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HISTORY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY IN MEXICO

Origins of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology

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Introduction

Medical trade organisations are essential elements in the formation of a medical specialty. They are created through a series of circumstantial elements, such as the prevalence of certain ideas, a critical mass of elements that share them, and some more external elements of chance, such as the political situation, the availability of means, etc. In this line of thought, it is necessary to see the precursor elements that were present for the formation of the first ophthalmology organisation in Mexico and on our continent.

Background

Since the Middle Ages we can find guilds that in some way controlled and restricted medical practice. During the Renaissance, professional organisations different from guilds and universities appeared, initially in Italy in the 14th century. Another example is the London College of Physicians, which was founded in 1518.

However, it is during contemporary times, after the French Revolution and with particularly in the 19th century that national medical associations play a more active role. The American Medical Association was founded in 1847, the British Medical Association in 1856 and the Association Générale des Médecins in 1867.

Mexico, in its early years of independence, was not unaware of these events and influences concerning professional associations. The first scientific society created in Mexico in the 19th century, that is still active today, is the Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics, founded in 1833 by Va-

lentin Gómez Farías. The first medical society that existed from 1825 to 1829 was the Academy of Surgery. It was also during this century that the National Academy of Medicine was founded. The first record is from 1836, when the first Mexican Academy of Medicine was created.

This Academy was dissolved and similar societies appeared: The Sociedad Filoiátrica, the Sociedad Filomédica, the Society of Medical Emulation and the Society of Medicine and Surgery. All sought to improve the state of medicine in Mexico and to extend the benefits of health to the population. On 30 April 1864, the medical section of the Scientific, Literary and Artistic Commission was created, as part of the foreign



Figure 1 Hospital de San Andrés.

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occupation government's desire to support inventors and encourage interest in cultivating science, literature and the fine arts. On 13 December 1865, the medical section separated from the Commission and formed the Medical Society of Mexico, although its documents and records already referred to it as an Academy. It was in 1873, under the presidency of Dr Lauro María Jiménez, when it formalised the name Academy of Medicine of Mexico. In 1877 it acquired the designation National Academy, which it still holds. Within its folds, the National Academy of Medicine harboured sections of anatomy and general surgery, as well as other specialties that encompassed their surgical aspects. It is in this setting that we find the founders of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology.

The professional environment

During the early years of the 19th century, ophthalmology was taught in the Royal School of Surgery, where, among other things, the students learnt how they should “couch cataracts”. In the medical practice of that time there were already groups of surgeons dedicated exclusively to practising this art. In this sense, the Hospital de San Andrés merits particular mention. At the end of the 19th century, it was the largest medical centre in Mexico (Fig. 1).

It was there that the Instituto Valdivieso was founded in 1875, located in the lower part of the Hospital, occupying the land left by the demolition of the church of San Andrés, where the body of Maximilian was displayed for several months. The church was demolished in a single night by Juan José Baz, since Juárez did not want it to become a place of worship for the emperor. Eight years after the demolition,

the Eye Annex was built thanks to the Mexican diplomat Ignacio Valdivieso, who bequeathed an income for poor eye patients in Mexico. Dr Agustín Andrade, a physician in the Hospital de San Andrés with an interest in Ophthalmology, was appointed the first director.

The Instituto Valdivieso was the point of reference for most Mexican ophthalmologists of that time, some of which would go on to found the first Mexican ophthalmological organisation.

Founding of the Society

The meeting to formalise the Society took place in the home of Dr José Ramos on 18 February 1893. The record of establishment was signed by 7 people, although for reasons unknown, 8 names appear on it. It is worth noting that Joaquín Vértiz's signature is not among them. That same day, the first board of the newly-created Society was elected, which was established as follows:

President: José Ramos.

Vice President: Fernando López.

Secretary: Agustín Chacón.

Treasurer: Emilio Montaña.

The Mexican Ophthalmological Society became the oldest in Latin America in this specialty. In the Ophthalmological Society's first book of minutes, in addition to the summary of the works presented and the discussions that took place during the sessions, there are several useful pieces of information for the history of this newly created association (Fig. 2).



Figure 2 Doctors of the Hospital San Andrés.

