THE passing of Agatha Cobourg Hodgins in 1945 removed from the field of anesthesiology one of its most colorful, gifted, and notable pioneers. A woman of marked administrative ability, exceptional foresight, and inventive genius, she was the founder of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists and the originator, or co-inventor, of many techniques, procedures, and appliances now used by anesthetists the world over.

Keenly intelligent, courageous, and energetic, Miss Hodgins' resourcefulness, technical skill, and professional initiative won her an international reputation in her specialty and established her as the foremost leader of nurse anesthetist education during the past thirty years.

She was born in Toronto, Canada, where she received her early education and was graduated from junior college. The daughter of conservative, prosperous parents, she was expected to participate in their sheltered home life and engage in the social occupations of young ladies of her time. Agatha Hodgins was too enterprising, however, to settle down placidly to the humdrum activities of an Episcopalian church circle. With the determination and progressiveness which characterized her whole life, she travelled to the United States and entered the Boston City Hospital Training School for Nurses.
After graduation, she affiliated, in 1909, with the Surgical Department of Lakeside Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio, whose surgeon-in-chief was the brilliant professor of surgery at Western Reserve University, Dr. George W. Crile. Miss Hodgins' professional skill and special qualities of mind soon came to the attention of Dr. Crile, who was then seeking a solution to the problem of surgical shock. In Miss Hodgins he found an able teammate and the two minds and skills blended into a collaborative effort which made medical history. In 1911, Dr. Crile placed Miss Hodgins in charge of anesthesia in the Surgical Department of Lakeside Hospital and later, the first school of anesthesiology in this country was developed there under their direction.

Such progress in anesthesiology has been made in the thirty-five years since, that it is difficult for anesthetists today to grasp the limitations of the field at that time. For years, chloroform, with its dangers, and ether, with its suffocation, had been the agents customarily relied upon. Nitrous oxide had been introduced in 1908, but it was found to produce another peril—cyanosis. It is due to the efforts of Dr. Crile and Miss Hodgins that a better anesthetic and safer administration procedure was eventually developed.

In the clinic at Lakeside Hospital, it had been demonstrated that anesthesia could be produced without cyanosis if nitrous oxide was administered in combination with oxygen. One of Miss Hodgins' first contributions to anesthesiology was the development of the nitrous oxide-oxygen technique for general surgical procedure which has since become familiar to all students of anesthesiology. Working with C. W. Clarke, inventor of the Ohio monovalve apparatus, Miss Hodgins also made notable contributions to the progressive improvement of the gas machine, forerunner of the efficient piece of equipment we know today.

In 1908, in response to numerous requests for the training of nurses in anesthesia technique, the hospital accepted a few applicants who had already had some experience in administering ether. This was the beginning of the Lakeside Hospital School of Anesthesia. Further development was delayed by the advent of World War I. A special American Hospital Unit was organized for overseas' service with Dr. Crile as Surgeon-in-chief and Miss Hodgins as Chief Anesthetist.

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The "Lakeside Unit" sailed for Europe in December, 1914, and functioned at the American Ambulance Hospital at Neuilly, France, during the early part of the war. The nitrous oxide-oxygen technique introduced by the Lakeside Unit soon achieved wide acclaim. Many overseas surgeons visited Dr. Cottle and asked that their anesthetists be trained in Miss Hodgins' procedures. As a consequence, a French physician, two groups of English nurses, and an American nurse were trained during Miss Hodgins' stay at this hospital.

Miss Hodgins' success as a teacher of these procedures was confirmed when the Lakeside Unit was replaced by the Harvard Unit and Dr. Harvey Cushing requested that she remain and continue teaching her technique until they were well established in that area of operation. Much of Miss Hodgins' work was necessarily done at the front and with anesthetizing apparatus hazardingly transported to front-line trenches under enemy fire. Here, however, she was able to demonstrate under entirely new circumstances the solution provided by nitrous oxide-oxygen anesthesia in the problem of operative shock. Its usefulness was particularly evident in patients who had been gassed.

Shortly after her return to Cleveland in 1915, Miss Hodgins, at Dr. Cottle's urgent request, began the organization of what is believed to have been the first school of anesthesiology in this country and, probably, the world. With definite educational prerequisites and a prescribed course of study, the Lakeside Hospital School of Anesthesia graduated its first class in 1916. This included six physicians, two dentists, and eleven nurses. Later that year, the Ohio State Medical Board questioned the legal status of the new school, but in 1917, all obstacles were raised and the school permitted to proceed.

Meanwhile, the United States entered World War I and our National Base Hospital plan was organized for overseas service. Miss Hodgins did not join any of the units recruited for this project, however, as it was considered more important for her to remain in America, and on the basis of her valuable war experience to train nurse anesthetists for such service. The striking services rendered by nurse anesthetists trained by Miss Hodgins for World War I duty added greatly to the prestige of the profession after the war.
Miss Hodgins devoted her life from World War I through 1934, when illness forced her retirement, to the development of teaching methods in anesthesiology and the perfection of an adequate course of study for the student nurse anesthetist. From her original nitrous oxide-oxygen anesthesia, with its then unique advantage of defense against surgical shock, she expanded her curriculum to include other gas-oxygen and carbon dioxide techniques, as their merits were verified. From her school and from others patterned from it, graduate nurse anesthetists and teachers of nurse anesthetists, inspired by her great example, went forth to the four corners of the earth, carrying with them the boon of modern skilled anesthesiology, often to areas where such service had hitherto been unavailable.

It was Miss Hodgins' conviction that the professional position of the nurse anesthetist could be advanced through state and national organization and during the last years of her administration at Lakeside Hospital School of Anesthesia, she used her leisure to promote this idea. On June 17, 1931, she called a meeting of representative nurse anesthetists which resulted in the organization of the National Association of Nurse Anesthetists; later renamed the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. From its inception until her death on March 24, 1945, she served the Association continuously as a member of the Board of Trustees.

After her retirement from clinical anesthesiology in 1934, she continued to serve, in active advisory capacity, the Lakeside Hospital School of Anesthesia and the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. In her community, she had long fostered the Boy Scout and Girl Scout movements and was active also in Red Cross work, as well as church and civic enterprises. Her indomitable efforts in behalf of the advancement of her profession, her sincerity, courage, vision, enthusiasm, and inspiring leadership in all she undertook, and her unselshf service to mankind have all contributed to the betterment of the world, her country, her community, and her profession. As a "first" in our profession, Agatha Hodgins set an example of which we may justly be proud and hope, in some small measure, to emulate.

Clara R. Moore
Helen Lamb
Aida Allwein, Chairman

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