Franklin Bache, MD

Acupuncture 1826

“And what we can learn from our forefathers”

By John Howard, L.Ac., Dipl. Ac
Stephanie Lashmit, AAS
Some time ago a colleague of mine proposed a question to me. I had to stop and think about it for a minute. Her question was “when was acupuncture first used in the United States?” After thinking about it I too I was curious to hear your answers. If you answered 1826 (we would have even accepted anytime in the 1820’s) you would be correct. That leads me to my next question, or should I say questions; did you know this? If not why don’t they teach this in every acupuncture school around the country? Before I answer the above questions let me first start off with most know or believe about acupuncture in the United States.
It’s well known in the American acupuncture community that President Richard Nixon helped usher in the acupuncture boom when he established diplomatic relations with the Peoples Republic of China in 1972. Some believe that this was the birth of acupuncture in the United States. Maybe the rebirth, but acupuncture had a long rich history before President Nixon's trip to China in February of 1972.
The Operation that started it all, or did it?

It would safe to say that it wasn't till James Reston, a journalist for the New York Times, wrote about this use of acupuncture in China did it take hold in this country. In July of 1971 Mr. Reston was in China with the President’s national security advisor Henry Kissinger as he was making final arrangements for the president’s trip the following year.
On the morning of July 12th 1971, Mr. Reston noticed a pain in his groin and by that evening he had a temperature of 103 degrees. The next day he checked into the Anti-Imperialist Hospital in Peking (now called the Peking Union Medical College Hospital as of 1985 its original name). Mr. Rexton was diagnosed with acute appendicitis and had his appendix surgically removed that day. Two days later, Mr. Rexton received acupuncture for his post surgical pain. Most acupuncturists have heard this account before, but most don’t know much about this hospital.
President Richard Nixon personal physician, W. Kenneth Riland, DO wrote the following about acupuncture

“I’m afraid that many doctors will attempt to use acupuncture for a therapeutic effect with limited (or practically no) knowledge and a lot of damage will be done”

Desert Sun, Number 266, 10 June 1972
All of the presidents men

Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller serviced as President Gerald Fords Vice President from 1974 to 1977 when Richard Nixon left office. Nelson Rockefeller father, John D. Rockefeller Jr. Had a hand in the history Of acupuncture as you will see. Enter the Rockefeller foundation.
In 1913, the Rockefeller Foundation was created to oversee all the grant-giving programs of the Rockefeller family. A top priority on their list was establishing a school that would introduce American-style medical science to Asia. In 1914 China Medical Board launched as the second major program of the newly established Rockefeller Foundation to put the ideas of the China Medical Commission Study into practice.
The Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) in Peking was comprised of 14 hospital, medical school, and laboratory buildings. The school was modeled after Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and completed in 1921.
The Board of Trustees at PUMC

Meeting of the first Board of Trustees, September 1921

Fourteen members of the Board of Trustees, including John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Chairman of the Board, Martin Ryerson from the University of Chicago.
In 1924 PUMC scientists discover and isolate ephedrine from the Chinese herb mahuang (*ephedra sinica*).
What's my Roll in American Acupuncture

The best doctor gives the least medicines-

Benjamin Franklin
In the beginning of the 19th century, acupuncture was the dernier cri throughout Europe. By the early 1820’s, acupuncture articles started to appear in American medical journals and physicians in the US began to take notice of acupuncture experiments that were taking place in Europe. There was special interest taken in the literature coming out of France.
In 1825, Franklin Bache, MD (the great-grandson of Benjamin Franklin) translated (from French) the work of J. Morand, *Mémoire sur l'acupuncture* (Memory on acupuncture). Bache also wrote the first research paper on acupuncture in the USA. Thus the connection to the founding fathers of the United States of America. Acupuncture is as American as Apple pie.

While translating Morand’s book, Bache decided to try acupuncture. He was an assistant physician at the state penitentiary in Philadelphia. Bache chose 12 patients to treat, who were all in extreme pain and suffered from the following conditions: three with muscular rheumatism, four with “chronic pains,” three with neuralgia, and two with ophthalmia.

