Illustrations of cranial adjusting from De Jarnette Sacro Occipital Technic of Chiropractic (1952).
The Roots of Cranial Manipulation: Nephi Cottam and 'Craniopathy'

CALVIN COTTAM, D.C.* with ERIN MacGILLIVRAY SMITH**

Cranial manipulation is a procedure recognized for limited payment under Medicare, and while always controversial the origins of the technique itself has been the subject of dispute. Advocates and practitioners of Nephi Cottam, an American chiropractor, and William G. Sutherland, a Canadian osteopath, have both claimed priority. This paper advances a case for establishing "craniopathy" as formulated by Cottam as the first school of instruction and practice in this specialty.

Although the "Bedouins of the Greek tribes" practiced a form of cranial manipulation as "a sort of secret healing,"1 K.A. Ligeros, a Greek medical doctor who researched the history of spinal manipulation, found no example of cranial manipulation in the ancient world of Europe.2

Ligeros' research took him to museums and libraries of Europe and his research led him back into the ancient world as far as 1250 B.C. The result of his research was that, although D. D. Palmer "rediscovered" an ancient practice, no examples of cranial manipulation were found.

Ligeros' research was recognized in a U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare entitled "The Research Status of Spinal Manipulative Therapy," which was based on a February 1975 workshop.3 However, recognition for Ligeros was made earlier in his own country when the monks of Mt. Athos gave him a spoon carved from the wood of a "sacred" tree. In a letter to Nephi Cottam dated July 19, 1930, Ligeros explained that the tree from whose branches the wood was taken had been planted 1,000 years before by St. Athanasius, an early church father.

Ligeros' research was recognized in a U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare publication entitled over the spoon to Cottam because of the American chiropractor's superior work. "I take this opportunity," Ligeros said in his letter, "to express my utmost of appreciation for your kindness and lofty ideals assuring you at the same time that your work is superior to any I have known so far." The Greek physician also commented in the letter that he felt it his duty to recommend Cottam's work to "all true scientific practitioners."

In 1939, Ligeros met Cottam again and reportedly made the statement about Bedouins practicing cranial manipulation as a secret healing technique.

Although claims by medical doctors have been found either in the ancient or modern worlds regarding cranial manipulation, research by Tetley since 1975 has found head shaping of infants for cosmetic reasons, among rural, non-westernized peoples. (Tetley presented his research in May 1978 at the World Congress of Physical Therapy at Tel Aviv, Israel.)

Today, doctors manipulate the bones of the head, but the controversy has reigned regarding when the first verifiable cranial manipulation was made and by whom. There are those who contend that Cottam was the undisputed originator of cranial manipulation. However, research has shown that there was a surprising, almost parallel, development by William G. Sutherland, a Canadian osteopath. At about the same time, both men seem to have developed the concept that it was possible to manipulate the bones of the head in an effort to affect health.

Although claims have been made about other doctors' cranial manipulative efforts, these have not been documented — or at least weren't documented until later and then were only fragmented. Research has revealed that Cottam and Sutherland are the only two found to have comprehensive systems of cranial manipulative techniques but there is a difference: dates and events concerning Cottam were published at the time in contemporary newspapers or dated material; Sutherland's claim, upon which osteopaths base their first public disclosure, was made years later with no contemporary verification.

Sutherland's followers contend that his first inspiration was in 1899; if so, Cottam's followers say he was four years earlier. Sutherland's wife points to sometime after 1924 for the first revelations to anyone else: Cottam said his was in 1915. However, these are just claims.

The first date with some verifiable material is November 23, 1928. Cottam applied for a U.S. patent on

*Private practice in Los Angeles, Calif.; **Writer and editor in Pueblo, Colo.
Correspondence to: Dr. Calvin Cottam, 1017 S. Arlington Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90019.
his treatment by "single and double manipulation" in the patient's mouth "of the tendons, muscles, membranes, tissues, ducts, glands, organs, growths, and hardened or solidified accumulations, for removal of undesirable materials and the restoration of the body." This was letter 235675 of the U.S. Patent Office dated December 9, 1929.

