In 1865, 150 years ago, the Missouri Dental Association was formed. To be exact, our official anniversary will be October 31, but we’ll be celebrating all year long with special proclamations, events, celebrations, and eventually, a commemorative anniversary book set to publish later this year.

Each issue of the Focus will feature a Backwards Glance of our Association history. It may be an excerpt from a magazine issue or a significant photo or a milestone event remembered. History is a force that shapes our present environment, and our present actions will be the history that shapes the future. Each Backward Glance will celebrate, in a small way, our unique history as the MDA.

In this issue, we focus on our birth with an excerpt from the book Missouri Dentistry: The Biography of a Profession (published in 1965 at the Association’s Centennial Celebration), from the section “Formation of the Missouri State Dental Association,” as well as an image of the first association president, Dr. HJB McKellops.

Pictured is a young and older Dr. Henry James Byron McKellops, the first president of the Missouri State Dental Association. He was born August 31, 1825 near Syracuse, New York and later relocated to St. Louis. Aside from first president of the MDA, he was one of the organizers of the St. Louis Dental Society, founded December 9, 1856, and in 1879 he served as its President. He also was President of the American Dental Association in 1878, one of only seven MDA members to hold the position.

Under the conditions of postwar disharmony, leaders of the profession renewed their efforts to form a statewide organization of dentists. The time was ripe if for no other reason than it had to be done if Missouri was to be represented in the newly organized American Dental Association. Membership was only open to delegated representatives from organized dental groups.

The time was ripe, but personal antagonisms that had existed before the (Civil) war had not been relieved by it. The matter of personality problems had to be overcome, and there was considerable doubt that an association could be formed because of them.

Additionally, Missouri citizens were divided into two angry political camps that crossed party lines. The state and local governments were controlled by the pro-Northern “Radicals” whose “test-oath” barred many southern sympathizers from full citizenship. Against such repressive control, the liberal Republicans joined Missouri’s Democrats in attempts to restore freedom in the state. This group issued a call for a mass meeting of all citizens desirous of doing something and St. Louis was the designated place of meeting on October 26, 1865.

When postwar political agitation was at its highest, and amidst rifts in the profession, the Missouri State Dental Association had its origin. Although the opposition press spoke scornfully of this gathering, the response was widespread and over a thousand delegates from all parts of the state converged upon the city (St. Louis). Doctor (HJB) McKellops, re-established in St. Louis practice following his stay in Paris, had figured prominently in the call for the political convention. Among those present were a number of older, established dentists of Missouri, and some of these were to reassemble a few days later to form a state dental association.

Those dentists who had come to the political convention were free to remain in the city and join other dentists at the meeting called by the St. Louis Dental Society to form a state dental association. Accordingly, on the morning of Tuesday, October 31, 1865 in St. Louis, a number of the profession from Missouri and other places met for the purpose of organizing the Missouri State Dental Association.
The following excerpt is from an article included in the 1890 Archives of Dentistry, which published from 1884 to 1891, and included Missouri dental news. The Archives followed after the Missouri Dental Journal—the Association’s original publication—ceased. It wasn’t until 1921 that the MDA officially had a journal again.

Interesting—but, perhaps not surprising—how much of these recommendations ring true for today’s practitioners, such as with dental offices (because your ability as a dentist will be very correctly gauged by their first impression) and infection control (because unclean finger nails are disgusting under all circumstances).

While we’ve updated our Rubber Dam instructions for the Expanded Functions training (to ensure a new one is used for each patient), and your office doesn’t use cocaine as an anesthetic (so the patient will lose all dread), you still do choose the restoration material that will preserve the tooth longest.

And, likely when it comes to patient care, you follow his closing advice: “Be gentle, firm and kind; answer all useless questions, regardless of what they are. In closing, there can be no truer utterance than this ‘What a man does is the real test of what a man is.’”

Practical Suggestions by Dr. E. E. Shattuck, Kansas City

Read before the Missouri State Dental Association Annual Meeting, at Pertle Springs, Mo., July 9, 1890

I hope these few remarks, or suggestions I make, will be the cause of inspiring new life into some of the dentists who keep in the same old rut year after year.

Avoid indolence, and fill up all the spaces of time with useful employment. Those who are the most persistent and work in the truest spirit will invariably be the most successful. If we make a success in life, it is due to nothing but industry. Even the simplest art cannot be accomplished without it.

One of the most important things to consider is our dental office. It is there we pass the best part of our life. Our failure or success in a business way depends more on our surroundings than most of us are aware. Intelligent and cultured people look to the environments on entering an office when calling to make the first appointment, and your ability as a dentist will be very correctly gauged by their first impression. It need not necessarily be furnished expensively. The one thing needful is to have it clean and neat in every detail. It should have a pleasant, inviting appearance, and tastefully arranged. This has an elevating influence on the character and disposition of the dentist. He is inclined to be more cheerful and patient with nervous and exacting patrons.

Do not be afraid of spending too much money in furnishing your office. It will be a good investment. I never saw a clean, well-arranged dental office but the dentist himself was neat and particular in his appearance, and also a first-class workman. I can always tell what kind of a dentist he is by his office, or the kind of an office by the dentist. We ought not to consider this subject in regard to a well-kept office of little or no importance. It will always bring a better class of patients who are willing to pay the price we ask, and this is a stimulant for us to excel in each succeeding operation. It is a duty we owe the profession, to do all we can to improve ourselves in dentistry.