In James H Cassidy’s article titled: “Early uses of acupuncture in the United States, with an addendum (1826) by Franklin Bache, M.D.”
Bache concluded that acupuncture caused no harm to his patients. Most experienced relief from their pain, in a few cases there was no change at all. In some cases needle insertion would cause moderate to severe pain before relief was achieved.

Between 1825 and 1826 Bache treated 17 more patients with acupuncture. This time, not all of the patients were inmates. Those 17 patients suffered from the following ailments: headaches, fever, elbow tumors and pulmonary inflammation. Bache reported the following results.

7- patients were cured
7- patients were considerably relieved
3- patients reported little to no relief

In conclusion Bache reported that acupuncture had remarkable power for “removing and mitigating pain.”
Observations From Bache’s paper

Bache concludes his paper by addressing why he did not go into the philosophy behind his acupuncture nor needle insertion. He refers the reader to his translation of Dr. Morand’s “Mémoire sur l'acupuncture.”

To read Bache’s full report click here

Even though Bache didn’t address the philosophy behind his acupuncture treatments, it was obvious that he used mainly local points. With some of his patients he would start off by inserting the needle right in the of pain. For some of his patients the pain was too much and Bache had to withdraw the needle. He also experimented with needle retention. In a few cases Bache retained the needles in for 1 to 1.5 hours. In other cases he would retain the needles in from 3 to 10 hours and in two cases the needles were retained in for 24 hours. Bache discovered that some patients responded better when needles were left in for longer periods of time.
Bache might have been the most active physician performing acupuncture during this time but he was not the only one.

In 1826, J. Hunter Ewing, a physician from Philadelphia, PA reported great success when he used acupuncture to relieve and cure his patients of neuralgia. Later that year Ewing published his results in *North American Medical and surgical Journal* 3 (1826) 77-78.

According to Cassidy, there were two unpublished medical theses on acupuncture in 1826. One by Thomas A. Elliott in South Carolina and the other by John Jefferson Hall from the University of Pennsylvania. Although we can only document acupuncture starting in 1825, it most likely started before that in America. Both Bache and Elliott mentioned other physicians that had more experience in using acupuncture. Bache thanked his friend Dr. Harris for his guidance on treating the group of 12 patients. While Elliott referred to a Prof Dickerson whom he observed treating a patient with ophthalmia.
Elliott also made an reference to Prof Ramsey and wrote the following, “to whom I am much indebted for a number of cases on which I have experimented.” Elliott also noted a certain galvanic phenomena, “when holding the needle in his fingers.

Even though all three physicians (Dr. Harris, Prof Dickerson and Prof Ramsey) used acupuncture a number of times, none published any articles on the topic.

From Acupuncture to Elector Acupuncture

In 1829 the American edition of Tavernier’s *Elements of Operative Surgery* published three pages on how and when one might perform not only acupuncture but also ‘electro-acupuncture’. In 1853 Dr. Holl from York County Hospital in Pennsylvania used DC though acupuncture needles to treat a longstanding nonunion of tibia fracture.
In 1836 William M. Lee of Indian Town, South Carolina writes about his use of acupuncture over the past 6 years (1830 – 1836.)

Lee used acupuncture to treat several cases of rheumatism. He reported that needle insertion caused minor pain, gave quick results, and the needles were easily accessible. Lee wrote that acupuncture was “entitled to far more attention than it has yet received in the United States.”

One acupuncture needle in the 1820’s from England (sold by S. Maw in an ivory case) cost one shilling. To give you an understanding of the cost, one shilling equals 12 pence. While the current currency of England today the Pound contains 20 pence.
What Acupuncture looked like in the 1820’s

The needles shown here are made from steel sewing needles, and are equipped with ivory handles.
In 1835 George Washington Carpenter, owner of G.E.O Chemical Warehouse, sold acupuncture needles through his catalog. By all accounts GEO.W Carpenter’s Chemical Warehouse was the first American company to sell acupuncture needles. Carpenter’s catalog also listed moxa under the treatment of chronic rheumatism as (Carpenter 1844 n.p).

