
- 7th Advertising as being superior to all other Dentists
- 8th Advertising to do work at reduced rates

Dental Showcases

Dental showcases were public display cases exhibited most frequently at the entrance of a dental practice. Designed to draw in patrons, they featured dental specimens, including dentures, teeth, impressions and all manner of the dentist's handiwork.

Dental showcases had been a source of conflict between learned members of the profession and quack dentists since 1869. Many deplored the carnival-like aspects of the displays and felt that, like irresponsible advertisements, the showcases degraded the profession.

In 1869, Dr. W.G. Beers, Editor of the *Canada Journal of Dental Science*, urged a colleague not to set up a showcase outside his office to compete with a new dentist who had erected one nearby. Instead, Beers advised him to place his specimens in his office, since a dental showcase at his door would mark him as a quack.

Beers' editorial remarks were prescient: "Have we the power to prevent their use? We think not. The law cannot step in and dictate how a man shall advertise. No code, but one of ethics adopted by the Society ... can affect the question and only when the users of showcases are members."¹³

Twenty years later, the ODA's Code of Conduct, would ban its members from using showcases to attract clients.



"A Living Sign on Fifth Avenue." Franklin's Dental Parlor,
New York City, 1905.
Photo used with permission of Shorpy Images.

The First Annual Scientific Session

On June 27, 1889, the ODS held its first Annual Scientific Session in the dental parlours of Drs. Harry Abbott, Frederick Harvey and Laughlin McDonald, on Dundas Street, in London, Ont.

The need for dentists to learn about emerging technologies was a powerful incentive for them to attend the ODS scientific sessions — and to adhere to the Code: in order to participate in the learning sessions, dentists had to commit to the new Code of Conduct or risk expulsion.¹⁴ While the ODS had held many earlier scientific sessions, this one would mark the commitment to an annual event, which still is held today in the form of the ODA Annual Spring Meeting.

The scientific sessions promoted discussion and learning among ODS members, while the Code of Conduct promoted a common standard of professional behavior. When the ODS held its annual meeting in Barrie, Ont., on July 21-23, 1891, it brought charges against three members of the association for violating the Code of Conduct. Both the Code of Conduct and the scientific sessions served to elevate the profession and promote mutual co-operation and an improved understanding among association members. 📄

References

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3. Gullet DW. *A History of Dentistry in Canada*. University of Toronto Press; 1971.
4. Naylor CD. *Private Practice, Public Payment, Canadian Medicine and the Politics of Health Insurance 1911-1966*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP; 1986.
5. Canniff W. *The Medical Profession in Upper Canada 1783-1850*. W. Briggs; 1884
6. Herrington WS. *Pioneer Life Among the Loyalists in Upper Canada*. Toronto. MacMillan, 1915.
7. Shosenberg J. *The Rise of the Ontario Dental Association, 125 Years of Organized Dentistry*. Toronto: Ontario Dental Association; 1991



London, Ont., was the site of the ODS's first scientific session. Clinics were held in the offices of Drs. Harry Abbott, Frederick Harvey and Laughlin McDonald.
Above, the corner office of Dr. Harry Abbott, 401½ Richmond Street at the corner of Dundas and Richmond Streets looking east, London, Ont., 1883. Courtesy of Toronto Public Library.

8. Ontario Dental Society: Ninth Annual Meeting. *The Globe* (1844-1936); July 25, 1877; (Proquest Historical Newspapers: *The Globe and Mail* pg. 4)
9. Being newly elected, perhaps Dr. Bosanko did not know that the Association already had an existing constitution and a commitment to a code of ethics — that of the American Dental Association. These records were either mislaid or forgotten.
10. Ontario Dental Society: Ninth Annual Meeting. *The Globe* (1844-1936); July 25, 1877; (Proquest Historical Newspapers: *The Globe and Mail* pg. 4)
11. *Ibid*
12. Shosenberg J. *The Rise of the Ontario Dental Association, 125 Years of Organized Dentistry*. Toronto: Ontario Dental Association; 1991.
13. *Ibid*

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