

**Archival & Historical Committee
October 27, 2008
Las Vegas, Nevada**

**Interview with
Wilbur T. Hill, DO, FACOFP *dist.***

Committee Chair: Dr. Hill, we appreciate you being here today and we would like for you to start off with any opening statements that you might have.

Dr. Hill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all I feel very humbled and honored to be in this position since I have never served as either a board member or an officer of the ACOFP or ACGP. I have been an active member of the ACGP since its founding. I had an active part in the ACGP as President of the Missouri Chapter. I then got disheartened with the way the Missouri ACGP Association was going. In 1991 with the help of Dr. Thomas and others, we reorganized the Missouri Chapter into what it is today. I've served as its Treasurer since that time.

Let me also say that I'm 85 years old. I learned today in the discussion on aging, neurology and memory that I'm falling a victim of Parkinson's Disease. Due to the dementia that goes along with Parkinson I am unable to-recall all of the things that I wanted to remember as it related to my history with this organization.

I do remember one of the first great moments of the organization. We were the first group of candidates that took the examination for certification in Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. I don't even recall the year, but I know the board members took the first exam so they could give the exam. I passed it without having to take it the second time.

Let me tell you a little bit more about my background. There was a question on the paper: "Tell us a little about how you got started in osteopathic medicine?" I grew up on a farm. We milked cows and farmed with horses and mules, and I thought I would like to be a veterinarian. Our family physician was a fairly new graduate of the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine (Back then it was called The Kirksville College Osteopathy and Surgery) and talked to me a little bit about osteopathy and said: "How about going to Kirksville with my wife and I this weekend and let me show you the college?" So that weekend was the turning point in my life during the summer of 1942.

I entered the Teachers College of Northeast Missouri majoring in pre-med in the fall of 1942. In December 1942 I got word that I was going to be drafted into the military in February. I did not enroll in the second, (or the winter quarter, as it was named at that time) and went back to our residence in Butler, Missouri.

I had worked for a Russell Green for two summers as a hired hand. He had a daughter and we fell in love and got married in December 1942. I was then drafted in February 1943. Of course an interesting highlight, she had been the Deputy Circuit Clerk of Bates County, Missouri and her boss lost his job at election time. She also lost her job but went to work for the Selective Service of Bates County prior to me being drafted. After returning from the military, I received my premed and entered the Kirksville College in 1947, graduated in 1951, interned in Kansas City, and went into practice in Liberty, Missouri. Shortly thereafter I was a member of the AOA and I learned about ACGP when it was being organized. I even helped with the designing of the emblem of ACGP with Dr. J. Myron Auld, a family practitioner in Kansas City. I think he was an officer of the ACGP at one time.

Committee Member: Could you expand upon that just a little bit? How you were involved in that? How did that process go?

Dr. Hill: Well, Jack Auld and I were very close friends through our affiliation and through the Osteopathic Hospital of Kansas City. -He asked me if I would help him help design the emblem of the ACGP. We had different designs and finally put one together with subsequent approval by the board. So it was always kind of fun to see it. That was a great interesting moment, and I became very active and attended most of the meetings.

I remember one of the first meetings that we had with the ACGP was a July meeting in one of the state parks in Oklahoma. Not very many attended, but it was a family affair and it was kind of interesting.

I entered practice in Liberty, Missouri with a doctor, who was not a member of anything. After about ten years of practice, I split from him and started my own solo practice and I was able to succeed in a great practice of osteopathic medicine. One of the basic philosophies that I had in my practice was: always remember to know the patient; always look at that patient as a person; and each of the entities that might be bothering that would interfere with other part of that body. I always enforced this with medical students. I can

also [sideline] remember one day when Dr. Bill Betz was a student with me and he came to me and said, "Cheryl's in labor; what'll I do?" I said, "Just get your butt out here and go take care of her. "Dr. Bill and I've been very close since. I had many students in my office both from Kansas City and Kirksville following me, and it was always an extreme pleasure to be able to work with students.

