

The following cover article is a reprint from the Journal of Chiropractic Achievers March/April 1989. This article shows what one man went through to help get Chiropractic licensed. Dr. Herbert Reaver Sr. died in 2000 he continued to practice straight, principled chiropractic until his final days.

Rebel with a Cause

Dr. Herbert R. Reaver
Chiropractic pioneer

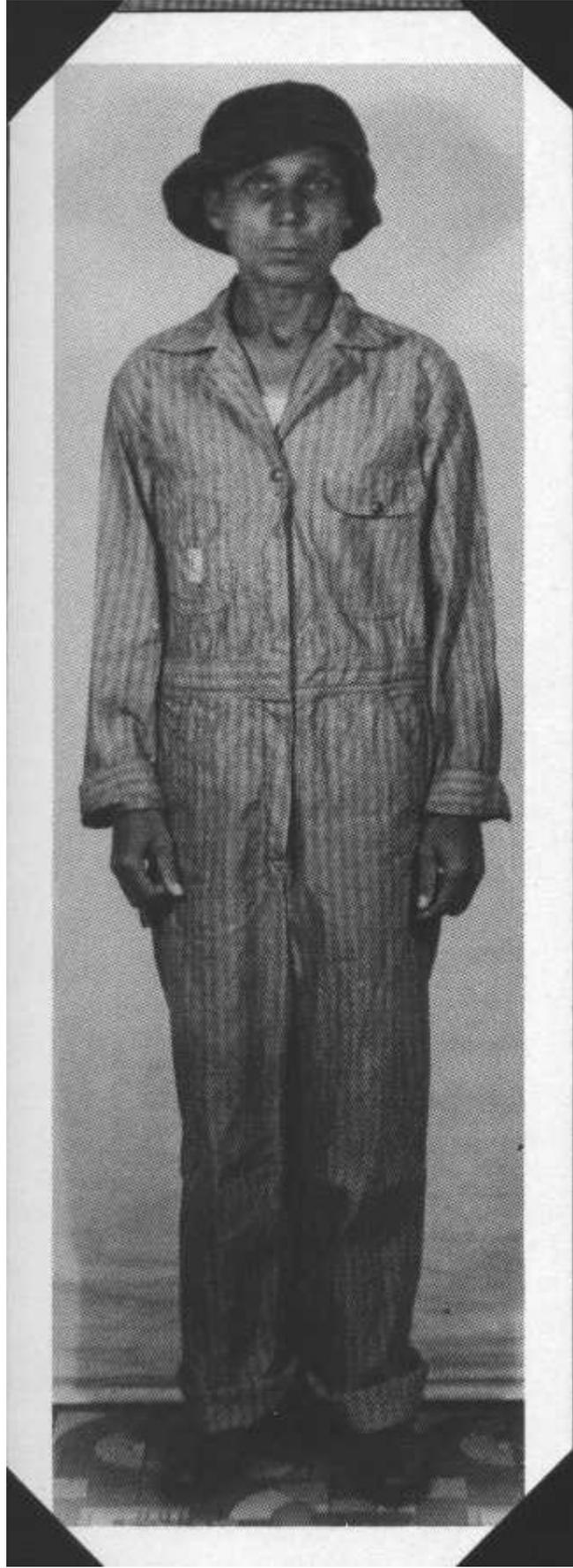


Dr. Herbert Ross Reaver, called "the most arrested chiropractor" in history, was an incorrigible criminal. As soon as he finished a jail term, he'd go home and break the law again. Soon, he'd be back before a judge for another sentence to the workhouse. Dr. Reaver wasn't a thief, a murderer or a vagrant. His crime?
Practicing chiropractic.

