

Oakland County Medical Society History

In 1819, the Michigan Territorial Legislative Council passed an act “to incorporate Medical Societies for the purpose of regulating the Practice of Physic and Surgery in the Territory of Michigan.” Under this act, the medical Society of the Territory of Michigan was organized in Detroit in August, 1819.

The law provided that licensed physicians in any county, upon application to the Territorial Medical Society, were granted the right to form a county society, which, within the limits of the county, had the same rights as a parent society. On June 12, 1827, a group of physicians were granted permission to form the Washtenaw County Medical Society. And three years later, in June, 1831, physicians William Thompson, David L. Porter, Thaddeus Thompson and Ezra Parke were granted permission to organize a medical society in the county of Oakland, the second county society in the Territory. Records of the Society’s activities during these early years are sketchy, but meetings were held and officers were elected until about 1851, when the legislature repealed the medical law and thus deprived the medical societies of their former power and privileges. The Medical Society of Michigan was formally dissolved at a meeting in May, 1851.

The Michigan State Medical Society was organized in 1866. It encouraged its members to study and record local climates, epidemic diseases and public health problems. It demanded compliance with the Code of Ethics of the American Medical Society, insisted on improved standards for the University of Michigan Medical Department, and called for better treatment for the insane by building state insane asylums. It initiated the demand for state and local boards of health and the use of scientific knowledge to improve the daily life of Michigan residents. Scientific papers read at its meeting attracted scholarly members, but the Society failed to attract and hold the majority of Michigan physicians.

The American Medical Association, founded in 1847, was reorganized in 1901. Its new constitution provided that any dues-paying member in good standing of a local society affiliated with the state society could become a member of the Association. This encouragement from the AMA gave impetus to a surge in membership for MSMS and the rebirth of the Oakland County Medical Society.

At an organized meeting held in the Council Chamber of the City of Pontiac, September 9, 1902, the Oakland County Medical Society was organized and its Constitution and By-Laws were adopted. Dr. Franklin B. Galbraith of Pontiac was elected President.

The Society worked in public health, to eradicate diphtheria, to improve maternal and child welfare, and to provide care for the indigent. OCMS also worked with the Oakland County Tuberculosis Sanitarium, helped with programs on inoculation against polio, and worked with the American Cancer Society to plan for cancer detection.

The Bulletin, published without interruption since 1927, records the activities and current issues of concern to the Society. In connection with the Society's sesquicentennial celebration in 1981, Ruth Howes of Oakland University, Rochester, compiled a comprehensive history of the Oakland County Medical Society.