

60th GSA Anniversary

A Time to Celebrate

By Arnold J. Berry, MD, MPH

President

[Printed in Fall 2007 issue, *GSA Newsletter*]

Although I have been a member of the Georgia Society of Anesthesiologists since 1978, this year, while serving as President, I realized that I knew very little about the history of the organization. With the help of Ms. Felicia Reilly, an Archivist at the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, I obtained copies of the original correspondence related to the founding of the GSA and discovered that we are approaching the 60th anniversary of our Society. This prompted me to search for more information about the history of anesthesiology in GA and the role that members of the GSA have played in our specialty.

The beginning of our specialty can be traced to Jefferson, Georgia where the first anesthetic was performed. On March 30, 1842, Crawford W. Long, MD administered ether anesthesia to Mr. James Venable. Because he had so feared the pain of surgery, Mr. Venable had delayed having two small tumors removed from the back of his neck. After Dr. Long offered him the possibility that surgery could be performed without pain, Mr. Venable consented to have one of the tumors removed. Dr. Long successfully administered the first ether anesthetic, permitting the surgery to proceed without causing pain to Mr. Venable. Although Crawford Long performed several other surgeries while providing ether anesthesia to his patients, the first public demonstration of anesthesia took place in Boston on October 16, 1846. In 1849, at a meeting of the Georgia State Medical Association, Dr. Long read a description of his original experience with ether anesthesia.

Many tributes have been bestowed upon Dr. Long because of the significance of his discovery and use of anesthesia. The national observance of Doctor's Day is linked to Crawford Long. The Barrow County Alliance in Winder, Georgia decided that there should be a day set aside to honor all physicians. The first Doctor's Day was held on

March 30, 1933 in recognition of the first anesthetic, and on March 30, 1958, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution commemorating Doctor's Day.

Each state is permitted to honor two of their citizens with statues that reside in the Capitol in Washington, DC. On March 30, 1946, a statue of Crawford W. Long, MD was presented to the national government to represent the state of Georgia. The Crawford Long Museum was opened in 1957 in Jefferson, Georgia and remains as a tribute to his discovery and to our specialty.

The development of Anesthesiology as a medical specialty proceeded slowly after the first administration of anesthesia in Georgia. In the early 1900s, very few surgeries were performed at major hospitals, and most anesthetics were administered by general practitioners. By 1920, as surgical techniques improved, more operations took place, and the few physicians interested in anesthesiology were being trained in apprenticeships. It was also around this time that programs were established to train nurses to provide anesthesia at some of the larger medical centers. Although nurses, under the supervision of surgeons, administered most anesthetics in the 1920's, two anesthesiologists, Drs. Thomas Collier and Thomas Tidmore, Sr., established an Anesthesia Department at Piedmont Hospital in Atlanta.

In 1937, Perry Volpitto, MD, an anesthesiologist trained by Emery Rovenstine, MD at Bellevue Hospital in New York, established the first academic Department of Anesthesiology in the Southeast at the University of Georgia School of Medicine in Augusta. This was quite significant since there were only four major post-graduate training programs in anesthesiology at the time.

During World War II, there was a tremendous interest in anesthesiology because of the great need for surgical care of injured soldiers. Short training courses in anesthesiology were provided to physicians to permit them to care for the increasing numbers of trauma patients from the battlefields. As these military trained anesthesiologists returned home after the war, many chose to remain in the specialty. This coincided with a significant increase in the number of anesthesia resident training programs.

In 1946, Dr. William Galvin was recruited to head the Anesthesia Service at Emory University Hospital. Dr. Galvin began an anesthesia resident training program at

Emory in 1948, but eight years later, the residency program at Emory became inactive. An external review conducted at Grady Memorial Hospital between 1955 and 1956 indicated that there were 20 to 40 anesthesia-related deaths in the preceding year. To address this issue, the Emory School of Medicine decided that it needed an academic Chairman of Anesthesiology, and Dr. John Steinhaus was recruited for the position. The new Emory anesthesia training program admitted the first resident in September 1958.

History of the Georgia Society of Anesthesiologists

In a letter to the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Dr. Volpitto described the founding of the GSA. “On January 29, 1948, a Georgia State Society of Anesthesiologists was organized at a meeting held of a group of anesthetists at the Biltmore Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia. At this time the constitution was framed and adopted to conform with the constitution sent out by the American Society of Anesthesiologists for state organizations. The following officers were elected for the coming year:

President: Dr. Thomas Collier of Atlanta, Georgia
Secretary: Dr. Perry P. Volpitto of Augusta, Georgia
Treasurer: Dr. Hayward S. Phillips of Atlanta, Georgia”

Following this request to the ASA, a charter was granted to the GSA on March 21, 1948.

At the organizational meeting of the GSA, there were 20 active members and 5 junior members. With the dramatic increase in the population of Georgia and the greater number of anesthesiologists being trained in Georgia and across the U.S., the membership of the GSA has now grown to approximately 900.

GSA members have figured prominently in the history of the ASA including three that have served as President: Perry Volpitto, MD in 1965, John Steinhaus, MD in 1970, and John Neeld, Jr, MD in 1999. There have also been three GSA members honored as recipients of the ASA Distinguished Service Award, the highest tribute the Society can pay to an ASA member for meritorious service and achievements. These individuals include Perry Volpitto, MD in 1974, John Steinhaus, MD in 1982, and Carl Hug, Jr, MD, PhD in 2006.

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the GSA, a special reception has been planned to honor all of the Past Presidents of the organization. The celebration will be held at 6 p.m. on Saturday, January 19, 2008 following the day-long Winter Meeting at the Evergreen Conference Center, Stone Mountain Park. I encourage all members to attend the scientific meeting and stay to participate in this special celebration.

References

1. Paper by Thomas J. Collier, MD: A History of the Various Anesthetics and the Discovery of Same in the State of Georgia, provided by the Wood-Library Museum
2. Steinhaus JE: Anesthesia Education at Emory 1958-1985. Wolfe Publishing, Fernandina Beach, FL; 1996