

Jeanette “Nettie” Bolles: The First Female DO

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Jeanette “Nettie” Bolles (née Hubbard) was only a child when her father was shot and left for dead during the border wars between Kansas and Missouri. Andrew Taylor Still, MD, who had not yet founded osteopathy, removed the bullet and doctored him back to health. Years later, her mother became paralyzed after a fall. Bolles brought her mother to Kirksville to be treated by Still. She watched her mother improve with daily osteopathic manipulative treatments administered by Still. Bolles was already a graduate of the University of Kansas, but she was inspired by his new method of treatment and inquired about attending the school he was preparing to open.¹ Still assured her that she could learn osteopathy, the same as any man, and welcomed her into the first class of the American School of Osteopathy (ASO).²

In 1894, Nettie Bolles was 1 of 3 female graduates in the ASO inaugural class.^{3(p81)} The other 2 female graduates, Mamie Harter, DO, and Lou J. Kerns, DO, both practiced osteopathy until 1907, but after that, there are no records of their careers. Bolles, however, dedicated her life to the practice, promotion, publishing, and teaching of osteopathy.

After graduation on March 4, 1894, Bolles joined the faculty of the ASO to teach anatomy, becoming the first female faculty member at an osteopathic college.^{3(p81)} Shortly afterward, she became the first editor and publisher of the *Journal of Osteopathy*.

In 1897, Bolles left the ASO to move to Colorado, becoming the first practicing osteopath in the state. The next year, Bolles opened the Western Institute of Osteopathy (WIO) and became the first female president of an osteopathic college. After her husband graduated from the ASO in 1898, they renamed WIO the Bolles

Institute of Osteopathy and later the Colorado College of Osteopathy (CCO). The CCO was purchased by the ASO in 1904, and Bolles returned to teach at the ASO.^{3(pp88-89)}

In 1897, Bolles became the first vice president of the American Association for the Advancement of Osteopathy, which was renamed the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) in 1901.^{4(p252)} She served for many years in multiple high-ranking positions within the AOA.

In 1898, Bolles became the founding president of the Associated Colleges of Osteopathy (ACO), later to become the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine.^{4(p274)} The WIO was one of the original osteopathic colleges accepted into the ACO.^{4(p272)}

Bolles was a founding member—and served 3 times as president—of the Osteopathic Women National Association. The osteopathic profession honored Bolles in 1925 with the prestigious AOA Distinguished Service Certificate for “Pioneering in Osteopathy as a Profession for Women.”⁵ Bolles died in 1930, but her legacy lives on. She has been an inspiration to legions of women who have followed in her footsteps, as a female physician, teacher, author, and leader in the osteopathic medical profession. (doi:10.7556/jaoa.2019.002)

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