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**THEODORE GAILLARD THOMAS, M.D.
A SOUTH CAROLINIAN'S CONTRIBUTION
TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN MEDICINE**

W. CURTIS WORTHINGTON*

THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN GYNECOLOGY'S EMERGENCE AS A specialty in the second half of the nineteenth century is characterized by the interaction of numerous enthusiastic, innovative, and forward thinking medical practitioners from across the United States.¹ The accomplishments of J. Marion Sims, however, have overshadowed the contributions of many others who shaped the new discipline.² While in no way detracting from Sims's pioneering role as the "Father of American Gynecology," a greater acknowledgement of what others did to develop the specialty is in order. Among those who might be cited are Fordyce Barker, first president of the American Gynecological Society, and Sims's early colleagues at the New York Women's Hospital: Thomas Addis Emmet, Edmund Randolph Peaslee, and Theodore Gaillard Thomas. Of this group, Thomas may be the most important, not so much for his specific technical contributions as for his leadership position and influence on the medical, surgical, social, and humanitarian aspects of gynecological practice. His impact was much greater than has heretofore been recognized. This study is drawn heavily from his own writings, his accomplishments, and the opinions of his colleagues. It explores the origins of Thomas's personal, cultural, and intellectual characteristics as well as his role in American gynecology in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Theodore Gaillard Thomas, M.D., was a South Carolina native who lived almost a third of his life in South Carolina. He received his basic professional education in South Carolina, contributed to antebellum

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¹James B. Ricci, *One Hundred Years of Gynecology* (Philadelphia: The Blakeston Co., 1945); Harold Speert, *Obstetrics and Gynecology in America: A History* (Chicago: The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 1980); Deborah K. McGregor, *Sexual Surgery and the Origins of Gynecology: J. Marion Sims, His Hospital, and His Patients* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Co, 1989); Houston S. Everett and E. Stewart Taylor, "The History of the American Gynecological Society and the Scientific Contributions of Its Fellows," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 126 (1976), 908-918.

²J. Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, edited by H. Marion Sims (New York: D. Appleton Century and Company, 1855); Seale Harris, *Women's Surgeon: The Life Story of J. Marion Sims* (New York: The McMillan Company, 1950).



Elizabeth Jamison as she appeared about the time that she wrote her tale of the war (ca. 1880). Courtesy of Mrs. Thomas W. Jamison III, Westminster, Maryland.

southern medical literature, and represented the state's cultural values in a major area of medical practice. He assisted friends in South Carolina during the darkest era of the state's history. Finally, he supported the state's Huguenot tradition, financially, by membership, and by publishing historical documents relating to its history.

Thomas was born on November 21, 1831, on Edisto Island near Charleston, South Carolina. He was the son of the Reverend Edward Thomas, an Episcopal clergyman, and his wife, Jane Marshall Gaillard. He was their second son to bear the name Theodore Gaillard, the first having died four years earlier. Thomas left the island at the age of six when his family moved to Berkeley County, South Carolina. Little is known about his earliest education. After Edward Thomas's death in 1840, however, the widow, two sons, and three daughters spent at least one winter season in Winnsboro, South Carolina, at the home of two of Edward Thomas's brothers. There Thomas attended the Mt. Zion Academy.³ At the age of fourteen he attended the Reverend P. T. Babbitt's School on Glebe Street in Charleston, next door to the more "celebrated" Mr. Coates's School. He enjoyed the pleasures of bathing in the Ashley River and weekending with friends, including T. G. Boag, at the beach on nearby Sullivan's Island.⁴ It is not clear whether or not the family moved to Charleston. It is possible that Gaillard lived with the Boag family, since years later during the winter of 1864, Thomas's sister was searching for the Boag residence on a trip to Charleston.⁵

Thomas's personal qualities have been hard to assess since primary sources derived from his private life have proved to be extremely limited. Furthermore, testimonials and obituaries are hardly reliable as balanced estimates of personality. There are several themes, however, that run through writings both by and about Thomas that give us more than a clue to what he was really like. He was raised in a highly-respected family in the plantation-dominated society of the South Carolina Lowcountry and developed the personal standards of conduct and manners of that society. The comment at the celebration of his seventieth birthday by Weir Mitchell that "My friend gives to the sick poor the very tithes of life. . . ." and the

³Albert S. Thomas, *A Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina, 1820-1857* (Columbia: The R. L. Bryan Company, 1957), 605. Charles E. Thomas, Notes and Correspondence, Biographical Files, Waring Historical Library, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina (hereafter MUSC).

⁴Samuel G. Stoney, ed., "Recollections of John Stafford Stoney, Confederate Surgeon," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (hereafter SCHM) 60 (Oct. 1959), 209-210.

⁵Charles E. Thomas, ed., "The Diary of Anna Hasell Thomas," *SCHM* 74 (July 1973), 129.

comment in the same breath that his approach to patients had "the charm of a certain genial kindness, of a never ending inexhaustible courtesy. . . ." are consistent with everything that we know about him.⁶ His entire history reflects determination, persistence, and courtesy as basic elements of his character.