In 1989, when chiropractic is the second-largest health system in the country and thousands of DCs practice in peace, Dr. Reaver's story can't help but amaze the younger members of the profession. It's hard to believe that, not too long ago, chiropractors were outcasts in health care. At 83, Dr. Herbert Reaver is a testament to a time when chiropractic was under fire. Perhaps as a premonition that future generations would want to know about the difficult days of the profession, the Ohio chiropractor kept meticulous scrapbooks of his arrests during the 1940s and 1950s. Among the clippings and the telegrams from B.J. Palmer are photographs - all detailing Dr. Reaver's courage in black and white.

The circumstances surrounding Dr. Reaver's long fight for Chiropractic began much earlier than the time of his arrests. Ohio's Platt-Ellis Amendment had been enacted in 1915 to leave healing the sick solely in the hands of medical doctors. It was on the books, but DCs were able to work in Ohio without much interference until Dr. Reaver was chosen as a target. Essentially, the law made it necessary for chiropractors to receive their licenses from a State Medical Board comprised solely of MDs. The hundreds of DCs who were practicing in Ohio were to be considered limited medical practitioners governed by MDs. Chiropractors who refused to be licensed were fined \$25 and sent home; a majority of the state's DCs were unlicensed.

"I was arrested eight times, which worked out to about once every year since I started practicing." remembers Dr. Reaver from his home in Ohio. "I paid the fine and went about my way.



"He was arrested four more times; the harshest jail term was six months of labor. After his last arrest in 1950, a judge warned him that he would be sentenced as a habitual offender the next time he came to court. Weary of the fight, Dr. Reaver moved his practice to Florida for 15 years before returning to Ohio, where he is now semi retired.

The story of Dr. Reaver's arrests is an integral part of the history of chiropractic. Some DCs who were conforming to the rules attacked him in the local papers for making himself a martyr, but the majority supported his stance. The press followed his story, chiropractic societies lent him moral support and his patients demonstrated in front of the workhouse to get him released, During one of his jail terms, he was assigned to work on a garbage truck. He soon had to be sent elsewhere when patients who spotted him along his route began to follow the truck in their cars to show their support.

The First Jail Term

After 13 years in practice, Dr. Herbert Reaver had built a popular practice in Oakley, a suburb of Cincinnati. He was outspoken about chiropractic and about inoculations; he often wrote to newspapers stating his opinions. During the summer of 1943, he wrote a letter to a local school principal about the school's requirement that students be vaccinated for enrollment. The letter made its way to MDs who targeted Dr. Reaver for action from the State Medical Board.

On September 30, 1943, a medical inspector stopped by Dr. Reaver's office to warn him that a group of local MDs had signed complaints against him. For the ninth time, he would be arrested for refusing to be licensed. He could have paid the \$25 fine and returned to his patients, but he and his wife made a difficult choice.

"I talked it over with my wife and we agreed, "this is enough: so I didn't pay the fine," remembers Dr. Reaver. He informed the Ohio State Chiropractic Society of his decision in a letter explaining that paying the fine would be "admitting guilt." He was sentenced to nine days' labor mixing cement in Cincinnati's local jail.

As Dr. Reaver was serving his term, a letter arrived at his Ohio home from his friend B.J Palmer. On letterhead from the Palmer clinic crowned by B.J.'s initialed signature, the developer of chiropractic offered Dr. Reaver his backing: "You are pursuing the only path that really wins. They will realize now that they have hold of a red hot poker and if he sticks it out he will win hands down. More power to you."

[\(To read the letter from B.J. Click here.\)](#)

At the end of his term, Dr. Reaver's wife Millie and his son Chappie were joined at the jail by 40 patients to greet him as he returned home.

"I am fighting for a principle," he told the local press, "And someday I hope to see the Ohio law changed so that those engaged in practicing chiropractic will get a fair deal."

The publicity he received attracted more patients to his practice. Mrs. Millie Reaver, an attractive brunette, received modeling offers after her picture ran in the papers.



Son Chappie grew up to become Dr. Herbert "Chap" Reaver Jr., a Georgia chiropractor and columnist for Dynamic Chiropractic. In 1985, he wrote a tribute to his father in which he tells how the jail terms helped build his father's practice: "Each time he got out of jail he was busier than ever," remembers his son.