Committee Member: How many years did you work with the students, how many years did you have them in your practice?

Dr. Hill: Oh, all the time I was in practice for 49 years. I only practiced 49 years. I had a goal of practicing 50, but on the first week of June in my 49th year I got crossways with an HMO medical director. I began by calling and talking to him about some personal matters and then ended calling him the rottenest thing I ever heard how a "blankety-blank" pediatrician knows about geriatrics in the first place and said you're the worst guy. I really lit into him and slammed the phone down. I told my partner Steve Pecoraro who had been with me 31 years; "Steve, today I lost my sanity, my religion, and everything else. It's time to do something else."

I started early in my career performing intern training inspections for the American Osteopathic Association (AOA). I remember our first inspection team was a five-person team; an administrator, director of medical education, a family practitioner, a surgeon, and a medicine representative.

Then that evolved eventually into rewriting the present intern training program that's been in use for a long time. It's been modified from time-to-time, where now one person does the inspection. Since retiring from active practice, I'm back doing inspections. I took a sabbatical for a year and a half. Five years ago my wife was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and fought it for 18 months. I did not leave her side. Then this past year [2007], I only inspected one training program because I was District Governor of Lions International, which kept me very busy with 45 clubs. We organized four new ones and my district was number one in the state for members and new clubs.

I enjoyed practice, enjoyed working with students, and I've always enjoyed the association with the leaders of this association. Some of the early memories that I have to go back to, of course, was Mary Burnett. I knew her when she was Mary Snediker. She was practicing in a little town in Kansas not too far from Kansas City, because her husband at that time was a urology resident by the name of Jim Snediker.

Committee Member: Was Mary Burnett, Mary Snediker.

Dr. Hill: Yes

Committee Member: Was she very active at that point?

Dr. Hill: I'm not sure because I only knew of her as Jim's wife and knew that she had a practice in a small community near Kansas City. I've come to know her more since she married. When she married Dr. Burnett, she was at that time very active. Both were active in ACGP and I have come to cherish her with great loving memory.

Committee Member: Who were some other influential leaders?

Dr. Hill: I remember George Thomas was a great leader in our profession and I admired what he was doing. Charlie Sauder, I remember him with fond memories, he was Speaker of The House Of Delegates of the AOA for many years and was very active in this organization of ACGP as well. Tiny Andreen, I think was president shortly after I became a member of the ACGP and I just learned recently that his first name was Clemens. He was from Michigan, I believe it was, and of course Jack Auld and I were very close. He was very active. But then I became very active again after the reorganization in 1991 of our Missouri Chapter and have been a Delegate to the Congress of Delegates every year since that time.

Committee Member: Did you have much contact with Tiny Andreen?

Dr. Hill: The only contact I had was at our ACGP meetings and the Congress of Delegates.

Committee Member: What was his story? What was Tiny Andreen's general character/demeanor?

Dr. Hill: Well, he was a fairly good size, about 6-feet tall; fairly heavy and very friendly; very professional. He was somebody that I really admired and tried to emulate. Another question was asked here: "Who are some of the people who really influenced my life?" I would say that an internist in Kansas City when I was an intern, Grover Gillian, was one of my fine persons that I knew. Margaret Jones was an OB/Gyn and a surgeon that helped me in my early training. Max Guttenson, an internist from Kirksville and I were very close. I have been active with the Kirksville College since my graduation and served on its board for nine years. The greatest joy I had during service as Chairman of the Board was signing my own son's diploma in 1978.

Committee Member: Wilbur, do you remember much about the meeting at the state park in Oklahoma? That was one of the first meetings that we have record of that was from the California transition?

Dr. Hill: It was more just a family gathering; picnic style; but we had lectures and then we had outings and things for the family to do.

Committee Member: There were things mentioned, I know, by some of the old leaders that we got off a video tape about curriculum having to do with things like hypnosis and with other things other than just OMM and the standard things that we got. Do you remember much about that?

