

History of the Southern Obstetric and Gynecological Seminar

The time was nearing sunset, the season it was summertime, the year was 1920. The location was a muddy country road near Saluda, North Carolina. The scene was the front seat of a Model "T" Ford touring car. On that seat sat a Mrs. Bradley who held on her lap a pillow; and on that pillow rested her severely dehydrated, hollow-eyed, feverish, semi-comatose infant daughter. The baby's father was driving the car; and while they were both laden with anxiety, Mrs. Bradley said, "John, could you please go a little faster?" He said, "I'm going as fast as I can through eight inches of mud, my dear." Soon they saw a sign pointing to Baby Hospital where Dr. Lesesne Smith's summer office was located. Dr. Smith saw the infant immediately, and a noticeably somber expression of woeful awe came upon his face. In trying to obtain a decent history, Dr. Smith asked Mrs. Bradley how long the child had been sick and what she had done for her baby. She stated, "I expect she's been sick right onto two weeks now. I've washed about twenty diapers a day, and they have been bloody for the past two or three days. Doc Bunon told me to give her calomel and castor oil to clean the poison out of her." A nurse carried the baby into the next room, placing it on an examining table, and Dr. Smith, along with two interns and the nurse, worked feverishly trying to re-hydrate the child and save her life. By midnight, however, for little Amy Bradley, life was extinct. The next day, Dr. Smith left Saluda for a medical meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, deeply touched by this child's death and others like it.

A few days later, as he and a close friend (Dr. Frank Howard Richardson of Black Mountain, North Carolina, who was also a pediatrician) were returning from the Louisville meeting, they discussed the tragedy that was occurring in the rural south at least in part because most practicing physicians had been out of school so long, coupled with the fact that when they were in medical school, little was taught about this relatively new field of pediatrics. These two pediatricians agreed that since general practitioners treat by far the bulk of the infants and children in rural areas, there was a serious need for a postgraduate course of some sort to give these generalists exposure to more knowledge and better perspectives in baby care. They further agreed that when they got back home, both would contact their learned friends in medical schools and teaching hospitals, soliciting their help in such an educational endeavor. For that first session in 1921, they were able to recruit 16 lecturers who were willing to come and teach for two weeks without stipend or compensation. That first year, only five student physicians registered and attended. Dr. William Mulherin of Augusta, Georgia, was the first Dean of the organization, which they named Southern Pediatric Seminar. Dr. Frank Howard Richardson was named Vice-Dean, and Dr. Lesesne Smith became the Registrar. Their motto was "Better Babies in the South."

These stalwart men were keenly perceptive because they believed that if the end result was to yield better babies in the South, strong perinatal emphasis should be a part of their program. So they invited Dr. Oren Moore, a renowned obstetrician from Charlotte, North Carolina, to join the faculty that first year. The first two days of that

1921 meeting were held in Black Mountain, North Carolina; then they moved to Saluda, North Carolina. All the other Seminar meetings were subsequently held in Saluda. The second year, 22 student physicians registered for the Seminar. Then as the years rolled by, the enrollment continued to swell until registration reached a peak of 125. Originally, there was one day devoted entirely to obstetrics and gynecology. Dr. Moore usually had one other Ob/Gyn man to help him lecture. On one particular day, Dr. Moore lectured for six consecutive hours. When he finished, there was a standing ovation for him. In 1930, it was said that there were no professional men as greatly loved and as poorly paid as the family doctor who included obstetrics and gynecology and pediatrics in his practice. The same year, a Commonwealth Fund gave \$2,000 to be used to help defray the expenses of doctors who were more than 41 years of age and practiced in towns and villages of a population less than 2,000. Only one other grant was ever received while the Seminar remained at Saluda. That was a \$500 grant from the Doris Duke Foundation, most likely inspired and encouraged by Dr. Robert A Ross and Dr. Bayard "Nick" Carter of Duke University. In 1950, the Board of Directors decided to have a whole week of Ob/Gyn. They named Dr. Oren Moore Dean and Dr. Jim Donnelly vice-Dean of the Ob/ Gyn section. Following Dr. Moore's tenure as Dean, Dr. Donnelly became the next Dean; and he was followed by Dr. "Daddy" Ross, who was in turn followed in that position by Dr. J. Champneys Taylor of Jacksonville, Florida.