In his book The Cranial Bowl published in 1939, Sutherland stated: "I kept my research activities to myself for several years... I ventured further by introducing the subject to the Minnesota Osteopathic Association, in a paper given at Redwood Falls." No date was given.

Mrs. Robert N. Sampson, assistant to the MOSA executive director, researched the Redwood Falls meeting and found that the only mention of the meeting was an entry: "Southern District Convention was held at Redwood Falls, Friday and Saturday, September 27 and 28, 1929. Splendid reports have been made as to the friendliness and common interests of those in attendance while the lectures and clinical work were of high order." According to Mrs. Sampson, there was no mention in the records about Dr. Sutherland being at the convention, nor for that matter, being one of its speakers.

In Sutherland's Contributions of Thought published in 1967, compilers noted: "In September 1929... the first public reference was made to what he called 'his personal hobby' — the theory of cranial articular mobility."

"Bedside Technique," part of Sutherland's book, includes a few remarks about possible "physiological movement in the cranial articulations." In the same breath, Sutherland commented on the skepticism of the medical profession. A lack of interest among doctors was mentioned by Sutherland's wife, Adah Strand Sutherland, in the biography With Thinking Fingers.

In contrast, eight months earlier, in January 1929, Cottam's presentation to the profession was the first known, verifiable publication of the idea of "adjustment of cranial bones" or mention that the bones of the head might be moveable and could be adjusted. The Salt Lake City (Utah) Tribune of January 23, 1929, announced the coming event to be held at the Hotel Utah. The news article noted that the "new work has to do with cranial pressure on the brain as a cause of disease, and with the adjustment of cranial bones for the removal of this pressure and the ailments caused by it."

The first edition of The Deseret News, a Utah publication, of January 28, 1929, told about Cottam's demonstration of "removal of brain pressure by adjustment of the bones of the head..." "This method of adjustment is a discovery made by Dr. Cottam, which, he explains, will greatly extend the province of chiropractic in cases of mental derangements, subnormal mentality of children and adults, epilepsy and paralysis," the article stated.

The Deseret News also noted that Cottam's "discovery" is held by local chiropractors to be one of the most important of the profession." The newspaper stated that the convention "was attended by the largest group of chiropractors ever assembled in Utah."

Sutherland spoke at some conventions. Finally, he presented his cranial ideas at the American Osteopathic Association convention in Detroit in 1932 to only seven persons. It was a letdown but not a defeat.

Cottam presented "Cranial Adjusting" on Tuesday, July 15, 1930, at Cincinnati, Ohio, to the American Chiropractic Association. It was at this convention that Dr. Ligeros apparently met Cottam and penned his remarks.

None of the pioneers called their techniques "cranial adjusting" or "craniopathy" except Cottam. Inspired by the term "osteopathy," Cottam began calling his cranial adjusting "craniopathy" about 1932. In 1936, he founded the Cottam School of Craniopathy in Los Angeles.

Cottam published his book The Story of Craniopathy in 1936. He reprinted an updated edition in paperback in 1963, three years before his death at age 82. The text was reproduced in newspaper format in 1978, since the original edition has long been out of print.

Sutherland self-published his book The Cranial Bowl in 1939, three years after Cottam.

Cottam published lessons on how to do his cranial adjusting — "craniopathy" — in 1936, with new editions since. Sutherland never published any lessons on how to do his manipulations, but his followers first published in 1943.


Sutherland's ideas were put into book form by Harold I. Magoun, D.O., in 1951 with two editions since, in 1966 and 1976. Osteopathy in the Cranial Field (Kirksville, MO: Journal Printing Company).

Both Cottam and Sutherland lived to see the beginning of acceptance of cranial adjusting. Sutherland, born on March 27, 1873, died September 23, 1954. Cottam was born December 5, 1883, and died February 6, 1966.

