

# Andrew Taylor Still

Father of Osteopathic  
Medicine

Jason Haxton



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# Contents

Introduction . . . . .	4
Chapter 1: Growing up on the Frontier . . . . .	6
Chapter 2: Border Warfare and New Medical Methods . . . . .	13
Chapter 3: Frontier Life and Medical Studies . . . . .	21
Chapter 4: Osteopathy Is Born . . .	28
Chapter 5: Teaching Osteopathy .	36
Legacy: Medical Pioneer . . . . .	44
Timeline . . . . .	45
For Further Reading . . . . .	46
Index . . . . .	48
Image Credits . . . . .	48

# Introduction


When Andrew Taylor Still was born, the field of medicine was very different from what we know today. Many people who practiced medicine had little or no formal training. Even trained doctors knew very little about what caused illness or how to treat it. People used herbal medicines to treat minor illnesses like a cold or upset stomach. But the old

methods of treating serious illnesses included using leeches or bleeding people to remove “bad blood,” or giving poisonous drugs to try to “kill” the disease. Those methods could not cure an illness caused by germs, and they were dangerous to the patient. Many people died from diseases despite being treated by



a doctor, and sometimes people even died because of the dangerous treatments that were used. When people got sick, often the best thing to do was to give them healthy food and have them rest, and hope they would get better soon.

As he was growing up on the frontier in the early 1800s, Andrew studied medicine with his father. He studied any medical books he could find. He also learned about plants that could be used to make medicines and he studied human anatomy. Andrew realized that medicine needed to be approached in a more scientific and systematic manner, and that the old methods were harmful. Most doctors would not listen to Andrew's ideas and many people thought he was crazy. But Andrew kept studying and kept working on his ideas about how to improve the practice of medicine.

After many years of studying, Andrew developed a new type of medicine that he called "osteopathy." His new way of treating sicknesses focused on helping the body return to its natural, healthy state. Dr. Still founded a school in Kirksville, Missouri, where he taught his methods to both men and women. From those early beginnings, osteopathic medicine has grown and spread around the world. 



## chapter 1

# Growing up on the Frontier

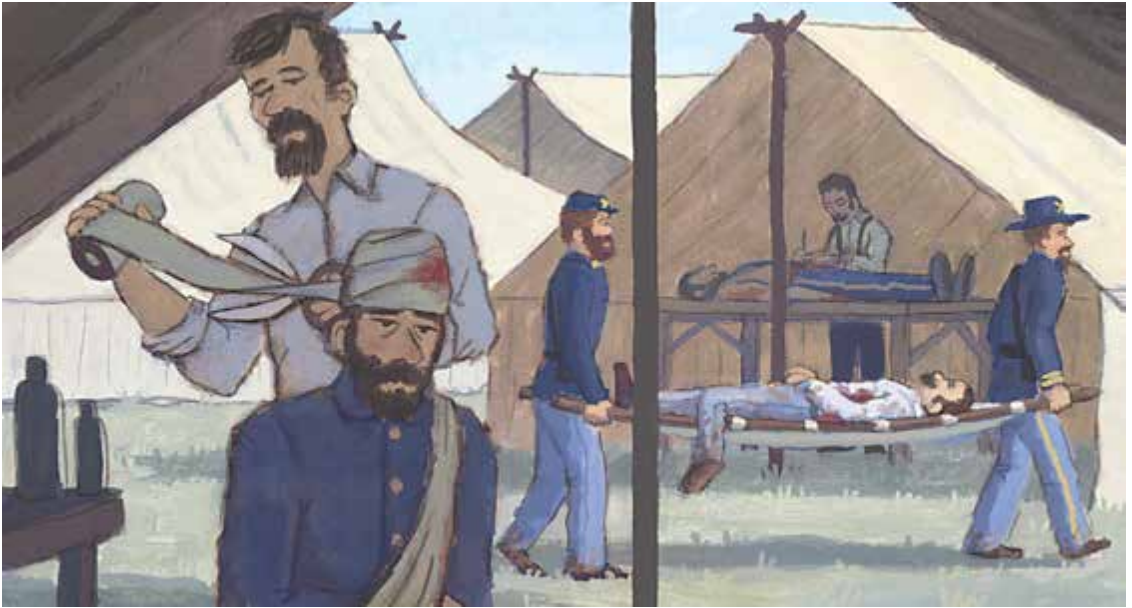
Andrew Taylor Still was born on August 6, 1828, in Lee County, Virginia, the third son born to Abram Still and Martha Poage Moore Still. Andrew's father, Abram, grew up on a plantation in North Carolina. His parents owned slaves, but Abram came to hate the practice of slavery. Abram attended a medical school in Ohio for a few months and then trained to be a Methodist preacher. As a "circuit rider," Abram traveled to homes and churches in isolated areas of the Blue Ridge

Mountains in western Virginia. Andrew later described his father “as a man educated to do all kinds of work, he was a doctor, minister, farmer and practical millwright.” Like many circuit riding preachers, Abram also treated sick people. This made him very welcome in areas where there were no doctors.