Dr. Chap Reaver tells of a night when his exhausted parents were having dinner and talking about their busy practice. Dr. Reaver and his wife were discussing ways to cut down the number of patients who kept filling their practice each day. They decided to raise their fee from \$3 a visit to \$4 thinking that the increase would discourage new comers. A few weeks later, the subject came up again at the dinner table.

"Has raising the fees cut us down any" asked Dr. Reaver.

"No," replied Mrs. Reaver. "The practice is growing faster than ever. Should we raise it again?"

"Aw hell," he said after mulling it over. "Let's go back down to \$3."

And so the D.R. Reaver Chiropractic Offices kept seeing more and more new patients and making Dr. Herbert Reaver more visible in his community.

B.J. Intervenes To Help Dr. Reaver

Things stayed quiet for Dr. Herbert Reaver as World War II took everyone's mind off the battle between DCs and MDs in Ohio. There were some rumblings that Dr. Herbert Reaver was running a practice that didn't refuse to see blacks or Jews as some others did. Although a predominantly black church praised him in its bulletin, other patients couldn't accept a doctor that that didn't segregate patients. Other than exchanges of letters in the local papers, there was to be no more trouble for Dr. Reaver until 1946.

For the tenth time, Dr. Reaver was arrested for practicing without a license. His fine was upped to \$500, or six months in the workhouse. He served a week before an appeal freed him. As Dr. Reaver's appeal stretched into 1947 and a higher court sustained the conviction, his case became a familiar one in Cincinnati. Journalist Alfred Segal, a crusading columnist who called himself "Cincinnatus" after the Roman statesman, wrote about the Reaver case constantly. By the time he was taken to the workhouse to begin his 160 day sentence, all of Cincinnati knew about Dr. Herbert Reaver. The police court and the workhouse were picketed by patients protesting the sentence.

The distraught parents of a patient the press called "The Stone Girl" begged the judge not to imprison Dr. Reaver. The girl had a rare disease that hardened her skin and medical doctors had not been able to help. Dr. Reaver's adjustments every other day had allowed "The Stone Girl" to be well enough to sit up.

As the judge ordered Dr. Reaver to be taken to the workhouse, the ICA restated its position to pay the fine of any chiropractor cited for practicing without a license. For Dr. Reaver the publicity surrounding his six months in jail would help chiropractic more than paying a fine. He was assigned to the prison bakery while he served his time.

According to a Cincinnati Post story, his patients visited him daily for advice while he

adjusted fellow prisoners. The secretary of the State Medical Board told the Post why Dr. Reaver had been singled out for arrest. With only two inspectors to cover the entire state, the DCs who were fined were usually those who'd had complaints lodged against them by MDs. "It may be that Mr. Reaver has been arrested more than some of the others because he is the ringleader in resistance to the state law. He makes a martyr of himself," said the secretary.

Although Dr. Reaver was ready to serve the six-month sentence, his friend B.J. Palmer intervened. Because Dr. Reaver had already served 14 days of the sentence, the court lowered the fine to \$471.95. B.J. wired the money to an attorney to get Dr. Reaver out of jail and sent a telegram saying that, as president of the ICA, he'd overridden Dr. Reaver's decision. His services were too valuable to the ICA and to his patients to keep him in jail, wired B.J.

In 1948, a smiling Dr. Herbert Reaver is one of the new directors surrounding B.J. Palmer at a Palmer School Lyceum photo. He'd just been elected the ICA's third vice president. The 1928 Palmer graduate, who'd heard B.J. lecture so many times during the year he was a student, was coming to the Lyceum a hero.

60 Years Serving Chiropractic

"I kept wanting to get the next patient cured, to do good and to practice the Golden Rule--same as now," says Dr. Reaver of the difficult days. "I went through the mill and it was rough on my family."

After more than 60 years in practice, he can look back with pride at the stand he took for chiropractic. The postwar period was to offer him new challenges in court.