Neither Cottam nor Sutherland lived to learn that cranial manipulation was at last recognized by the U.S. government in 1976 as a benefit under Medicare.

Willard Carver, LL.B., D.C., reportedly used a technique in 1906 for treating hydrocephalus but did not put it in writing, and, as far as is known, none of his students have either. According to Langmore, Carver's Chiropractic Analysis published in December 1909 was the first general text book on chiropractic.
Chiropractic Analysis makes only two statements relevant to cranial manipulation. Under "Hydrocephalus" Carver stated: "The adjusting here will be precisely that indicated in brain fever, except more attention should be given to occlusions affecting the kidneys and bowels." The section on "Brain Fever" is no more enlightening: "Upon the arrival of the Chiropractor, he should at once begin adjusting to remove the occlusions at all brain and heart places." He gave no instructions as to how or where the adjustment should be made.

In the second edition of the text, published in 1915, he slightly rewrote the instruction on hydrocephalus and brain fever. In 1921 the book was published in its third edition. However, of 466 pages, Carver only devoted seven to the head. Under the section on "The Head," Carver stated: "In hydrocephalus it frequently becomes necessary to relate the skull bones. This also becomes necessary in certain active phases of syphilis and other abnormality." Again, no definite procedure was given. It is interesting to note that Carver used the word "relating" rather than "manipulating" or "adjusting."

Concerning the nose, Carver said, "force can only be applied by use of the thumbs and fingers and it is sometimes necessary to use such auxiliaries as flattened hard rubber levers which may be placed within the nostrils against the wing cartilages in order that gentle pressure may be directed upon these structures, as well as the nasal bones and the septum."

He concluded about the nose saying that nothing could really be described in connection with the technique that could be of assistance to the student. He cautioned students that procedures relating to the nose "must be executed with the utmost skill and caution."

Of the temporal region, Carver said: "Relating in this region is accomplished by placing the subject upon the dorsum and turning the head directly to the side, so as to anchor that side of the head directly upon the table. The operator... places the hand... takes his traction mesodorsally, and thrusts with slight headward impulsion, which movement must be short and quick."

Similar instructions were given for mandible, submalar relating, and mental relating.

Lorna Langmore, D.C., a devoted historian of Carver, provided materials for this paper including a memorial outline of Carver's accomplishments, published after his death. In the latter, no mention was made regarding cranial technique.

Richard Van Rumpt, D.C., was with M.B. DeJarnette, D.C. for 15 years and was director of S.O.T. Research Society, had his first exposure to cranial adjusting in 1922 from an osteopath named Budreau. He noted in 1977 that he exchanged ideas with Dr. George A. Cole, an associate of Cottam's in 1928 or 1929, but didn't meet Cottam until about 1940. No other information has been found about Budreau whose first name Van Rumpt did not recall.

Van Rumpt noted that he had not written up any of his techniques but contended that he taught his style of cranial techniques for the first time about 1925 in Baltimore. "My type of adjusting is done with a thumb toggle. My analysis is made by the use of positive and negative fingers — pushing or pulling the bones — and the use of visualization — plus my own type of leg measuring."

After Cottam's presentation in January 1929, George A. Cole, D.C., joined Cottam as an associate. He taught Cottam's cranial adjusting techniques throughout the U.S. and sold carbon copies of typewritten lessons. In early pamphlets, Cole acknowledged that the ideas — cranial adjusting and craniopathy — were Cottam's.

In a February 26, 1930 letter to Cottam, Cole said, "I predict for you a name that will go down the ages as one of the discoverers of greatest service to man. I am making it a part of my life's work to see that your discoveries are known and used throughout the healing world, and that you get proper credit for these discoveries... I will yet make your name known in the capitals of Europe — in London, Berlin and Paris. I promise it."

