Medical Licensure in Arkansas

A very good description of the history of the licensing situation in Arkansas is given in W. David Baird’s *Medical Education in Arkansas 1879-1978*. (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979)

Below is a timeline, based on the information in Baird.

1831 – The Arkansas Legislature passed legislation for licensure in Arkansas. **Gov. John Pope vetoed.**

1881 – First law enacted, requiring registration by county, with the records kept in the county clerk’s office.

1893 – Licensure law passed creating state board.

1895 – Repealed 1893 licensure law and restored county examining board system. Remained in effect until 1903.

1903 – Licensure law passed, required 3 boards, each to offer exam. [Feb 17, 1903]

1909 – General Assembly made a diploma from a recognized medical school a prerequisite to taking a licensing exam. [Act 219, 1909]

1929: Law passed requiring candidates for a license to practice medicine in Arkansas to first pass an examination in the basic sciences. This law had its origins in the 1920’s, when many different types of medical practitioners competed with “regular” doctors for public acceptance and recognition. This board was eventually known as the Basic Sciences and Healing Arts Board, and all who wished to practice any form of medicine in Arkansas had to take the exam.

[Note: One of the oddities of the whole licensing situation for physicians nationwide was the separation of physicians into three groups, based on their approach to treatment. Arkansas as well as other states had an examining board for each group:

- **Homeopaths** (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeopathy#The_principle_of_medical_similars)
- **Eclectics** (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eclectic_Medicine) and
- **Allopaths** – which were most like modern day practitioners-
  (see http://www.fandm.edu/student-and-post-graduate-development/quick-links/health-professions-advising/for-current-students/moving-forward/allopathic-medicine.)]
1955: The Arkansas General Assembly abolished the 52 year old system of medical licensure whereby eclectic, homeopathic and regular physicians had been certified by their different boards. (less than 100 eclectics and few if any homeopaths continued to practice in the state) A single Arkansas State Medical Board composed of nine members was created. It was authorized to license physicians to practice medicine within the state.

1959: Original law changed to make the administration of the basic sciences exam a State Healing Arts Board.

1977: State Legislature abolished Healing Arts Board.

Why is this knowledge important? From 1929-1977, any person wanting to practice medicine in Arkansas had to have had interaction with both of these boards. For many, records of both boards have survived, and can be helpful for research.

The Basic Sciences and Healing Arts Board Records (1929-1977) are housed in the
HRC (University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Library - Historical Research Center - Distribution Center) with the index at the HRC proper. These records consist mostly of applications to take the exam, complete with photographs and are also available on microfilm at the Arkansas History Commission. These are very useful for background information.

The Arkansas State Medical Board has applications for licenses going back before 1900. In most cases (but not all), each applicant did receive a license, and those licenses were sent to the applicant, but the application, with some background information, remained with the agency handling the examination. Contact the Arkansas State Medical Board at 296-1802 or http://www.armedicalboard.org

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