

Preface

In August of 2013, the newly appointed dean of the Columbia University College of Dental Medicine, Christian Stohler, invited me to write the history of the school to commemorate the 100th anniversary of its founding. I was happy to accept because I have always been intrigued with the role that Columbia played in the development of dental education in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century. The research for the book would provide me with the opportunity to delve deeply into that history. When I became dean in 1978, much of the school's history had been forgotten. It was therefore with great enthusiasm that I took on the task of preparing this history so that it would be remembered and passed on to future generations.

In preparing this book, it was important that the history be obtained from primary sources. The Archives and Special Collections at the Augustus C. Long Library on the Medical Center campus and at the Butler Library on the Morningside campus of Columbia University contain a trove of documents related to the founding of the dental school and its progress over the past century. They include records and files from the school's deans and the vice presidents for health science offices going back to the 1890s. Their formal reports, letters, and memorabilia provided the majority of the information for the book. In addition, interviews with key individuals such as faculty, students, and alumni were used to enrich the material from historical documents.

History came alive for me through contacts with family members of the founders—William J. Gies and the Dunning brothers—and the son of one of its legendary deans—Alfred Owre. Those contacts provided me with a deep appreciation and understanding of the important contributions made by these individuals and others to establish the Columbia University Dental School.

The history of the dental school at Columbia University is intimately intertwined with William J. Gies, William and Henry Dunning, and Alfred Owre. Gies was the author of the 1926 Carnegie Foundation report on the advancement of teaching, which is still credited today as the most important document in shaping dental schools in the United States and Canada. Gies was not a dentist but a biochemist at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. He became interested in the field of dentistry in 1910, first through research on dental caries and later by working with leading New York dentists to prepare the school's founding document, *A Dental School on University Lines*.

That document and the dental school he helped found at Columbia became the model for Gies's recommendations in the Carnegie report. Its principles showed the way that dentistry should fit into the field of medicine and the nation's university system. Those principles are still relevant today. Similar issues regarding dentistry's position in the field of medicine and in the nation's university system have resurfaced. Throughout the text, therefore, reference is made to Gies's original educational principles.

William Bailey Dunning and Henry Sage Dunning were brothers and prominent dentists in New York City at the time of the founding of the school. William probably coauthored the founding document with Gies. Henry was an oral surgeon who raised funds to help establish the school. Both served on the faculty for many years.

Alfred Owre arrived as dean in 1927 and his task was to move the school from East Thirty-Fourth and Thirty-Fifth Streets to the Vanderbilt Clinic building on the newly completed Columbia University Medical Center campus on 168th Street. Owre had served as dean at the University of Minnesota before coming to Columbia. He became a controversial figure among the dentists in New York City because of his ideas about how dentistry should be integrated into medicine and how the dental school should operate.

I was fortunate to meet with family members of these four individuals in the 1980s. I was surprised one day when a second-year medical student at P&S came to my office asking whether or not her great-grandfather had something to do with the founding of the dental school. She was Marjorie Gies! Through her, I met her father, William (Bill) J. Gies II, a man who has shared remembrances, friendship, and service as we worked together on the American Dental Education Association's William J. Gies Foundation. Bill Gies provides the association's members with wonderful stories of his grandfather and in the process keeps the connection between William Gies and Columbia fresh in everyone's mind.

Similarly, I reconnected with the Dunning brothers' family. I received a call from James Dunning, a son of one of the distinguished founders of the Columbia University Dental School. Jim was an alumnus of the School of Dental and Oral Surgery (SDOS) and a former dean of the Harvard University School of Dental Medicine. He called to say that he came across some files from his father's (William Bailey Dunning) years at SDOS and wanted to donate them to Columbia. Along with the papers was also a gold cigar box that his uncle (Henry Sage Dunning) received from his oral surgery residents. Everything was put into the archives of the Augustus C. Long Library. Jim also made a donation to the school and, together, we created a symposium, the Dunning Symposium, in his family's name. Each year when we held the Dunning Symposium, Jim would attend and join in the discussion.

Alfred Owre's years at Columbia were difficult ones for him. That became apparent to me again in the 1980s during a visit from his son. One day my assistant, Letty Casillas, buzzed me to say that Alfred Owre was in the waiting room! I knew that was not possible, because he died in 1935 and this was the mid-1980s, but in walked his son of the same name, a man possibly in his seventies. He had come to Columbia looking for some of his father's papers so he could donate them to the University of Minnesota where a building was to be dedicated in his father's name. We talked and I learned that the son was a psychiatrist living in California and that he believed that his father was distressed for a long time about his treatment while at Columbia. I remember feeling uncomfortable and tried to assure him about his father's many positive contributions to the development of the school. A few years later, the

associate dean, Norman Kahn, received a call saying that the caller had Alfred Owre's academic gown in her closet and would the school like to have it. Norman brought the gown to the school and I put it in the closet in the dean's office where it still sits today!

In so many different ways, the history of the dental school is fascinating. It includes insightful documents related to mergers with other schools and the story of a long and protracted controversy with the dental accrediting agency over the relationship between the dental school and the medical school and the Presbyterian Hospital. There is even the story of a "crazed" technician who murdered one of the deans at his desk in 1935!

With this as a background, how can knowing this history not evoke interest, pride, and continual support for the Columbia University College of Dental Medicine, "a dental school on university lines"?

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