Andrew’s mother, Martha, was from a family that had moved to western Virginia when many Shawnee Indians lived there. As Americans began moving west, they often started farms on Indian land, and there were many conflicts between Indians and settlers. When Martha’s father, James Moore, was young, he was captured by the Shawnee and sold as a slave. Later Shawnee attacked the settlement and killed most

In the early 1800s, many Virginians were moving west in search of better farmland. Eastern Virginia had many large farms and plantations. Farms in the mountains of western Virginia were smaller and communities were more isolated because of the mountains.





## Chapter 3

# Frontier Life and Medical Studies

In 1856, the leaders of the Methodist Church wanted to establish a college somewhere in the Kansas territory, and various people offered to donate land for the school. The committee selected a piece of land in Palmyra, which was donated by Andrew Still and two of his brothers. They named the new college Baker University. While he helped to build the college, Andrew continued to work as a doctor. He was also elected to the state legislature during that period.



Despite being very busy with all the work involved in starting a college and serving in the legislature, Andrew continued to study medicine. Mary often watched Andrew in the evening as he pored over his anatomy books and then went to the closet to bring out his collection of human bones to study. He was figuring ways to adjust the bones, muscles, and nerves using just his hands—this is called manipulative medicine, because it is based on carefully moving (manipulating) body parts.



When Baker University opened in 1858, it consisted of just one building and had twenty students. Baker University was the first college in Kansas.

At such times Andrew rarely spoke and was so focused on his studies that Mary felt very alone. She was caring for their three children, plus another they had adopted. They had lost a baby son



## Chapter 4

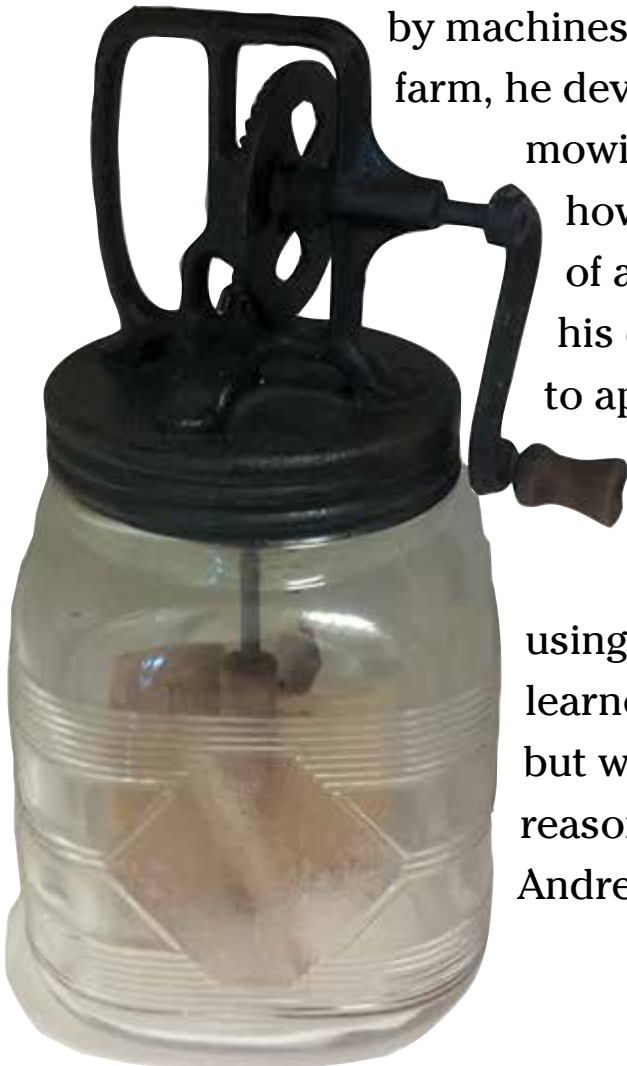
# Osteopathy Is Born

Over the next years, Andrew studied all of the latest developments in the science and philosophy of healing. He read Rudolf Virchow's ideas about cells as the basis of life and sickness as a biological process. He learned about Joseph Lister's idea of using antiseptics in surgery and Charles Darwin's ideas about how creatures adapt to their environment. He took classes at a medical school in Kansas City, but he left after seeing that the training was not systematic and included no hands-on practice. He studied new ideas about how the mind worked and how diet

affects a person's health, and thought about how the body was like a machine. He read about Spiritualism (the idea that people could talk to the spirits of dead people), hypnotism, and experiments in using magnetism and electricity in healing.