Before beginning an examination, or operating on the teeth, always wash your hands, and be sure your finger nails are clean. Unclean finger nails are disgusting under all circumstances.

In filling, always use the material that will preserve the tooth the longest. Keep this in mind, and always work for the good of your patrons, and not for the most money to be obtained from the operation. In a great many cases, plastic, for a filling, is far better than gold.

Speak well of your competitors, especially if they are in good standing. Do not use the letter ‘I’ too often, as some of us are in the habit of doing. You will not be thought any the wiser for it. Never lose your temper; it belittles you in the estimation of others.

Be gentle, firm and kind; answer all useless questions, regardless of what they are. In closing, there can be no truer utterance than this “What a man does is the real test of what a man is.”
In the mid-1920s, advertising within the Bulletin of the Missouri State Dental Association included common dental products—dental labs and instruments, lights and cabinets, and scrap metal.

Fast forward a few years to 1929 and product variety increased. Ads still showcased dental wares—such as Co-Re-Ga denture powder, Lavoris mouth rinse (astringent and deodorant), alloys and even dental colleges—but other items appeared, promoting their benefit for overall “health and well-being” such as milk of magnesia, flavored cod liver oil and even Lucky Strike cigarettes—touting “throat protection against irritation and cough!”

One Lucky Strike ad, in particular, has a unique dental tie. Jean Harlow—an American film actress and sex symbol of the 1930s who died at the age of 26—was featured in the Lucky Strike ad in the January 1932 Bulletin. She was born Harlean Harlow Carpenter to Mont Clair Carpenter, a 1902 graduate of the Kansas City Dental College who practiced in Kansas City and was known for his expertise in gold work.

“We say “Thanks, Jean Harlow.” Miss Harlow has smoked Luckies for two years... not one cent was paid for her signed statement. See her new Columbia Picture, “Three Wise Girls.”

“I’ve tried all cigarettes and there’s none so good as LUCKIES. And incidentally I’m careful in my choice of cigarettes. I have to be because of my throat. Put me down as one who always reaches for a LUCKY. It’s a real delight to find a Cellophane wrapper that opens without an ice pick.”

“‘It’s toasted’

Your Throat Protection—against irritation—against cough
And Moisture-Proof Cellophane Keeps that “Toasted” Flavor Ever Fresh

A Home for the Missouri Dental Association

Since 1945, when a full-time, non-dentist executive secretary was hired and an executive office was established, the Missouri Dental Association has required a home. From 1949 to 1975, that home was located in Jefferson City at the Merchant’s Bank Building on the corner of High and Jefferson Streets.

From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, MDA leased office space on West McCarty Street until 1981 when the Board of Trustees voted to authorize the purchase of a building to house the executive office. The building would serve the association well for more than a decade, but time would take its toll on the structure, necessitating a change by the early 1990s.

In late 1992, the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to demolish the old office building and construct a new one on the same site, which would hold not only the MDA but the newly created Missouri Dental Insurance Services. In February 1993, crews arrived to begin demolition, which was slowed by the discovery of asbestos shingles. Originally scheduled to be complete by mid-to-late August, the project was delayed by the Great Flood of 1993.

With a need for more office space and easily accessible meeting rooms for the association and its insurance subsidiary, in February 2002, the MDA broke ground on its present office building, located on the West side of Jefferson City at 3340 American Avenue. MDA took up residence in December 2002.
Touted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control as one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century, the fluoridation of community drinking water supplies has been instrumental in reducing the incidence of tooth decay for 70 years.

Although other products containing fluoride are available, water fluoridation remains the most equitable and cost-effective method of delivering fluoride to all members of most communities, regardless of age, education or income level.

Frederick McKay, a Colorado Springs, Colorado, dentist who established his practice in 1901, first observed the benefits of fluoride.

In 1945, Grand Rapids, Michigan, became the first city in the world to add fluoride to its drinking water as part of a National Institute of Dental Research (NIDR) study on fluoride’s effectiveness in preventing tooth decay.

Richland became the first Missouri community to fluoridate its water in 1954, followed by St. Louis the following year. By 1961, there were 29 municipalities fluoridating their water supplies. Today, there are more than 130. Roughly two-thirds of Americans and about 378 million people worldwide received fluoridated water.

In commemoration of this milestone, the 70th Anniversary Fluoridation Celebration and Symposium was held at ADA Headquarters in Chicago on September 11 and 12, 2015. Ninety attendees from 28 states participated in the meeting.

In 1954, Richland became the first Missouri community to fluoridate its water, followed by St. Louis the following year. Images of Richland’s water fluoridation system when the addition of fluoride to the water supply officially commenced. A dinner and tour of the equipment commemorated the event.

In 1955, the display of the State Dental Association and Missouri Division of Health at the Missouri State Fair would promote community water fluoridation.
Annual MDA meetings of long ago featured an evening with dinner, music and dancing; however, the custom faded as the Association aged and the times changed. While today’s MDA House of Delegates does feature a Dinner and Awards Banquet, it’s typically without the flair of yesteryear. This year, to put a exclamation point on 150 years of organized dentistry in Missouri, we asked attendees to don their semi-formal attire and join friends and colleagues for an evening of fun and festivity. A special location, evening gowns and bow ties, a photo booth and fireworks were all part of a once-in-a-lifetime celebration. Close to 175 attendees ranging from current dental students to 50-year (plus) members reveled together over cocktails and dinner at tables decked out with special wine glasses and ornaments commemorating the anniversary. Everyone left with a keepsake and memories shared, but the real treat was reliving the proud history of the MDA.