THE HISTORY OF REFLEX HAMMERS

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Following the simultaneous description of muscle stretch reflexes by Heinrich Erb and Carl Westphal in 1875, neurologists used direct finger taps or chest percussion hammers to elicit these phenomena. Because of inadequacies of chest percussion hammers for eliciting muscle stretch reflexes, a variety of hammers were developed specifically for this purpose. In 1888, J. Madison Taylor, working for S. Weir Mitchell at the Philadelphia Orthopedic Hospital, designed the first such “reflex hammer.” Taylor’s hammer had a triangular rubber head and a short, flattened metal handle. Krauss (1894), Berliner (1910), Troemner (1910), Babinski (1912), and Wintle (1925) also designed popular reflex hammers. Many of these hammers and several others are still in use.

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Comment from Robert A. Gross, MD, PhD, FAAN, Editor-in-Chief: Of the many topics covered in our Historical Neurology section, what could be more appropriate than including an abstract of a paper on the history of one of the neurologist’s most cherished tools, which has also been part of the AAN logo?

Stop by the AAN Store at the AAN’s 63rd Annual Meeting to view a prototype of a re-tooled Queen Square Hammer featuring a softer rubber bumper.
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