The first sessions

Record number 1 from the session held on 1 February 1894 indicates that it was chaired by Dr Ramos and is signed, as secretary, by doctor Agustín Chacón. *Record number 2* from the next sessions is recorded as extraordinary, and took place 1 year and 8 months after the first, on 5 October 1895, where again Dr Ramos chaired and Dr Manuel Uribe Troncoso was secretary. During the first 3 years, the members of the Society met annually or every 8 months, but towards the end of 1895 they began to have greater interest and the time between sessions shortened. In November 1895 the ophthalmologists met again, this time chaired by Dr Lorenzo Chávez and Uribe Troncoso continued as secretary (*record number 3*). On 18 November that same year there was another session, in which *record number 4* was written. The session was chaired by Chávez with Uribe Troncoso as secretary. The same board members continue with the sessions from 2 December (*record number 5*), 16 December (*record number 6*), and 30 December (*record number 7*). It gives the impression that the ophthalmologists were trying to reorganise themselves and breathe more life into a society that was working so slowly. As no new appointments to the board appear in the records from these sessions, it is assumed that the doctor who chaired was functioning as the president of the Society. In 1896, the 13 January session (*record number 8*) was chaired by Lorenzo Chávez, but now the secretary was Dr Emilio Montaña, who had been treasurer since the Society was founded. After this record, the rest are unnumbered. They report that the session from 27 January was chaired by the above named people, while the session from 10 February was chaired by Lorenzo Chávez.

There are only a few records from the sessions from 1901 to 1903; in 1901 a session was chaired by José Ramos and another by Agustín Chacón and Lorenzo Chávez. In 1902 the president was Fernando López and the vice president was Lorenzo Chávez, although there was one session presided by Magaña.

Founding members

Dr José Ramos was born in San Luis Potosí in 1858 and as a schoolboy knew Gabino Barrera who introduced positivism in Mexico. Ramos was a disciple of the distinguished ophthalmologist, Dr Manuel Carmona y Valle, and received his degree in medicine in 1881, becoming a professor of physics and geography in the Instituto Científico y Literario de Toluca [Toluca Literary and Scientific Institute]. In Paris he specialised in ophthalmology at the side of Galezowski, who offered his knowledge and experience to the medical body in Mexico. Upon his return to Mexico, Ramos earned the professorship in internal pathology through a competitive hiring process. He established the teaching of ophthalmology in the School of Medicine. In 1888 he joined the National Academy of Medicine and was its president in 1896.

Another founder is Lorenzo Chávez y Aparicio, who was born in 1860. He graduated as a surgeon in 1884, and in 1895 he held a chair in the National Academy of Medicine. Chávez was the director of the Valdivieso Ophthalmological Hospital and doctor at the Hospital de Regina. He died in 1912.

Fernando López y Sánchez Román (1854-1924) graduated in 1879 and in 1880 received an award as best surgeon. He was appointed as the subdirector of the Military Instruction Hospital in 1891 and then its director in 1894. In 1905 he was designated the director of the General Hospital of Mexico City. He was also a member of the National Academy of Medicine.

Agustín Chacón (1860-1920) graduated in 1882. He was a disciple of Agustín Andrade and Ricardo Vértiz in the Instituto Valdivieso. In 1890 he joined the National Academy of Medicine and was an assistant to Dr José Ramos in the ophthalmology clinic. In addition, he was a prolific writer. Along with Dr Emilio Montaña, in 1905 he was at the head of the ophthalmology department of the General Hospital.

Emilio Montaña (1863-1936) was a disciple of Manuel Carmona y Valle and later José Ramos. He perfected his knowledge at the side of Lapersonne in Paris. Like the other doctors indicated above, he was a member of the National Academy of Medicine.

Manuel Uribe y Troncoso (1876-1959) (Fig. 3) was one of the figures of Mexican ophthalmology whose work had a worldwide impact. He was an adjunct professor of ophthalmology in the National School of Medicine in 1899 and a full professor in 1915 and 1916. Dr Uribe Troncoso was also a member of the National Academy of Medicine. In 1916 he emigrated to New York, seemingly for political reasons. His writings about the iridocorneal angle still form the foundations of our knowledge on the subject. The design of the first gonioscopy for clinical use is attributed to him. Furthermore, he published two works that are classics in the history of ophthalmology, *Internal Diseases of the Eye* and