Dr. Hill: Oh yes. There were many people present representing surgery, medicine, and so forth. They had a good rounded seminar for family physicians.

Committee Member: What was the quality of the speaker at that time?

Dr. Hill: Well, I would say they were very good speakers. They knew their subject well. I think I've had that experience pretty much all the time with this organization. We've always had Class A number one leaders and speakers. We've had good programs. I've never been to one where I was disappointed in a program.

Committee Member: Were the speakers more local or were they national?

Dr. Hill: They were national.

Committee Member: You had alluded to the Missouri Association that you reorganized.

Dr. Hill: Yes.

Committee Member: Is there any pertinent history?

Dr. Hill: I hate to get involved with that, but yes there was. It became an organization ran by two people who controlled everything. No one else had an opportunity to contribute. We couldn't find any minutes of anything. The programs were all directed by two or three people and it really deteriorated into just a personalized organization by two or three people. There were about three or four of them that were involved and we were upset about the situation so we called ACGP and George Thomas.

Committee Member: Who else came?

Dr. Hill: It was Harold Thomas and Gene Zachery that came. We filed with the State of Missouri a petition to declare it no longer a viable organization and filed our new articles of agreement.

Committee Member: How did that affect membership?

Dr. Hill: It started improving members because we started having quality programs.

Committee Member: Were you an officer then?

Dr. Hill: I've been a treasurer since that organization was reorganized and still in that capacity.

Committee Member: There was a rumor that I heard yesterday that Wilbur Hill never was the president of the National ACOFP.

Dr. Hill: I was never asked to be president.

Committee Member: But I heard that you became the de facto conscience of the National ACOFP when a terribly extravagant group of expenditures were perhaps being made on the national level and that you were the one that continued to monitor and bang away at...

Dr. Hill: No, I didn't monitor; I hounded.

Committee Member: Could you tell us a little more about that?

Dr. Hill: Well, we never had an official financial report. We just were showed how much was being spent. At our meetings, we had no official budget items, expenditures, etc., until we finally got people brave enough to follow along with me to request-that be done. So that's when they started having good quality treasury reports and a balanced budget report.

Committee Member: About what year are you talking about?

Dr. Hill: I don't have any idea.

Committee Member: Who were some of the people?

Dr. Hill: Oh, it was in, in the late '50s, early 60s.

Committee Member: Was that the Sevastos presidency?

Dr. Hill: Jack Hanks was Executive Director then.

Committee Member: At that time. Was that also the time that they gave the financial report on the back of a matchbox?

Dr. Hill: I don't recall.

Committee Member: I think the time that they actually started producing the treasurer's report for the Congress was right around when Harold Thomas was president.

Committee Member: Yeah, Harold Thomas was in 1988.

Committee Member: Right in there, yeah.

Committee Member: I hate to do this, but I'm going to throw in here that Wilbur Hill has always been the conscience for ACOFP, ever since I've known him; he has always been the conscience for the whole organization.

Committee Member: For the entire organization?

Committee Member: Yes, sir.

Committee Member: He has been the champion of students. I know that kept moving forward as far as the champion of benefits more to students and to more extravagant programs; or am I wrong?

Dr. Hill: Oh, absolutely. I felt like the student part of our organization, of our profession, were the people that we should be preparing to be part of our organization. That's one thing I still do when I make intern inspections. I interview interns. Of course, the intern number diminished tremendously since last July, but one of the things that I do is have a personal interview with the interns as a class. I charge them to train themselves well to be a full rounded physician. Remember always the Andrew Taylor Still's philosophy was: the body is the rule of the artery supreme and its the structure. One should look at that person as an individual, discovering everything about that individual; know where they work, what their family is, and then become a part of your community. That was a problem I had when I

entered practice, the guy I was with 10½ years wasn't a part of the community in any activity and resented my time that I spent with Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, even with the AOA, so it finally came to a point in which we just exploded.

Committee Member: Who was that?

