

History of the International Association of Paediatric Dentistry Part 2: Early events in the USA – the American Society of Dentistry for Children

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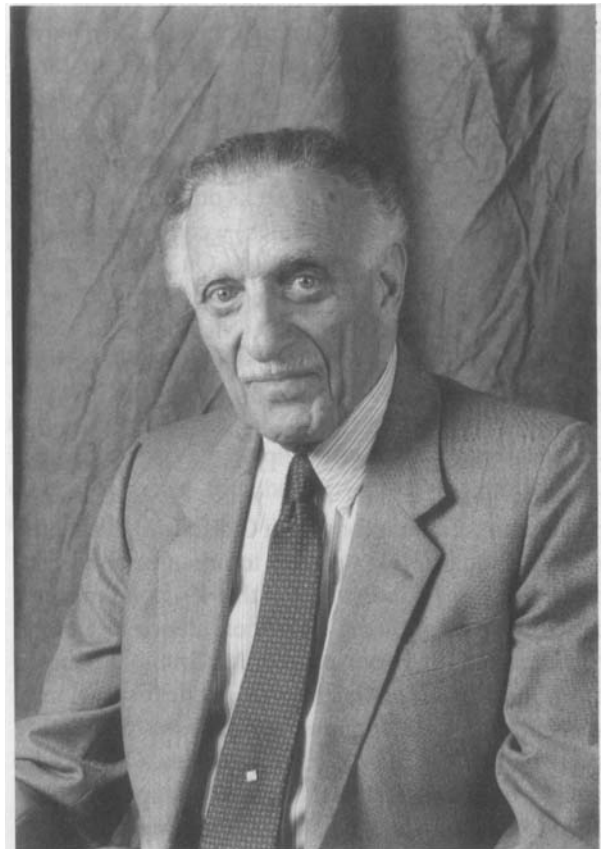
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Samuel (Sam) David Harris is a man never to be forgotten in the annals of children's dentistry. Upon qualification from Ann Arbor Dental School in 1924, he immediately enrolled at the Forsyth Dental Infirmary for Children, which had opened in Boston in 1914 to provide dental treatment for children. It was the first institution of its kind in the world.

The Rochester Dental Dispensary in Rochester, New York, opened 3 years later, financed by George Eastman, founder of the Eastman Kodak Company and the principal employer in the city of Rochester. Eastman supported the oral care of children as early as 1909. The Rochester Dental Society had established one of the first free dental clinics in the world, originally designed to serve poor adults as well as disadvantaged children, and, impressed by the work of the clinic, Eastman gave his strong support. When the Rochester Dental Dispensary opened in October 1917 its director was Dr Harvey J. Burkhart. Eastman wanted the Dispensary to care for all the indigent children of Rochester. In 1941 the institution was renamed the Eastman Dental Dispensary, which in 1965 became the Eastman Dental Center.

Eastman decided to open similar clinics in other countries and asked Burkhart to oversee their establishment. The Eastman Dental Hospital was opened in London, England in 1930, followed by the Instituto Superiore di Odontoiatria George Eastman in Rome, Italy in 1933; the Institut Dentaire G. Eastman in Brussels, Belgium in 1935; the Eastman Institutet in Stockholm, Sweden in 1936; and the Institut d'Hygien Dentaire et de Stomatologie in Paris in 1937. Burkhart



Dr Samuel D. Harris: 'father' of children's dentistry organizations world-wide.

dedicated all the new clinics as they opened and supervised their operations.

Sam Harris and the other graduate students at the Forsyth Dental Infirmary were eager to learn about dentistry for children, at a time when many American

dentists had notices in their reception rooms stating: "Children under 12 are not accepted in this office." Harris had discussions with DeWitt Cross (Director of the Forsyth), Frank Delabarre (an Instructor), Ed Sullivan and other Faculty members, who encouraged him to contact known enthusiasts of children's dentistry about the advisability of organizing a national society. On 8 December 1926 Harris wrote to a number of dentists to test their reactions, stating that he hoped to call a meeting in the following year during the American Dental Association convention in Detroit, his home town.

DeWitt Cross gave Harris a letter of introduction to A. C. Thompson, Director of Detroit's Dental Department of Health. With his encouragement, a *Detroit Pedodontic Study Club* was created on 14 December 1926. Walter McBride became President, Thomas C. Bartholomew was Vice-President and Harris was Secretary. Of the 14 original members of the Detroit Club, three restricted their practices to children, three to periodontics, three to pedodontics plus periodontics and one to orthodontics; two were in general practice and two were employed by the City Board of Health. Meetings were held every 3 weeks during the summer months and four table clinics were prepared for showing at the ADA convention. On 13 September 1927 the Club gave hearty support to Harris's efforts to organize a national society. McBride and Swift were nominated to help Harris in taking forward the proposal.

Meanwhile, Harris received replies to his letter dated 8 December 1926. Thomas B. McCrumb reported that he had met with 11 well-known pedodontists (all but four from California) during the ADA meeting in Los Angeles to organize an *American Society of Pedodontia*, but that a second meeting called for the following ADA conference in Denver had attracted only four people; McCrumb attributed this failure to the fact that insufficient dentists actually specialized in pedodontics, as opposed to treating some children in their general practices. Others who replied to Harris stated that membership should be open to all dentists interested in the care of children.