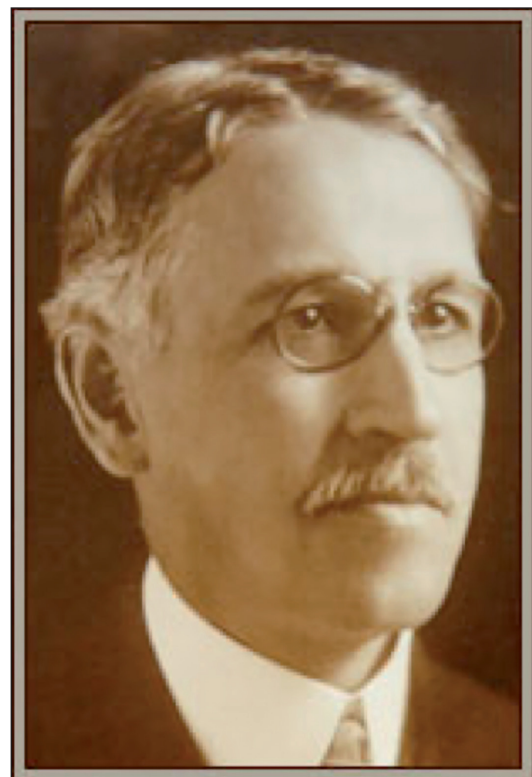


Figure 3 Dr Manuel Uribe y Troncoso.

In September that same year, the following members joined the editing committee: Drs Juan Santos Fernández, from la Havana, and Charles A. Oliver, from Philadelphia; in 1899 Demichieri, from Montevideo; in 1900 Albert B. Hale, from Chicago, Otto Wernicke, from Buenos Aires and P. de Obarrio, from Guayaquil, and later J.A. de Abreu Fialho, from Rio de Janeiro. For the first 17 years the journal was issued monthly. This took considerable effort, both because of the small number of Mexican ophthalmologists as well as the frequency and persistence with which it was published. It was only towards the end that it presented several delays as a direct consequence of the Mexican Revolution and in 1914 due to the occupation of Veracruz by troops from the United States.

The *Anales* is the oldest Spanish-language journal on ophthalmology, that has lasted until the present day.

First Annual Meeting

The idea of holding annual meetings of ophthalmologists was presented by Dr Uribe Troncoso during the session on 2 December 1902, an idea which was approved by the members of the Society. The Organising Committee comprised Drs Lorenzo Chávez, Manuel Uribe Troncoso and Daniel Vélez, who sent a first flier about the meeting on 1 January.

The original project was to hold meetings each year and so regulations were drafted for the annual meetings.

The First Annual Meeting took place in Mexico City from 27 to 31 March 1903, at the Hospital de Nuestra Señora de la Luz, at 619 La Paz street. It was chaired by Lorenzo Chávez with Manuel Uribe Troncoso as vice president, E. Graue y Glennie and Rafael Silva as secretaries and Emilio Montaña as treasurer. Ophthalmologists from the Mexican Republic and abroad attended. The sessions were held at 11 in the morning and 6 in the evening, and 9 works were presented by members from Mexico City, 6 more by members from the states, and 2 from abroad, in addition to 4 related to the description of new instruments and an artificial eye for retinoscopy. The foreign works were from El Salvador and the United States.

Dr Eduardo Liceaga, Director of the School of Medicine, upon inaugurating this meeting indicated that the participation of doctors from the province and abroad truly made this Meeting the First National Congress of Ophthalmology.

Among all the specialties, the Ophthalmological Society was the first to hold a national congress. The Society published the proceedings from that meeting the same year, in a small, 232-page book, with all the works presented.

Second Annual Meeting

The Second Annual Meeting was also held in Mexico City, from 2 to 6 May 1905 in the Academy of Medicine Hall. The president was M. Uribe Troncoso and the vice president was Daniel Vélez, the secretary Ignacio del Valle and the treasurer Emilio Montaña. At that time, the Society had 3 honorary members, 8 founders, 11 full members, 22 corresponding members, and 10 foreign corresponding members.

Third Annual Meeting

The Third Annual Meeting took place in Mexico City from 17 to 21 September 1907, chaired by José Ramos, with Dr Fernando López as vice president, R. Acosta as secretary and E. Montaña as treasurer. As can be seen, the meetings were held every other year.