According to Cottam, in 1933 and 1934, Leo L. Spears, founder of Spears Chiropractic Hospital took Cottam's classes. However, in an October 4, 1977 letter to this author Dan C. Spears, D.C. a nephew of Spears, said he went into practice with his uncle in 1937 and "to my knowledge he never attended any classes or techniques."

Although Spears claimed his uncle developed the "Spears Painless System of Adjusting" and "Skull Moulding System of Adjusting" after his 1921 graduation from Palmer School of Chiropractic, the first mention of skull moulding does not appear until the 1950 edition of Spears Painless System. Cottam's idea was to spread the bones apart at the sutures. Spears appears to have three "pressures in areas of distortion" from the middle of the skull: from antero and postero, from latero, and from oblique.

In a May 4, 1978 letter to the author, Jack Lerner of Lerner Institute of Scientific Massage, Inc., Holbrook, Mass., compared the idea of Spears' pressures to a method used by Russian soldiers during World War I. An arm lock would be applied around the head exerting pressure upon the head.

Lerner said, "The belief was that, by so doing, the skull would first be compressed, and then when the pressure had been applied for a certain length of time when it became almost unbearable, the release was so sudden that the soldier experienced a feeling of euphoria."

Endo-Nasal, Aural and Allied Technics.

Lake’s dedication in his 1942 self-published book is “to W. Wallace Fritz, M.D., N.D., who first used part of these techniques on the author.” Fritz could have learned from Cottam at the convention in 1930 or from someone who had learned from Cottam or from Cole when he was touring the U.S. and teaching Cottam’s techniques.

Lake contended that the term “endo-nasal therapy” originated in Europe.24 Apparently, he did not realize that it could have started in Utah with Cottam as cranial adjusting and craniopathy and spread to Europe in the care of a physician or physicians. Ligeros, having learned cranial adjusting from Cottam in Cincinnati in 1930, could have spread the word in his native Europe.

Lake further contended that the reason “for it being so little known is that it is not officially taught at present, and those who practice it are most jealous of its secrets and do not make it easy to learn.” Yet, Cottam was very open about it, teaching anyone who would listen. Lake came to the conclusion that up to this publication (in 1942) there was no comprehensive treatise on Endo-nasal Therapy... up to this time nothing has been found, ancient or contemporary, that treats of the subject as a whole.”25 Lake may not have ever seen Cottam’s 1936 book or the lessons published in 1936, 1938, and 1939.

John Clauson Burnett, D.O., and his Timken roller bearing heiress wife, Cora, proved to be benefactors to Cottam as well as to colleges and the arts. Burnett took Cottam on a tour of osteopathic colleges around the nation to demonstrate Cottam’s “craniopathy” two years before Sutherland’s book was published. A misunderstanding developed between the two men afterward and the friendship came to an end.

Sutherland in Contributions of Thought credits cranial thought to Dr. Andrew Taylor Still, founder of osteopathy. Although the book gives 24 references to Still in the index, not one of those references says anything about cranial manipulative techniques.

Major Bertrand DeJarnette, a chiropractor, published The History of Sacro Occipital Technic in 1958. In the volume, he cites dates when he began different techniques. The first mention of any skull techniques other than the occiput that this writer could find was 1931 when he briefly researched above the occiput.

Research of the official U.S. Government copyright records shows many subjects, mainly S.O.T., copyrighted by DeJarnette, but the first title found that appeared to be on anything above the occiput was Temporal-Sphenoidal (T.S.) Research Project, 1965, then Cranial Technique in 1968 and after.

Other pioneers who contributed to the field of cranial manipulation should be mentioned.