During the 1930's and 1940's, and until the dissolution of the Saluda operation, Dr. Smith's only daughter, Mrs. Nettie Smith Owings, and her husband, Dr. Jake Owings, ran the physical plant, including the cottages, dining hall, grounds, etc., at "Smith Hall." Mrs. Owings, along with her good friend, Miss Mary Virginia Kohn of Montgomery, Alabama, and Saluda, acted as gracious hostesses for faculty, students, and other families. Miss Kohn entertained most everyone who attended at her summer home, "Sunset Cabin," in Saluda. Of particular interest to the members of our organization is the fact that, since 1959, Mary Virginia Kohn has been a significant benefactor, sending a check every year as a token of her love and esteem for the Seminar. There were many Ob/ Gyn faculty members. Some, whose names will be familiar to many of you, were: Dr. J. Street Brewer, Roseboro, NC; Dr. Bob Credick, Durham, NC; Dr. Bob Greenblatt, Augusta, GA; Dr. Dick Bun, Dr. Frank Lock and Dr. Hamp Mauzy, Winston-Salem; Dr. A W. Diddle, Knoxville, TN ; Dr. Larry Hester and Dr. Jim Wilson , Charleston, SC, Dr. John Parks, Washington , DC; Dr. Nick Carter and Dr. Roy Parker, Durham, NC; Dr. Robert A Ross and Dr. Charlie Flowers, Chapel Hill, NC (and of course, more recently of Birmingham, AL); Dr. Lewis Rathbun, Asheville, NC; Dr. Hunter Jones, Charlotte, NC; Dr. John Robert Kernodle, Burlington, NC; and the list goes on and on.

In 1958, the Board of Directors voted to discontinue the school at Saluda because the facilities at Smith Hill had not kept up with the popular demand for both comfort and luxury, along with the fact that pediatrics and obstetrics were both being taught in all the medical schools and that postgraduate courses were becoming more and more accessible to almost everyone who would take the time to attend. After 1958,

the pediatric section moved its efforts to Morehead City, NC, under the general direction of Dr. Wilburt C. Davidson, Dean of Duke University Medical School. Simultaneously, the Ob/Gyn section moved to Asheville, NC, where it was (and still is) held each July at the Grove Park Inn. That section was incorporated in 1960 as a non-profit organization by Dr. Robert A. Ross, Dr. James F. Donnelly and Dr. W. Otis Duck. Under the leadership of Dr. Robert A. Ross, Dr. Bayard Carter, Dr. Abe Mickal, and Dr. Robert Greenblatt, the organization has remained a very stable one. These able leaders were supported by the staunch efforts of men like Dr. George Schneider, Dr. J. Champneys Taylor, Dr. James F. Donnelly, Dr. Jim Wilson, Dr. Joe Pilkington, Dr. Charles White, and a host of others. Our membership now totals 120 physicians from 18 states, and our annual meetings in July at the Grove Park Inn attract practitioners from all over the United States.

Since moving to Asheville in 1959, we have been fortunate indeed to receive financial support for educational programs from several pharmaceutical companies. Their assistance has been very helpful in maintaining the high educative standards of the Seminar. For example, the Reid-Rowel Company has been an ardent supporter for many years, as well as the Ortho Pharmaceutical Corporation. In addition, other companies listed in the program have given great assistance, which has been helpful in keeping our dues and registration fees very low in comparison to other similar meetings. Among the many university medical schools that have contributed to our popular programs over the years are the following: Bowman Gray School of Medicine (Wake Forest University), Duke University, East Carolina Medical School, East Tennessee State University, Emory University, Louisiana State University School of Medicine, Medical College of Georgia, Medical college of Virginia, University of Alabama, University of Arkansas, University of South Carolina, University of South Florida , University of Tennessee, and Vanderbilt University.

We are extremely grateful too, for all those who have cared enough to share their academic knowledge and their professional expertise with practicing Ob/Gyn physicians and other primary care physicians from 1921 until the present time. We believe our heritage to be an emphasis upon excellence, which all of us can take pride in sharing with each other and with the people we serve. I personally hope the Southern Ob/Gyn Seminar will continue to flourish luxuriantly as it provides needed medical education in a spirit akin to that which prevailed in the minds of its founders in 1921.

Paraphrased with excerpts from *The Old Order Changeth* By Clara Ravenel Smith