Andrew continued to practice medicine, but he kept quiet about his other studies for a while. He and Mary Elvira bought more land and had three more children: Charles was born in 1865 and twins Herman and Harry were born in 1867. Andrew was fascinated


by machines, and while working on his farm, he developed improvements to a mowing machine. He figured out how to improve on the design of a butter churn and patented his design in 1871. He began to apply what he knew about machines and mechanics to his study of the human body. He started using some of what he had learned when treating patients, but without telling them the reasoning behind his methods. Andrew had always been very



## Legacy

# Medical Pioneer

At a time when medical science was going through many changes, Dr. Andrew Taylor Still developed a new approach to healthcare. Osteopathic medicine viewed the human body as a machine that had to be kept in proper working order, with all of the bones and organs in their proper places. Many of the ideas Dr. Still promoted are now part of standard medical theories. Everybody knows that it is important to have a healthy diet and get plenty of exercise, that taking care of your health can help prevent illnesses, and that medicine must be studied in a systematic way.

When Andrew Taylor Still was developing osteopathic medicine, many people thought he was either crazy or a fraud, but eventually his hard work paid off. Osteopathic medicine was recognized as an effective method of treating sick people, and the study and practice of osteopathy now benefits people around the world every day. Today there are over forty osteopathic medical schools in the United States and more than one hundred schools in the world. 

# Timeline

- August 6, 1828:** Andrew Taylor Still is born in Lee County, Virginia.
- 1834:** Still family moves near New Market, Tennessee.
- 1837:** Still family moves to Macon County, Missouri.
- January 1849:** Andrew Still marries Mary Margaret Vaughan; begins practicing medicine with his father.
- 1853:** Andrew and Mary Still join the Still family at Wakarusha Shawnee Mission in Kansas; Andrew studies medicine with his father.
- 1854:** Andrew, his father, and his brothers join the Free-State Militia in Kansas.
- 1857:** Andrew is elected to Kansas territorial legislature.
- 1858:** Still family helps found Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas.
- September 29, 1859:** Mary Still dies, leaving Andrew with four children.
- November 1860:** Andrew marries Mary Elvira Turner.
- 1861–64:** Civil War begins; Andrew enlists and serves as a medical officer, and later in the Kansas state militia.
- 1864:** Spinal meningitis epidemic kills three Still children and another dies of pneumonia; Andrew begins search for new ways of healing.
- 1871:** Andrew patents a better butter churn.
- 1874:** Andrew publicly announces discovery of new form of medicine; moves back to Missouri and settles in Kirksville.
- 1879:** Andrew's trial for practicing medicine without a license ends in acquittal (Hannibal, Missouri).
- 1885:** Andrew chooses "osteopathy" as the name for his new form of medicine.
- 1892:** Andrew, with the help of Dr. William Smith, founds the American School of Osteopathy (ASO) in Kirksville, Missouri.
- 1894:** ASO awards first degrees.
- 1896:** Vermont is first state to license osteopathic physicians.
- 1910:** Mary Elvira Still dies.
- 1914:** A. T. Still-Hildreth Osteopathic Sanatorium opens in Macon, Missouri.
- December 12, 1917:** Andrew Taylor Still dies in Kirksville, Missouri.

# For Further Reading

## For Young Readers

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# Index

- abolitionist movement, 8–9, 10, 12, 18–19
- anatomy, Andrew Still studies, 11, 17, 22, 29–30
- border conflicts (Bleeding Kansas), 17–19, 20, 25
- circuit riding, 6–7, 9, 10
- Civil War, 24–25
- farmer, Andrew Still as, 12, 13, 14–15, 16, 25, 29
- herbal remedies, 12, 17, 26
- Indians, settlers relations with, 7–8, 16–15, 17
- machine, human body as, 29, 30, 33
- medical licensing, 34, 40–41
- medical practices, old vs. new, 19–20, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 39
- medical successes of Andrew Still, 20, 30, 32–33, 34, 36–37
- medical training, 6, 19, 28, 38–39, 42
- medical training, Andrew Still's, 11, 16, 17, 22, 28–29
- opposition faced by Andrew Still, 20, 23, 27, 30
- teaching osteopathy, 35, 36, 37–38, 39–40, 41–42

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# Andrew Taylor Still

As a young doctor in the mid-1800s, Andrew Taylor Still cared for sick and injured people on the frontier and on the battlefields of the Civil War. But he thought the common practices of bloodletting and using toxic medicines did more harm than good for sick people. He knew there had to be a better way to help sick people.

Andrew studied books and examined the natural world around him to make a new medical model, discovering a way to manipulate muscles, bones, and nerves with just his hands. At first, people thought his ideas were crazy, but today the medical system he developed, osteopathic medicine, is used to treat sick people all around the world.

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