



Clinical case

The first Mexican dentist: Mariano Chacón

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Abstract

Dental care in our country was provided by barber-surgeons and bloodletting practitioners from the arrival of the Spaniards until the first half of the 19th century, when dentists arrived from Europe to offer their services to the Mexican population. Once settled in Mexico, the dentists superseded the bloodletting practitioners in their profession and had to be recognized by the health authorities so that they could freely exercise the dental art. Thus, in 1841, the first dentistry degree in our country was granted to Eugenio Combé, a French citizen. It was not until thirteen years later that Mariano Chacón became the first Mexican to achieve the dentist degree. This article presents some references about this significant character of Mexican Dentistry, hitherto unknown.

Keywords: First dentist, Mexican, Mariano Chacón.

INTRODUCTION

After the War of Independence, the Mexican territory was amidst an atmosphere of freedom that flooded the entire country, opening the minds and beliefs of the settlers who began to accept new practices such as dentistry that would gradually replace bloodletting that was practiced in our country since the arrival of the Spaniards in the 16th century. But it was not until the culmination of the independence conflict that dentists began to insert advertisements in the newspapers, following the prevailing custom of the 19th century. In the advertisements, dentists offered plumping teeth, putting in artificial teeth, and filing defective teeth among others, leaving behind bleeding, cupping and leeches. With the influx of these characters, the dental practice and care scene in Mexico began to undergo changes.

Despite the great advances that dentistry offered, those who arrived in Mexican territory with their degrees from abroad as “Dentists” worked freely until 1840, when the newly named National School of Medicine decided to regulate the studies, examinations and the exercise of the health professions, among which was that of dentist¹. In January of 1841, the Higher Health Council, an institution empowered to regulate the exercise of professions or trades related to health, stipulated the requirements for those who wished to be certified before it, which were: submit a request to take the exam addressed to the president of the Council, accompanied by three letters from witnesses that endorsed the applicant as a decent and moral person and the payment of 100 pesos. Once the requirements were met, a jury, a date and time were selected to take the exam.

In the first year of work of the Higher Health Council, six dentists presented themselves for examination. The first to obtain the degree as a dentist was Eugenio Crombé, a French citizen, on August 19, 1840. It should be noted that the education received by dentists continued to be with an experienced dentist teacher who shared his knowledge with his apprentices. Towards the beginning of the 20th century, some boasted of having attended dental schools, which were very recently created (it should be remembered that the first one was inaugurated in 1839 in Baltimore, USA) and having a school degree that endorsed their knowledge.

SOME INFORMATION ABOUT MARIANO CHACÓN.

In Mexico, young Mexicans were attracted to the new work, far from bloodletting, and decided to train with a dentist to learn the trade. However, it was not until thirteen years after Eugenio Crombé that the first dentist of Mexican origin obtained his degree.

On the 11th of May, 1854, Mariano Chacón achieved his license as a dentist issued by the Higher Health Council. Mariano Chacón was probably the son of a barber who practised bloodletting, named Rafael Chacón who had graduated in the trade on January 2nd, 1810³. Perhaps, upon seeing the decline into which his work was falling, he suggested to his son to study with a dentist and not under his tutelage -as was customary-, continuing a legacy of work in the oral cavity, but from a contemporary mentor. So it was that Mariano studied for ten years with David Guillermo Seager, to be able to examine in the art of dentistry.

Mr. Seager was proud of his disciples and decided to share it with the public. He announced, on May 16, 1854, that his apprentices: Mariano Chacón and Benito Acuña (the second Mexican to graduate) had obtained their degree and were now settling at 23 Tiburbio Street⁴. Three months later, both dentists, Chacón and Acuña advertised: *“They offer their services in the*

mechanics of the pieces in the operative part of dental diseases, and other branches of the profession [because] they have the latest European and American discoveries and instruments”⁵.

It is well known that manual skills in dental practice are essential, so Mariano Chacón decided to show his by participating, in 1854, in an “Exhibition of Mexican industry” presenting several pieces to replace dentures with which he won second prize⁶. To the end the year, on December 31st, he informed the Mexican public of his decision to become independent from Benito Acuña and open his own dental office at 14 Refugio Street⁷.

Mariano Chacón continued to use the press to make himself known, in his advertisements he expressed that he would serve the public with *“the greatest care, accuracy and fairness in prices”⁸* and reported on the novelties he offered such as *“springless dentures”⁹*. In subsequent years, these ads in the newspapers allowed Mariano to express his updates, such as the improvements in the aesthetics of the dentures *“especially in the gums”* that he offered to his clientele¹⁰. In February 1880, the National School of Medicine communicated its interest in opening a chair *“on the art of the dentist, bloodletting, and small surgery”* and *“a class in which the practice of the art of the dentist is taught, as well as of the means of orifying, cleaning teeth, making artificial dentures, etc.”¹¹* To teach this chair, Manuel Ortega y Reyes and Mariano Chacón were appointed *“professors of the art of dentistry, the first in the theoretical part and the second in practice”¹²*. Apparently, the proposal was put to consideration by the pertinent authorities for evaluation and ultimately did not prosper.

The idea that the dental union needed to be strengthened remained in Mariano, as well as in Eduardo Clay Wise, Benito Acuña, Ricardo Crombé, among others, who, in August of that same year, met to form a *“corporation that has as its object the mutual assistance and the advancement of the profession”¹³*. The agreements and development of said association are unknown, but what is clear is that it aroused the concern of forging both a society and a dental school in the country.

Mariano was not the only member of the Chacón family who practiced dentistry; his son Ignacio Chacón graduated in 1868¹⁴ and practiced in the same office at Refugio Street. By 1891 he moved it to # 9 of Second Monterilla Street¹⁵ where he worked until his death in August 1894¹⁶. For his part, Agustín Chacón, also Mariano’s son, obtained his dentistry degree in 1881 and his surgeon’s degree in 1883, a profession in which he specialized as an ophthalmologist. The last of the Chacón family to obtain his degree as a dentist was Joaquín Chacón, graduating on August 12, 1898. Joaquín had been learning under dentist Carlos Padilla since May 1884¹⁷. He offered his services at the same Second Monterilla Street but at number 13. Joaquín was possibly the son or nephew of Mariano Chacón; his family relationship has not been found.

Mariano evidently exerted a strong influence on his family, perhaps having been the first dentist of Mexican origin motivated them to continue the dental legacy. On 15 January, 1885, the death of Don Mariano Chacón was announced in the press, referring to him as a: *“well-reputed and appreciated dentist in society”¹⁸*.

CONCLUSIONS

Without a doubt, knowing some aspects, hitherto unknown of the life of Mariano Chacón, the first Mexican dentist, allows us to notice that he was concerned about staying at the forefront of dental practice, on a par with foreign dentists. Worrying not only about offering quality care to his compatriots but also trying to forge a national dental profession by meeting with other dentists to form the collegiate base of dentistry in Mexico.

Undoubtedly, he stood out among his colleagues because he was considered by the directors of the National School of Medicine, to be in charge for several years of granting dentistry degrees; to be one of the first professors of a chair in dental art in the country. Although this did not become true, it opened the door for other dentists to conceive and finally establish, sometime later, the necessary institutional education for Mexican dentists.

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