Fourth Annual Meeting

The Fourth Annual Meeting, now joint with the IV National Medical Congress, was held in Mexico City from 19 to 25 September 1910, chaired by Emilio Montaña, with Agustín Chacón as vice president, Ramón Terroba as secretary and Juan Carmona as treasurer. This time it was three years.

These three meetings also published their respective proceedings in books of more than 200 pages.

Troubled years

In August 1911 elections for the Board were held and Dr Daniel Vélez became president. In the meantime, the Fifth Annual Meeting was not held and even the regular sessions stopped being held regularly, due, in large part, to problems caused by the Mexican Revolution. In 1914, two notes appeared in the *Anales* informing about delays in publishing and distributing the journal due to the Revolution, the nearly total suspension of railway connections, and moreover, due to the recent occupation of Veracruz by troops from the United States. Despite the difficulties, volumes XVI and XVII were released.

One of the Society's main driving forces was Dr Uribe Troncoso, who, upset because he was removed from his post in the Department of School Hygiene and his position as a professor in the School of Medicine for political reasons, emigrated to New York in the middle of 1916. The following year, the *Anales* were merged with the *American Journal of Ophthalmology* from New York.

Fifth Annual Meeting

The Society began to overcome their problems due to the efforts of Daniel Vélez, Rafael Silva and Antonio Torres Estrada. In 1918, Dr Fernando López was elected president and from 9 to 16 April the Fifth Annual Meeting was held jointly with the Fifth National Medical Congress, in the city of Puebla. During the meeting, 15 works were presented, 6 of them by José de Jesús González, 2 by Rafael Mendoza, and the remaining 7 by different presenters.

The *Anales* were again published in 1918 under the direction of Dr Vélez. In August of that year, an announcement appeared about a Practical Course in Ophthalmology for doctors, given by Drs Chacón, López, Montaña, Vélez and José Mesa Gutiérrez, from 9 o'clock in the evening once a week for four weeks.

Ophthalmology and otorhinolaryngology

The Society invited the otorhinolaryngologists from the capital and the states to join it, since both specialties were con-

sidered to be intimately linked. As of 1920, the journal's title was *Anales de la Sociedad Mexicana de Oftalmología y Otorrinolaringología* [*Annals of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology and Otorhinolaryngology*]. Dr Vélez continued as director, with the frequent appearance of Dr Rafael Silva as co-director.

Sixth Annual Meeting

Held jointly with the Sixth National Medical Congress in Toluca (State of Mexico), the Sixth Annual Meeting of the now Mexican Society of Ophthalmology and Otorhinolaryngology took place from 14 to 21 April 1920. The proceedings were published in a 148-page notebook, with an annex with 12 sheets with 24 colour drawings illustrated by Dr José de Jesús González showing the features of the fundus of the eye in some vertebrates. Fifteen works were presented at this meeting, 7 by José de Jesús González and 2 by Antonio Torres Estrada.

Seventh Annual Meeting

The Seventh Annual Meeting, chaired by Dr Vélez, was held jointly with the Seventh National Medical Congress in Saltillo from 24 to 30 September 1922. Nineteen works were presented, 11 of them by J. de J. González, 2 by Torres Estrada,

and the remaining 6 by different presenters. Dr González presented an iconography of ocular leprosy with several photographs and 11 colour drawings. In addition, there were two articles on the parenteral injection of milk to treat some eye diseases.

In the *Anales* from July and August 1928, there was an editorial by Dr Vélez about the journal's thirtieth anniversary. It said that it has continued publishing the works of the members with the journal's new name, and that the first 17 volumes along with the 6 from the second era constitute the scientific heritage of the Mexican ophthalmologists.

Conclusions

As seen from this historic retelling, the founding of the Mexican Society of Ophthalmology, in those days called the Mexican Ophthalmological Society, corresponds not only to the origins of a trade organisation, but also to the birth of a profession with a group of professionals who shared both the interest and knowledge for an area of the medical-surgical sciences to the extent that they were generating, organising and spreading knowledge about the area. All that is left is to detail the life of this Society at the start of the 20th century where it encountered unique challenges.

We will see that, despite the difficult times that they faced, they were successful in establishing one of the oldest and strongest professional groups in the medical profession.