Carpenter’s medical adviser listed Robley Dunglison’s book “New Remedies” (1839) as a source. Carpenter was a smart business man and would not sell acupuncture needles and moxa if they didn’t sell. When Carpenter died in 1860 he owned over 400 properties and was one of 7 millionaires living in Philadelphia at the time.
Bache may have been the most active acupuncturist of the 19th century but Dr. Robley Dunglison was the most well known. Enter the most prominent acupuncturist of the time.

Robley Dunglison was an English-born physician who studied medicine in England, Scotland, France, and received his medical degree in 1823 from the University of Erlangen in Germany. The following year, Thomas Jefferson asked him to join the first faculty at the University of Virginia as a professor of anatomy and medicine.
Dunglison, who was considered the "Father of American Physiology," served as Thomas Jefferson’s personal physician. He was at Jefferson’s side during his final illness. Presidents Madison, Monroe and Jackson also sought medical advice from Dunglison.

In 1843, Dunglison reported on his use and experimentation with acupuncture. In one report Dunglison’s advocated using larger than average needles to drain off fluid from the cellular membrane in anasarca. Starting in 1839 Dunglison published in New Remedy's, an eight page account on acupuncture. For the next seven editions (the last one in 1856) this account appeared almost unchanged.

Dunglison mentions the use of acupuncture needles made from stainless steel, silver, gold and platina (platinum.) The stainless steel needles he describes have a handle made of lead or wax to “prevent it from being forced entirely into the body.” This seems to be a predecessor to the modern J type needle. He describes the steps of needle introduction by first stretching the skin and inserting the needle by applying gentle pressure while rotating it in both directions.
Ear Acupuncture (*Ear Cauterization*) Arrives in America

With the discoveries of medical anesthesia in the 1840’s, acupuncture articles started to disappear from medical journals. A search of the Surgeon General’s library index catalog from 1850 to 1900 showed only 6 references to acupuncture published in American medical literature during that time. No such reference appeared in Edward Warren’s Civil War surgical manual “An Epitome of Practical Surgery, for Field and Hospital,” where acupuncture was used to stop hemorrhaging.

In 1850 Dr. ROLKER of Cincinnati, USA (*spelled Dr. in some RÜLKER publications*) mentioned cauterization of the helix as a good treatment for sciatica – employing the method of J. F. MALGAIGNE (*Cauterization on the ear as a treatment for sciatica. Journal Medicine Chirugicale. June 1850*).
1822 Articles on acupuncture started to appear in American Medical journals.

1825 Bache translated *Mémoire sur l'acupuncture* from French.

Bache tested acupuncture on 12 prisoners.

1826 Bache published his research titled: *Cases illustrative of the remedial effects of acupuncture* in a North American Medical and Surgical Journal 1: 311-21, 1826.

J. Hunter Ewing reports using acupuncture on neuralgia patients.

Edward J. Coxe, D. T. Coxe and Samuel Jackson experiment with using acupuncture to bring drowning victims back from the dead. They were unsuccessful and gave up in disgust.
The American edition of Taversnier’s *Elements of Operative Surgery* published 3 pages on how and when to perform acupuncture, as well as the stimulation operation Electroacupuncture.

William M. Lee writes about his use of acupuncture for 6 years.


Dunglison published his findings with the use of acupuncture in 7 articles.

First use of ear acupuncture in the U.S. is documented by Dr. Rolker of Cincinnati, Ohio.

William Osler worked to keep the practice of acupuncture alive in the U.S.

First use of electro-acupuncture in the U.S. is documented.
As my co-author and I were doing research for this article, we noticed some uncanny coincidences.

First was Franklin Bache. His last name is pronounce the same way as the famous Dutch painter Hieronymus Jerome Bosch.

In Dr. Paul Nogier’s first book Treatise of Auriculotherapy, the author starts off with a detail from the “hell” panel of Bosch’s triptych The Garden of Earthly Delights. Dr. Nogier was French and the first book on acupuncture in America was the one that Franklin Bache translated from French.

Second is our connection to George Washington Carpenter, the first person to sell acupuncture needles in the US. Carpenter lived in Germantown, PA while my co-author and I live in Germantown, MD.
References:


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