

## Orthodontic profiles: Martin Dewey

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**T**he world is a stage upon which each person plays a part, but only a very few qualify to play leading roles. Martin Dewey was one of the latter.

He was born in 1881 near Kingman, Kansas, where his family had settled after leaving their home near Dowagiac, Michigan, during the great migration which followed the Civil War. (In later years Dr. Dewey made it possible for his widowed mother to spend her summers in Michigan, when he purchased for her a home on the shores of Dewey Lake, near which the family had lived before moving to Kansas.)

Life was rugged on the Kansas plains during Dr. Dewey's youth. There were no farm price supports in those days, and it was plainly a constant battle to exist. That kind of environment helped to develop the tenacity of purpose and the desire to succeed which were to become so characteristic of Martin Dewey. Dr. Dewey's choice of a career was probably influenced by the fact that his father was a pioneer dentist.

In 1899, following completion of his preliminary college education at the Wichita (Kansas) Normal School, Dewey enrolled in the Keokuk (Iowa) Dental College. (This school later was consolidated with the University of Iowa.) Following his graduation in 1902, he entered one of the first classes of the Angle School of Orthodontia in St. Louis, Missouri. After completion of his studies under Dr. Angle, he was selected by the latter to teach in subsequent sessions of the Angle School. Dr. Dewey's connection with the Angle School did not require all of his time so, eager student that he was, he proceeded to earn an M.D. degree by attending medical school in St. Louis. He later discontinued his connection with the Angle School of Orthodontia and established a private practice of orthodontics in Kansas City, Missouri, at a time when the future of orthodontics was highly questionable.

He was a talented and experienced teacher, and it was not long until he became a member of the faculty of the Kansas City Dental School. In this role as faculty member, he soon gained recognition as a teacher, debater, and writer on subjects pertaining to dentistry. His



**Martin Dewey, DDS, MD; author, teacher, leader, and orthodontic pioneer.**

reputation soon radiated and he became an international figure in dentistry.

It was at about this period in his career that Martin Dewey developed into a talented public speaker. He learned to gain and hold the attention of an audience; he attained confidence in himself; he knew full well what he wanted to say, and never was he at a loss for words to say it. In a word, he stood out as a talented man and teacher. Many were heard to observe, after listening to Dr. Dewey in debate, that if he had chosen the profession of Blackstone for a career instead of dentistry, he undoubtedly would have become equally eminent. He was a stickler for facts as being the important thing in any situation; on this basis he later discussed many of the important issues of his profession, and his discussions always reflected clear thinking and an amazing fund of information.

While a member of the faculty of the Kansas City School, Dewey was instrumental in establishing a chapter (Delta Rho) of the Psi Omega dental fraternity. This proved to be not just a social organization, but a vigorous study club where every dental subject was

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reviewed and discussed, often more interestingly than in the classroom. The subject of orthodontics being his foremost interest, he usually channeled the discussion of nearly every collateral subject, be it biology, embryology, or other subjects, and managed to create a tie-in with an orthodontic application. As a result of the Dewey inspiration, several of the undergraduate students of that period later became specialists in orthodontics and contributed to the creation of orthodontics as a specialty.

There was never enough time to accomplish all that Dewey wanted to do, hence, he was seldom seen without a book under his arm for study. His photographic memory was as amazing as some of the modern exhibits seen on television today.

Time was limited for teaching orthodontics to undergraduate students; however, since the Angle indoctrination and the Angle School experience, Dewey's mind was on orthodontics and orthodontic teaching so some of his close friends and early students urged him to establish a special course for graduates in orthodontics. The first session of the Dewey School of Orthodontics was held at the Dental School in Kansas City, Missouri, in the summer of 1911. The school was successful; however, it was moved to Chicago, Illinois, in 1917 and then on to New York City two years later. This school continued to hold annual sessions under Dr. Dewey's personal supervision until his death in 1933. Many of the original orthodontists secured their basic training in this full-time ten-week course. The Dewey students soon organized an alumni group which held annual meetings for a number of years.

In reviewing the professional career of Martin Dewey, one is soon struck by the impact of a preponderance of evidence that here was not only one of the important pioneers of the orthodontic specialty but, in addition, one of the most brilliant and talented men in organized dentistry of all time. He not only served on an infinite number of important committees in organized dentistry, but he was elected president of the American Association of Orthodontists in 1922 and later served as president of the American Dental Association.

For seventeen years he served as editor of the *International Journal of Orthodontia* (now known as the *American Journal of Orthodontics*\*), which Dr. Dewey and the late Dr. C. V. Mosby of the C. V. Mosby Publishing Company established in 1915. In the early years, it was difficult for the Journal to survive, but Dr. Dewey's ever-active pen kept the pages filled and his spirit of determination never failed. With the support of Dr. Mosby (even at considerable financial loss), there

resulted a journal presently in its forty-third year, which has assembled the most complete record of orthodontic literature in existence today, and which is now the official publication of the American Association of Orthodontists and of all the component societies of the Association.

Dr. Dewey served as professor of orthodontics for short periods at the University of Iowa Dental Department, Chicago Dental College, and the New York College of Dental and Oral Surgery. At the latter, summer sessions of his school were held when he first moved to New York.

Dr. Dewey was the author of several textbooks, including *Practical Orthodontics* and *Dental Anatomy*; he was coauthor, with Thompson, of *Comparative Dental Anatomy*. All are used as standard texts in many dental colleges even today.

This man, strangely enough, could and did quote Roberts' *Rules of Order* off the cuff as glibly as most of us can read it; he knew it from cover to cover. This made him an expert parliamentarian and a leader of professional groups.

A short time before his death Dr. Dewey began the publication of a journal entitled *Orthodontic Review*, which was designed as an open forum for the discussion and evaluation of current orthodontic literature. However, without his guiding hand the journal was discontinued.

This venture revealed another facet of his character. He was instinctively a critic, a quality which does not make for close friendships and often creates violent prejudices. The pages of *Orthodontic Review* gave him ample opportunity, without reservation, to comment and disapprove, and this he was amply able to do.

He was a constant student who was never a neutral or a follower. Either he knew the facts and had the ability to prove and present them or, if not, he sought additional knowledge in order to verify his views. He did not make assertions shrouded in doubt, or on the basis of personal opinion. He contended that personal opinions are usually influenced by prejudice and that criticism of a personal opinion or of a theory that cannot be factually supported meets with prompt opposition. Air castles are quite sacred to the builders, even when built upon the sand, and when they tumble and fall the wrath of the builder is heaped upon the critic. Dr. Dewey often found himself an unpopular critic.

He commented that it was of little importance where or how one gained knowledge; the really important thing was whether or not one attained it and how he used it.

Dr. Dewey deplored the plan of some dental schools to abandon the teaching of certain subjects on the

\*Later renamed *American Journal of Orthodontics & Dentofacial Orthopedics*

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