Dr. Hill: Clyde Max Smith.

Committee Member: Was he a DO?

Dr. Hill: Yes, a DO.

Committee Member: We always like to hear about colorful characters. Do you have a particular group or a colorful character that you would like to say something about?

Committee Member: Don't look at me; I get nervous.

Dr. Hill: Oh, I don't know. Tiny Andreen would kind of fit that a little bit because he was a very colorful and jovial person.

Committee Member: Jack Hanks?

Dr. Hill: Jack Hanks was hard to know.

Committee Member: Can you give us a description of him, his general demeanor?

Dr. Hill: Well, he always dressed well. He looked like a perfect gentlemen in his suit and tie and everything. That's about all I can say about him.

Committee Member: Sounds like he could spend money.

Dr. Hill: Yeah, they knew how to spend money.

Committee Member: Were there any problems with hospital inspections over the years or any improvements you envision?

Dr. Hill: Yes. I remember the worst one I visited was in the Miami area, which was operated by a family. All operations were controlled by this family; every administration, medicine, and surgery. I felt they were not in it for the purpose of training students or interns, even though they had them there. They did rotten things. I remember one example; they performed general anesthesia to do an EGD because the anesthesiologist got a better fee. The hospital was placed on probation and I don't think they were ever allowed again to have training programs in that hospital.

Committee Member: Do you remember Raymond Saloom?

Dr. Hill: Oh, yes.

Committee Member: Do you remember that we had Saloom lectures? What was your feeling about him that made ACOFP, or ACGP, single him out?

Dr. Hill: Well, he was a very exacting person. He was a great physician. He always conducted himself well. He was a good example for us to know as a DO, both the organization line and practice-wise.

Committee Member: What's your recollection of the California time? How did Missouri act to the California merger?

Dr. Hill: I remember the day that the House of Delegates of the AOA was meeting in Kansas City and the California delegation was there led by Dorothy Marsh, I believe it was. There was some pressure being brought on by the House of Delegates about what they were doing. The California delegation walked out of the House of Delegates meeting.

What happened was a great disappointment because at that time California was one of the larger populated states of DOs. The DO organization had negotiated with — the California Medical Society to offer them MD degrees for \$65. The osteopathic college then was converted to an allopathic institution. However, the end result, was that those “converted” DO’s were never really accepted in the California Medical Association because they were set aside as a separate division of the California Medical Society. All but about 50 DOs in the state took the MD degree, even a colleague of mine who was in school with me. I visited him a few years later and he said, "I'm sorry it happened because it hasn't proved out to be what we expected it to be."

Committee Member: Were you involved with the fight with the AOA to get recognition of general practice as a specialty? The battle seemed to be at the epicenter in Kansas City at that time. Were you involved?

Dr. Hill: Absolutely. Who was executive director [AOA]? Ed Crowell, I think at that time, who was an internist, and he kept telling us, "You don't need a family practice organization. You're not specialists, your just general practitioners." But we fought the battle and after about three years, I think it took us about three years to get through the board of the AOA for approval to form the college.

Committee Member: Was there ever a problem in Missouri with licensure?

Dr. Hill: I was the first licensed by the osteopathic board in Missouri and then there was a merger of the two boards several years later. Once they combined it, then received a license from the combined board as well.

Committee Member: How old were you when you went to war?

Dr. Hill: 19.

Committee Member: So I guess you were not a physician yet?

Dr. Hill: That’s right.

Committee Member: You were in the 20th Armor Division with Patton?

Dr. Hill: I was. in the 20th... Well, I took my basic training in the 20th Armor Division at Camp Campbell Kentucky. Our company commander proceeded to send me to Fort Knox, KY to

study to be a company clerk. When I came back to Camp Campbell, the battalion had been separated as a separate tank battalion, 788th I believe it was. All the positions had been filled so the company commander made me a gunner, promoting me. I was a T5 and he promoted me to corporal for a week and then moved me as a Sherman tank commander sergeant. We transferred to Fort Ord, California and was training with amphibious vehicles called a Water Buffalo. The table of organization was such that there were excess numbers of non-commissioned officers, so I was sent to a landmine school to study landmines and then was retained as an instructor.

