

C. Edmund Kells Museum

Located at:
Louisiana State University
School of Dentistry,
New Orleans, LA 70119
USA

Photographs by Kavas H. Thunthy BDS, MS, MEd

Charles Edmund Kells, DDS

1865 - 1928

- It will probably never be known who actually made the first dental radiograph in USA.
- It was either one of these three:
 - C. Edmund Kells, DDS, of New Orleans
 - William Herbert Rollins, DDS, MD, of Boston
 - William James Morton, MD, of New York

C. Edmund Kells 1865 - 1928



Kells' dental office was in the old Maison Blanche building, Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA



For the first time in the history of the U.S. Postal Service, the Postal Service is not required to deliver mail to every address in the country. The Postal Service is now required to deliver mail only to "residential addresses," as defined by the Postal Service. This means that mail is not required to be delivered to businesses, government offices, or other non-residential addresses. This change is part of a broader effort to reduce the Postal Service's operating costs and to improve its financial health. The Postal Service is currently facing a significant financial challenge, with a projected deficit of \$1.5 billion for the fiscal year 2001. The Postal Service is seeking to reduce its operating costs by a total of \$1.5 billion over the next five years. This includes a reduction in the number of mail carriers, a reduction in the number of mail delivery routes, and a reduction in the number of mail delivery vehicles. The Postal Service is also seeking to increase its revenue by a total of \$1.5 billion over the next five years. This includes an increase in the number of mail delivery routes, an increase in the number of mail delivery vehicles, and an increase in the number of mail carriers. The Postal Service is also seeking to improve its financial health by a total of \$1.5 billion over the next five years. This includes an increase in the number of mail delivery routes, an increase in the number of mail delivery vehicles, and an increase in the number of mail carriers. The Postal Service is also seeking to improve its financial health by a total of \$1.5 billion over the next five years. This includes an increase in the number of mail delivery routes, an increase in the number of mail delivery vehicles, and an increase in the number of mail carriers.



At the Whitehouse ceremony, January 19, 1927, there was a large gathering of representative people of New Orleans, in the Metropolitan Commercial Building at the School of Medicine. The occasion was the dedication of the C. Edmund Kelly Memorial Library and Museum, founded by a group of doctors of New Orleans, friends and admirers of Dr. Charles Edmund Kelly, of the city, world-famous dental surgeon and lover of science. On this occasion, also, the University conferred upon Dr. Kelly the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, in recognition of his various achievements in the field of dentistry.

Dr. Kells was born in New Orleans on October 21, 1856. His early education was obtained in the public schools of the city and at the Kenne. N. H. high school. Later he attended the New York Dental College, now known as the School of Dentistry of New York University, where he graduated in 1878. He then returned to New Orleans and entered upon the practice of his profession. When Huxley first presented the X-ray, Dr. Kells was the first dental surgeon in the world to utilize the discovery in dental diagnosis. It was at the expense of his early acquaintance with the X-ray that a slight lesion developed on the thumb of his left hand, which led to a series of operations, resulting finally in amputation, accompanying the gradual accumulation of nearly his entire





Dentist -- Inventor -- Scientist

By Ida D. Jeffries

FORTY years ago, he was hailed as usually as a hero—a pioneer in the field of X-ray dentistry and the developer of many devices which are now standard equipment in modern dental offices. Today, only a few persons living in New Orleans remember him, and C. Edmund Kells Jr. is almost forgotten, like a prophet without honor in his own city.

Kells was born in 1856 in a house on Canal Street near where the Boston Club now stands. He grew up tall, spindly. Even as a child, his frail appearance would belie the fact that he was constantly at work both mind and body, energetically pursuing the wondrous scientific discoveries of his day.

In 1878, young Kells entered the office of his father, a practicing New Orleans dentist, perhaps to see what the profession was all about. Liking what he saw, Kells enrolled in the New Orleans Dental College, then attended New York College of Dentistry, when he returned home in 1879. However, it was with three years of dental education. Frequent visits to the Edison laboratory in Menlo Park had fired an interest in the uses of electricity, so much so that by the late of the century, the young dentist had patented dozens of inventions in making an electric thermostat, five extinguishers, burglar alarm and electric magnetic clock and engine.

Dr. M. B. Varnado, who began practicing with Kells in 1918, recalls visiting him at home and seeing his electric magnetic clock. "It would trigger the opening of the door downstairs, even the running of warm bath water at an appointed hour."

After marriage in 1883, Kells quickly learned he was the lucky person who had to stop what he was doing every time it rained—so he invented a mechanical window closer. "Darndest thing I ever saw," chuckles Varnado.

THE crowning achievement of Kells' inventive career was an automatic electric suction pump which found use in dentistry and every field of surgery where rapid aspiration of fluids was required to clear the operating field. Dr. Rudolph Matas said of the models he tried: "This invention alone is sufficient to immortalize the name of Dr. Kells and has won for him the eternal gratitude of every working surgeon in the land."

A progressive thinker in business, too, Kells instituted a system of monthly settlements of all accounts, including young women in his office for both restorative and dental assistant charges—all innovations for Southern dental offices in the early 1900s.

Mileage in his career, Kells' genius was especially inspired by an event in



Dr. Kells' up-to-date 1890 office had electric dent

Drill hangs from electric unit control switchboard.

Below, at 1954 New Orleans Dental Conference.

Marquette, Dr. M. B. Varnado and Dr. L. G. Ro

over early X-ray tubes used by Kells. Tubes and

memorabilia are now on display at Smithsonian.



Germany in 1895, the discovery of the Roentgen ray. Because dentistry was still in the age of feel and poke, Kells saw wondrous possibilities for exposing the roots of teeth with this X-ray. Immediately after a demonstration of the X-ray in New Orleans by Tulane's Professor Brown Ayres, he set up his own laboratory in the attic of his home. In a mass of wires, coils and tubes, he X-rayed one of his assistants.

Kells discerned the value. "The patient was seated in a chair with the film holder in position. With the teeth held together and the mouth closed, she could swallow without causing any movement of the film. With the film leaning against a firmly fixed tin board in order to steady her, the tube was placed on the other side of the board. Then, I unknowingly used a filter, which possibly prevented my patient from being burned during the long exposure."

By July, 1896, Kells felt experienced enough in the use of the X-ray to bring his equipment to the Southern Dental Association meeting in Asheville, N.C. The demonstration clinic he held, taking X-rays of the roots of teeth, is generally acknowledged the first of its kind in this country.

As extravagant claims were made for the X-ray, physicians around the country began using it as treatment for anything from male to cancer removal. Before 1900, some of these men had become early martyrs of prolonged exposure to X-rays. During these early pioneer years in X-ray work, Kells had used his bare hands for setting the tube. By 1900, the cumulative effect of these short exposures were manifested in conspicuous growths on the dentist's fingers, hands. During the next 20 years, he su

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Dr. C. Edmund Kells Jr., one of the outstanding pioneers

in field of X-ray dentistry, is shown in his office in 1920.