Harris wrote to more people on 14 December 1927 and there was correspondence in the dental journals. Paul Barker enclosed the constitution and by-laws of the defunct *American Society of Pedodontia* and a list of those people who had joined it. An encouraging letter came from Louis Ottofy, described by Harris as a "gentleman of the old school" who had come to the USA from his native Hungary. In describing his 50

years of practice since 1877, Ottofy claimed that he was the first person in the history of dentistry to make a thorough dental examination of school children, in the year 1882.

Mary Martin from San Francisco, a former associate of Evangeline Jordan, the "grand first lady of dentistry for children", reported that there was an active group in the Bay region. William Rice, Dean of Tufts, said that, in his opinion, the children's dentistry "branch of dentistry surpasses all others in importance". B. Edward Kells, the first dentist to use dental x-rays, wrote: "I am first, last and always for taking care of children's teeth, so I would naturally be heart and soul with any movement in that direction." H. C. Puckett of Seattle, Washington, claimed to be the first dentist in the North West United States to limit his practice to pedodontics. He and many others wrote in support of Harris.

On 13 September 1927 Harris sent a draft constitution and by-laws to Paul A. Barker (Denver, Colorado), Harvey J. Burkhart (Rochester, New York), H. Dewitt Cross (Boston, Massachusetts), William R. Davis (Lansing, Michigan), Frank A. Delabarre (Boston, Massachusetts), Floyd E. Hogeboom (Los Angeles, California), Thaddeus P. Hyatt (Wayne, Maine), Thomas B. McCrumb (Kansas City, Missouri), Louis Ottofy (Chicago, Illinois), F. Blaine Rhobotham (Chicago, Illinois), Phil R. Thomas (Minneapolis, Minnesota) and Harris R. C. Wilson (Cleveland, Ohio). A second draft was based on their responses and a poster invited ADA registrants to a meeting on 26 October. The 56 people who attended unanimously agreed to establish a new organization. Thaddeus Hyatt was elected as temporary President with Sam Harris as temporary Secretary. Subsequently, Walter C. McBride was elected as permanent President with F. Blaine Rhobotham as Vice President and Harris as Secretary-Treasurer. The proposed constitution and by-laws were adopted except that the name originally proposed, the American Association of Pedodontists, was changed to the *American Society for the Promotion of Children's Dentistry* (ASPCD).

In 1927 there was a range of titles for children's dentists: pedodontist, peditontist, pediadontist and paedadontist. Harris has described how, in those days, a pedodontist was regarded as one who, "because of his peculiar interest in serving children, did not quite 'measure up'". There was an attitude amongst both public and profession that any service for children featured a "half-rate performance for

fourth-rate recompense". Many of today's paediatric dentists will still recognize that attitude among some colleagues.

State units

The first issue of the *Review of Dentistry for Children*, published in November 1933, discussed the value of State units as a means of encouraging wider representations within the national organization. In particular, active study clubs were suggested as a way of involving people. Harris took up this point when he organized a *Michigan Society of Dentistry for Children* at the State Dental Society Meeting in 1931. In the following year, as President of the ASPCD, Harris stimulated further formation of units in Louisiana, New York, Massachusetts, Georgia and California (two units). These first seven official State units were inducted into the national society at its 1933 Chicago convention; by 1940, there were 20 such units. In 1993 there were 21 units, indicating that near saturation point had been reached by 1940. At each annual convention the official unit delegates and alternates met with the national council at a special session to report on their activities, types of programmes, ways of arousing interest and methods for increasing membership. It was only later that membership in the national society was declared mandatory for membership in a State unit. In 1940 the name of the national society was changed to the *American Society of Dentistry for Children* (ASDC). Its membership rose from 67 in 1927 to 144 in 1932 and to 7200 by 1993. So the ASDC went from strength to strength. In

addition to its national interests the Society helped to promote developments elsewhere.

Journal of Dentistry for Children

It is important for members of any association to communicate their ideas and developments with each other. *The Review of Dentistry for Children* was first published in November 1933, and its founder and first editor was Sam Harris. As Dr C. N. Johnson, the Editor of the *American Dental Association Journal* wrote in his journal in 1933: "Each month, every one of us who is in dentistry for children looks forward with the greatest anticipation to the arrival of the *Review* and it is safe to say that there is no other periodical in the profession that is so uniformly read among its constituents from cover to cover ... all I need to say is – continued power to it."

The *Review* became the *ASDC Journal of Dentistry for Children* in 1941. By 1952, four State units were also publishing a periodical. In 1966 it became a bi-monthly journal and today it is received in approximately 175 countries by dental schools, hospitals, dental societies and individuals. Over the years it has set a wonderful example for other countries to follow.

American Academy of Pedodontics

A further major development was the establishment in August 1947 of the American Academy of Pedodontics. Although the Academy and the ASDC are independent organizations, they have worked closely over the years for the betterment of children's dentistry.



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