

Preface

This supplement commemorates the sesquicentennial of the American Otological Society (AOS), the second oldest medical society in America. Eminent historian Arnold J. Toynbee, grandson of 19th century London otologist Joseph Toynbee who is widely credited as the father of scientific otology, famously said that “Some historians hold that history is just one damned thing after another.” Our goal in assembling this monograph is to illuminate more than merely the dates and facts surrounding the early years of the AOS but rather to delve into the motivations of the founder generation and to describe the ingenious ways they strove to bring comfort to their patients despite the limitations of their day.

Many aspects of the history of the society have been preserved in the Transactions of the AOS which began with the formation of the Society in 1868 and was published annually as a bound volume for 138 years through 2006 with the exception of the war years of 1943 and 1945. The Transactions include many the seminal works in otology and represent a time capsule of the state-of-the-art during the later half of the 19th and throughout the 20th centuries. Two earlier histories, primarily upon material preserved in the Transactions, were published by the Society at its 100th and 125th years. For those interested, the full text of the entire Transactions run and the two earlier society histories are available online at the Society’s website (americanotologicalsociety.org).

The goal of the present compendium is to extend earlier AOS histories by considering a wide spectrum of contemporary sources beyond the Transactions. This more comprehensive perspective helps to put the emergence of otology as a specialty into the context of medical knowledge at the time in relation to the roots of modern surgery with seminal advancements such as the introduction of antisepsis and anesthesia. The foundation of the AOS was influenced by the beginnings of specialized medical practice in America and the nascent specialty organizations it spawned. The monograph begins with new insights into the fascinating story of how, why, and by whom the society was formed. It continues with descriptions of the state of otological practice and hearing testing during the first quarter century of the AOS (1868-1893). Perspectives into the AOS official publications over its 150 years and its many contributions to otological education and research are explored. The belated, but increasing role of women in the specialty is described. The concluding paper gives a perspective on the scientific contributions of the AOS over the most recent quarter century and a provides a glimpse into the prospects for future evolution of the field in the 21st century.

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About the cover

The official Seal of the American Otological Society (AOS) was adopted in 1960. The dominant image is symbolic. A scribe records knowledge on a large volume while a youthful student holds an oil lamp, evocative of learning and wisdom. A traditional wand of Aesculapius with a staff (walking stick) enwrapped by a single serpent is depicted as opposed to the more common caduceus which has two snakes coiled around a winged staff. (1) The Ocean House Hotel in Newport, Rhode Island, was the location of the organizational meeting of the American Otological Society on Wednesday, July 22, 1868. Daniel Bennet St. John Roosa (1838-1908) of New York was the driving force behind the formation of the

AOS. Cover page of the 1st volume of the AOS Transactions (1868-1874). Examination of the ear via sunlight reflected off of a hand held mirror from Roosa’s 1874 otological text. (2)

References

1. Taylor GD. History of the seal of the Society. Transactions of the American Otological Society (Centennial Meeting), Vol LXVII. 1979, 112-113.
2. Roosa DBSJ. A Practical Treatise on the Disease of the Ear Including the Anatomy of the Organ. New York: William Wood & Company; 1874.