During that period of time, my outfit went on to the Philippines. I was reassigned to a tank battalion that was based in Camp Cook, California. They were taking amphibious training out of Fort Rosecrans, San Diego, and after a ten-day cruise on the Pacific where we landed our tanks on an island under strafing and battle fire, simulated battle, we returned. When we got back, we were issued winter uniforms and a furlough. When I got back from furlough, we were transferred by Troop Train to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey; and from Camp Kilmer, we were in a huge convoy that landed in LaHarve, France.

We left New York on January the 1st and landed in LaHarve, France on the evening of the 15th. We were placed on a troop train to go to base camp near Rouen. The train appeared to piddle along. About daybreak, the train was picking up speed going down a hill and I said to the guys in the boxcar, "I have a very uncomfortable feeling." The next I knew I was being pinned in the wreckage of the train having been knocked unconscious. Our engineers or French drivers, they were called, had left the train and placed us on a dead-end track. We crashed into a brick building that destroyed about 75% of our battalion. It took us awhile to get reorganized. I spent the next 30 days in the hospital. The nice part about that in January it's cold in France. It was warm in the hospital. We reorganized and then made our way down starting on March 1st towards the RhieneValley of Germany and ended up outside of Prague, Czechoslovakia. Finally, the peace treaty was signed in Europe, so the next two weeks I spent deactivating a mine field with a crew that I lead. I did the final pinning of each landmine because I was acquainted with them. The day I reported back to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis was the day that Japan signed the treaty, so instead of going on to the Pacific, as we were slated, we ended up in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Of course, during that process, there were a high number of priority GIs who were discharged with appropriate number of replacements. I was discharged on February

the 26th I guess it was in 1946 and then went back and enrolled in the spring quarter of Kirksville Teachers College (now Truman State).

Committee Member: So you came directly out of the military and went straight to...

Dr. Hill: Back to school, entered KCOS in the fall of 1947, graduated in 1951, and interned in the Connelly and Osteopathic Hospitals in Kansas City. I entered practice in 1952 with Clyde Smith, DO. I practiced a total of 49 years.

Committee Member: A question that we always ask is: What is your vision and hope for the future of ACOFP Family Medicine?

Dr. Hill: Well, I would hope the ACOFP will continue to be strong as a leading model for osteopathic family physicians and look out for the rights of DOs practicing family practice. I hope ACOFP continues to reach out to student bodies to encourage them to consider osteopathic medicine as a family physician, because I'm concerned I'm seeing fewer and fewer in the intern training inspection signing up for family physicians. All of them want to go to the big buck organizations.

Committee Member: So what advice would you have for young physicians coming - - just coming into the profession?

Dr. Hill: Look to be a good rounded physician caring for people. I tell students that my 49 years as a family physician is one of the greatest periods of my life and still I see some of my former patients. For example, we have a new Sears Grand Store in Liberty, Missouri and I walked up to the counter to pay for something the other day and the lady at the counter said, "Dr. Hill, could you step just a little closer?" And I said, "Sure." She gave me a big old kiss, "You are still the only physician that I've ever had that I loved."

Committee Member: What has the ACGP ACOFP meant to your life?

Dr. Hill: Well it's meant to me as an organization of training, models of family physicians that I could pattern my life after. It's always been looking out for the benefits and the welfare of family physicians both in training and practice rights.

Committee Member: Do you have any closing comments?

Dr. Hill: Well again, my only closing comment is that I hope, at 85, to be able to attend the meetings and be an active part of the ACOFP.

Committee Member: We appreciate you so much as always. Tell all of my veterans "Thank you for whatever you did," and they usually have done a lot less than that. As a veteran of the ACOFP, we thank you also for all your service.

Dr. Hill: Thank you very much.