As his reputation grew, Dr. Reaver's appearances in court increased. Between his six month sentence in 1947 and 1951, he was to be arrested three more times. During one of the jail terms, his son, then 14, wrote to the sentencing judge to speak for his father. "He is a good man," wrote Herbert Reaver Jr., "I hope that I can be like him even if it means going to jail."

His son remembers the days when the family would pick Dr. Reaver up at the workhouse at midnight after serving a sentence. The first thing his father would do after coming through the front door would be to flick the light switch that turned on the sign at the office on the ground floor of the house. "I knew that it meant he would be going to jail again soon," wrote Dr. Reaver Jr. many years later.

Another six-month sentence coupled with a \$500 ~ fine followed in 1950 as Dr. Reaver refused to change his stance against the state Medical Board. A journalist pointed out that a fellow inmate at the workhouse had just been released after serving only 30 days for child abuse. Meanwhile, less visible chiropractors in Cincinnati continued to practice unlicensed and unbothered by the medical investigators. Dr. Reaver was becoming a scapegoat in medicine's fight against chiropractic in Ohio.

In the fifth month of his 1950 sentence, he was found guilty of another count of practicing without a license. His sentence, one year's probation, carried with it the

stipulation that returning to practice would mean an immediate return to the workhouse. After his six month six-month sentence Dr. Reaver would not be allowed to practice in Ohio at all without violating his probation. Weakened by the physical and financial struggle, the Reavers decided to move to St. Petersburg, Florida. The Cincinnati Post put the story on its June 25 front page next to a story about developments in the Korean War.

Dr. Reaver practiced in St. Petersburg for almost 15 years before returning to his home state. In 1972, Ohio DCs the only ones in the country still governed by a medical board but Dr. Reaver was no longer under harassment.

He continued to practice in the Cincinnati area; his many patients included members of the professional Bengals football and Reds baseball organizations. Dr. and Mrs., Reaver now live in the Cincinnati suburb of Pisgah where, at the age of 83, he is still doing what he loves best, practicing chiropractic.

In the last few years, he's been inducted into the Chiropractic Hall of Fame and he's lectured at Palmer. One of the sections in his many scrapbooks preserves clippings of Dr. Chester Wilk's victory against the American Medical Association in 1987.

It had been a long road from the carefree 1920s, when young Herbert Reaver was playing guitar and singing in dance bands, to the Chicago Four's vindication in the fight against the AMA in 1987. An injury in the late 1920s had sent Dr. Reaver to a DC who filled him with zeal about the way chiropractic could heal. He'd enrolled at Palmer in 1927, when Calvin Coolidge was still President, and graduated a year later. We remembers seeing B.J. Palmer in class every afternoon when the Palmer staff numbered about a dozen and watching Charles Lindbergh parade down Brady Street in Davenport after his transatlantic flight. During his arrests, most newspapers called him "Mr. Reaver in print; B.J. himself had to sign his letters "Colonel" when writing to Dr. Reaver because the workhouse censors refused to accept mail from chiropractors.

"Young people today have no idea what it was like to practice in those days," says Dr. Reaver. His scrapbooks and his memories are there to educate today's generation about a time when chiropractic was in danger of extinction.

"I am just an ordinary chiropractor who became caught up in the events of the times," said a modest Dr. Reaver after his induction into the Chiropractic Hall of Fame. His scrapbooks and the sacrifices he and his family made so that chiropractic would survive are proof of his extraordinary courage and his place in history. In 1943, he wrote a letter to the local chiropractic society explaining why he had decided

to serve out his fine in the workhouse: "I want to try this to see if something will come of it; to see if the folks in my community are willing for this injustice to chiropractors to continue; to see if, in these times of national stress, it is a criminal offense to get sick people well... I sincerely hope it will be a good contribution toward health freedom."

Dr. Herbert Ross Reaver's contribution did come to something, as he had hoped in 1943. Every chiropractor in America owes him a tremendous debt.

