

Crawford Williamson Long, Georgia's most celebrated physician, took seriously his oath to care for patients.

During his medical school days in Kentucky and Pennsylvania and also while furthering his surgical skills in New York, Long observed patients in pain. He earned his medical degree in 1839 and spent 18 months in a New York Hospital internship¹. His upbringing and his education would serve him well.

In 1841, the young doctor assumed the existing medical practice of his mentor, Dr. George Grant, under whom he studied, in Jefferson, Georgia, located near his hometown of Danielsville². He would be closer to family and likely better able to properly court a certain young lady. Mary Carolyn Swain would become Mrs. Crawford W. Long on Aug. 11, 1842, and they had 12 children, seven who lived to adulthood³.

Establishment of Dr. Long's practice allowed him to pursue improvement of the surgical experience for his patients and perhaps ease some of their trauma as well as their pain. His legacy is his contribution to the medical world which places the birthplace of anesthesia in Jefferson, Georgia⁴.

Dr. Long had observed college-aged youth at "frolic parties" where nitrous oxide was inhaled to give participants a short-lived "high" and the experience of "feeling no pain" even after falling down and injuring themselves⁵. The popularity of such entertainment of the day spread and Dr. Long found that ether allowed the same experience when laughing gas was unavailable. He saw the potential of ether as anesthetic agent to provide a better alternative to the practices in use at the time.⁶

Dr. Long would need to experiment to test his theory that inhalation of ether could improve the delivery of the best possible medical care so, on March 30, 1842, inside Dr. Long's one-story office, James Venable, a patient with a tumor on his neck, breathed in sulfuric ether as anesthesia. Then, Dr. Long removed the growth in the presence of three witnesses, Andrew J. Thurmond, Edmund S. Rawls and William H. Thurmond. The patient reported no pain during the surgery.⁷

E.S. Rawls was among those providing notarized statements attesting to the first surgery: "I was present and witnessed Dr. C.W. Long cut out one tumor from the back of James M. Venable's neck, and that he was under the influence of sulphuric ether when the operation was performed. Mr. Venable did not show any signs of pain when the operation was being performed and stated after the operation was over that he did not suffer the least degree of pain from its performance."⁸

James E. Hayes witnessed Venable's subsequent experience under Dr. Long's care to have a second tumor removed later in 1842: "Previous to the performance of this operation the said James M. Venable informed me that Dr. C.W. Long had cut out another tumor from his neck in

the early part of the same year, and he was under the influence of the inhalation of sulphuric ether and that he was totally unconscious of pain during the performance of the operation.”⁸

While Dr. Long did not publish his discovery in the *Southern Medical and Surgical Journal* until December of 1849, he documented his findings. In addition, he and members of his family secured affidavits of patients, witnesses, townspeople and area physicians whom he instructed in the use of ether as an anesthesia in surgery⁸. He also presented his findings to the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta in 1849⁹.

While others in medical fields attempted to gain the prestige and profits from making their claims of being the first to discover and implement the use of ether as anesthesia in a surgical setting¹⁰, Dr. Long said, “My only wish is to be known as a benefactor to mankind.”

Roddy, Katie J., Vicki Starnes and Sukumar P. Desai describe Dr. Long’s significant contribution to society, noting: “Georgia’s most celebrated physician was the first to use ether as an anesthetic in surgery. Crawford Williamson Long was a young man of 26 when he performed the first painless operation on March 30, 1842, in his Jefferson office. During a time when individuals with almost no specific education could practice medicine, Long was a highly educated and well-trained physician. He practiced in Georgia for almost 40 year, receiving respect and admiration from his peers and countrymen.”¹¹

In 1850, Dr. Long sold his Jefferson practice to his cousin, Dr. John David Long, and the Long family moved to Atlanta for a short time before relocating to Athens in 1851. In Athens, Dr. Long established a practice and apothecary with his brother, Henry Russell Jones Long. During the Civil War, Dr. Long provided medical care and served as a surgeon for soldiers on both sides of the conflict.¹¹

Dr. Long was attending a woman in childbirth on June 16, 1878 when he collapsed. He directed the mother and child to be cared for before he was attended. He upheld his oath to care for his patients throughout his life, even as he took his last breath.^{12, 13}

When efforts were under way to ensure proper recognition of Dr. Long’s world-changing discovery, Dr. Jesse C. Bennett was among those speaking on Dr. Long’s behalf: “It was my good fortune to have been born within four miles of where this great discovery was made. My shingle is within seventy-five or one hundred feet of where this discovery was made... We believe that all fair-minded men in all sections of our country have no doubt as to the discoverer of ether anesthesia, and we certainly hope and trust that the legislature of Georgia will appropriate a sufficient sum to put in the Hall of Fame at Washington, D.C., a statue to Dr. Crawford W. Long.”¹⁴

The marble statue of Dr. Long by artist J. Massey Rhind was given by Georgia to the National Statuary Hall Collection in 1926.¹⁵ Engraved on that statue are these words of Dr. Long: “My profession is to me a ministry from God.”

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