For example, William H. Niedner, D.O., began with Sutherland, then developed his own technique. John P. Usselmann, D.C., in Sympathetic-Central Nerve Chiropractic Technic published in 1945 stated “I do not claim to have discovered the fact that cranial bones can become subluxated or that they can be adjusted... I do claim that I was first to discover how they become subluxated, what happens when they become subluxated, in what direction they subluxate and that I discovered how to adjust them.”26

D.J. Metzinger, D.C. said he became interested in cranial adjusting about 1940 and stated that cranial adjusting was mentioned in D. D. Palmer’s book The Chiropractor’s Adjustor, but the late Herbert Marshall Himes, D.C., considered the book’s authority, could find no reference to cranial adjustment.27

Another pioneer, Dain L. Tasker, D.O., was suggested by S. L. Romoser, D.C., of Florida. In Tasker’s Principles of Osteopathy published in 1913, six photographs shown on pages 522-528 reveal “manipulation for vaso-motor effects... press... making a vibratory movement, a painful treatment”. No thrusts or adjustments are mentioned, only pressure.28

The refinement of cranial adjusting techniques continues and is being applied in fields other than chiropractic and osteopathy. The late W. B. May, an Albuquerque, N. M., dentist, pioneered the use of cranial manipulations in dentistry.

Other names suggested were Oakley Smith, S.M. Langworthy, and Minora Paxson, but no reference to any cranial techniques were found. Recent advocates of cranial manipulative techniques have included such names as Alberts, Lee and Fuhr, Stober, Goodheart, Kotheimer, Paris, Fryman, Upleger and Retzlaff.
REFERENCES

1Health News. September 22, 1939, p.14
2K.A. Ligeros, How Ancient Healing Governs Modern Therapeutics
5Adah S. Sutherland, With Thinking Fingers (Kansas City, Mo.: Cranial Academy, n.d.), pp. 12, 33, 52, 57, 63. William G. Sutherland, The Cranial Bowl (Mankato, Minn.: S.P. 1939), p. 18
6W.G. Sutherland, ibid.
8W.G. Sutherland, Contributions of Thought (Sutherland Cranial Teaching Foundation, 1967). p. 20
9Ibid., p. 21; A.S. Sutherland, op cit., pp. 64-65.
10A.S. Sutherland, op cit., p. 66
12California Department of State, Sacramento, Calif., letter to N. Cottam, May 15, 1936; ibid., August 1, 1936; affidavit, signed by N. Cottam et al subscribed and sworn before Notary Public Edith W. Olmstead.
13A. S. Sutherland, op cit., p. 78.
17Carver, ibid., 3d ed.
18Ibid.
20Van Rump to C. Cottam, October 12, 1977.
21Ibid.
22George A. Cole, Spinal Adjustments; Cranial Adjustments (Salt Lake City: Cottam-Cole Chiropractic College, 1930).
25Ibid.
27Himes to C. Cottam, October 24, 1979.
REFERENCES

1Health News, September 22, 1939, p.14
5Adah S. Sutherland, With Thinking Fingers (Kansas City, Mo.: Cranial Academy, n.d.), pp. 12, 33, 52, 57, 63. William G. Sutherland, The Cranial Bowel (Mankato, Minn.: s.p. 1939), p. 18
6W. G. Sutherland, ibid.
8W. G. Sutherland, Contributions of Thought (Sutherland Cranial Teaching Foundation, 1967), p. 20
9Ibid., p. 21; A. S. Sutherland, op cit., pp. 64-65.
10A. S. Sutherland, op cit., p. 66
12California Department of State, Sacramento, Calif., letter to N. Cottam, May 15, 1936; ibid., August 1, 1936; affidavit, signed by N. Cottam et al subscribed and sworn before Notary Public Edith W. Olmstead.
13A. S. Sutherland, op cit., p. 78.

16Carver, ibid., 3d ed.
17Ibid.
18Ibid.
20Van Rumpt to C. Cottam, October 12, 1977.
21Ibid.
22George A. Cole, Spinal Adjustments; Cranial Adjustments (Salt Lake City: Cottam-Cole Chiropractic College, 1930).
25Ibid.
27Himes to C. Cottam, October 24, 1979.