

John S. Hattox, M.D., 1921-2017

James F. Arens, M.D.

With the passing of past president John S. Hattox, M.D., on December 31, 2017, ASA lost a pioneer, a visionary leader, a mentor and, to so many of us, a dear friend. John was by nature a modest man, but his passion for the specialty led him to attain the highest leadership positions and honors in his field. He served as California Society of Anesthesiologists (CSA) President in 1966, and ASA President in 1980. He received the CSA Distinguished Service Award in 1982 and the ASA Distinguished Service Award in 1992. In 1951, at the beginning of his career, he became the seventh member of Anesthesia Service Medical Group (ASMG) in San Diego, which he helped develop into possibly the first large private practice group in the United States.



John S. Hattox, M.D.

John Hattox was born in Coldwater, Mississippi, in 1921. John was very close to his father, who died at the age of 100. He graduated from Winona High School in Winona, Mississippi, and attended Mississippi College in Jackson. He graduated from the University of Tennessee Medical School in 1945; at that time, the University of Mississippi did not have a medical school.

He completed his anesthesiology residency at Mayo Clinic under Dr. John S. Lundy and Dr. Robert Charles "Charlie" Adams, whose son was to become one of John's partners in San Diego. While on the faculty at Mayo, John developed many fond memories of Dr. John Kirkland, a famous heart surgeon, and his fellow anesthesiologist Dr. Bob Patrick, who later moved to Casper, Wyoming. In 1951, he received his M.S. degree in anesthesiology from the University of Minnesota.

John then moved to San Diego in 1951 and joined ASMG, where he practiced until his retirement in 1990. In 1953, he established San Diego's first recovery room at Paradise Valley Hospital. And he had the distinction of giving the first anesthetic at Pomerado Outpatient Surgical Center, which was opened by ASMG and was the first freestanding ambulatory surgery center in San Diego.

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John was a relentless advocate for the specialty and a driving force for change. With the CSA in the mid-1970s, he was instrumental in the passage of MICRA in California, which limited non-economic damages in lawsuits to \$250,000.

The productive years at ASA that followed might never have been, however, as John was a humble man who did not seek the spotlight. It was only after intense pressure and encouragement from ASA Past Presidents Rick Siker and Harry Bird that he decided to seek to become ASA First Vice President. His time as ASA President and years as an ASA officer were marked by sometimes intense battles with the federal government over regulation, efforts to improve the public image of the specialty and notable victories in helping to increase the involvement of young physicians in the society's affairs.

John's selection as the ASA Distinguished Service Award (DSA) recipient in 1992 was a well-deserved capstone to a remarkable ASA career. Incidentally, the year prior to his DSA selection, I was chair of the ASA Committee on Distinguished Service Award, and I was urged to recommend John for the honor not only for his accomplishments but also because of our close friendship. I did not submit his name but rejoiced the following year when he received the DSA.

John was one of the first 1,000 anesthesiologists nationwide to receive board certification from the American Board of Anesthesiology. He was also the second delegate to the American Medical Association (AMA), having served as alternate delegate under M.T. (Pepper) Jenkins. Under John's leadership, the ASA's AMA delegation was changed from a "past presidents' club" to a delegation composed mainly of younger anesthesiologists who had made an impact on anesthesiology from either a state or society level. I served as alternate delegate at this time of significant change. Following the conclusion of each of the two yearly AMA meetings, it fell to John and me to write a complete summary of the entire meeting.

Our friendship continued to grow through the years, and I became the fourth member of the Anesthesia Baja Quail Hunting Club. The members were Arthur Keats, Bill Hamilton, John and me. This group was notable for consisting of four ASA DSA awardees. It was also notable for

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consisting of three conservatives and one liberal. How the friendships persisted is a mystery to me, because none of the members were shy about vehemently expressing his political opinions. Unfortunately, on one trip, one of us accidentally shot the guide with small pellets (no severe injury), at which point Dr. Keats called “time out” and established new shooting rules.



1979 ASA President Jess B. Weiss, M.D., left, passes the gavel to Dr. Hattox.

Subsequently, Bill Hamilton, John and I hunted deer each year in Brady, Texas (Arthur only hunted birds). The vehement political discussions continued, as did the close friendships.

John and his wife Kathy Crippen Hattox were very much involved in philanthropic efforts in San Diego. Visitors to the Old Globe Theater in Balboa Park will note Hattox Hall, which is a venue for cabaret performances, lectures and other events. And the renovated Sharp Memorial Hospital includes the Hattox Surgery Center. Travel was an important part of their lives together, including trips to Africa and India, and a yearly visit to New York, where Kathy ignited John’s love of theater.



The Anesthesia Baja Quail Hunting Club (from left): James Arens, M.D., their hunting guide, Arthur Keats, M.D., William Hamilton, M.D., and Dr. Hattox.

John truly loved Kathy, and following her death in April 2017, he was a changed man who lost his intense love and zeal for life. He passed away on New Year’s Eve 2017.

John’s memorial service took place on February 19 at the Miramar National Cemetery in San Diego.

John Hattox loved anesthesiology. He was a doer who integrated many of the Mayo principles into ASMG, he was a leader in various San Diego hospital organizations, was an ABA examiner, a political leader in the CSA, a dynamic leader and mentor for ASA, and an AMA delegate. Following retirement, he actively supported Kathy’s philanthropic efforts and relished traveling the world with her.

Perhaps the following anecdote is a fitting way to end a tribute to this beloved anesthesiologist who amassed such an uncommon volume of accomplishments in his life and career. One of John’s colleagues, Dr. Bob Adams, recalled a time when someone complimented him on his many successes and contributions to anesthesiology. John’s response was typical: “Well, I don’t know about that. I do know that if I died tomorrow, all anyone would be asking would be who’s going to take my call that weekend.”

John, anesthesiology – and the world – is better because of you. Thank you.