His eloquence as a speaker had its beginning in his first lecture, which he regarded as a failure. This spurred him to special efforts including elocution lessons, further study of English literature, and practicing before a mirror.⁷

His capacity for work is evident, although not the least of the qualities contributing to his personal and professional development was a sense of humor. At a New York testimonial dinner for Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1883 (an event whose committee on arrangements Thomas chaired), his response to one of the toasts was greeted with frequent bursts of laughter for his jibes at clergy, lawyers, writers, and the press. Although Victorian in tone, they still elicit a smile or chuckle in the reader. For example:

Not very long ago an English gentlemen was called upon in the city to reply to an after dinner toast under very much the same circumstances as those that I find myself placed in tonight. He began his remarks by stating that it was an exceedingly trying ordeal for him to be called upon by an American audience to stand up on his feet and make a speech. One of the gentlemen who preceded me tonight succeeded him on that occasion and he began his remarks by stating that if his English friend had understood an American audience better than he did, he would have congratulated himself that he had not been called upon to stand upon his head and make a speech [laughter]. . . . It is not at all the American audience to which I object but that a poor doctor is called upon to speak in the presence of representatives of the pulpit, the bar, literature and the press. Everybody knows that if there is one thing more than another for which a medical man is utterly unfit it is making a public and unwritten address, while everyone equally well knows that to these gentlemen the art of speaking comes spontaneously. From their mouths words

⁶S. Weir Mitchell, In *Addresses at the Dinner Given to Dr. T. Gaillard Thomas on his Seventieth Birthday* (New York: The Winthrop Press, 1901), 25, (hereafter *Addresses*).

⁷"In Memorium. T. Gaillard Thomas, M.D., LL.D.," *American Journal of Obstetrics* (hereafter *Am. J. Obst.*) 47 (April 1903), 503-504.

pour forth even as sparks fly upward. Let an audience place one of them on his feet, or for that matter . . . upon his head; touch a spring which these gentlemen keep about them somewhere and off they go without let or a hinderance [laughter]. After that like Tennyson's brook, "Men may come and men may go but they flow on forever."⁸

Although the facts are sparse, it is easy to infer that marriage and family were important to him and carefully nurtured. He was married twice. First, in 1856, he married his cousin Mary Marshall Gaillard with whom he shared a distinguished direct ancestor, Chief Justice John Marshall. Within a year, the marriage ended in tragedy with Mary Gaillard's death and the death of their infant son.⁹ In 1862 Thomas married Mary Theodosia Willard, granddaughter of the famous American writer and pioneer in the field of education for women, Emma Hart Willard. The marriage produced four children, two of whom survived him.¹⁰ In one of the few available images we have of Gaillard Thomas he is out riding with his grandson, he on horseback, the child on his pony.

Thomas attended the College of Charleston but there is no evidence that he graduated, nor would that have been required for admission to medical school at that time. His last year of residence was 1851, and he evidently enrolled immediately in the Medical College of the State of South Carolina. He was an excellent student. He won a silver cup for the best senior thesis, "A Treatise on the Treatment of Tuberculosis by Cod Liver Oil," when he graduated in 1852.¹¹

Thomas's intelligence was evidently matched by his initiative. As a descendent of early colonial English and Huguenot ancestors, Thomas had position in Charleston; but as one of several children of a clergyman's widow, his financial resources were sparse at best. We cannot be sure whether his opportunities for the practice of medicine were limited, or his sense of adventure was so strong that he wanted to strike out for a new experience. For whatever reason, the new medical graduate took passage

⁸Wesley M. Carpenter, M.D., ed., *Proceedings of the Dinner Given by The Medical Profession of the City of New York to Oliver Wendell Holmes, M.D., LL.D.* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), 38-40.

⁹"Theodore Gaillard Thomas," *Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina* 75 (Charleston, South Carolina, 1970), 78.

¹⁰Gertrude L. Annan, "Thomas, Theodore Gaillard," In *Dictionary of American Biography*; Allen Johnson, ed., IX (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons for the American Council of Learned Societies, 1936), 446.

¹¹Theodore Gaillard Thomas, "A Treatise on the Treatment of Tuberculosis by Cod Liver Oil," Inaugural Thesis, 1852, 4:13, Waring Historical Library, MUSC.

on a coastal vessel for New York as a common seaman, arriving with very limited means and "without one acquaintance." During the trip, a fight with another sailor earned him a gash in his forehead, which left a permanent scar.¹² This altercation, no matter how unpleasant, was probably helpful to him in adapting to life outside the familiar and privileged surroundings of the antebellum South Carolina Lowcountry. In any event Thomas seemed to have had a talent for making opportunities for himself.

Although he disembarked in New York knowing no one, he was nevertheless able to compete successfully for a staff position (internship) at Bellevue Hospital. A typhus epidemic was raging among the Irish immigrants; large numbers were being sent straight to Bellevue as soon as they landed, creating understaffing and overcrowded, unsanitary conditions. Two of twelve staff physicians had already died during this epidemic. Thomas performed creditably, thereby earning additional months at the Ward Island Immigrant Refuge Hospital. There he worked under the direction of Thomas Addis Emmet, who years later would become his close colleague at the New York Women's Hospital.¹³

Thomas continued to be motivated by the sense of destiny or ambition that drove him to leave Charleston. He decided to set out for Europe to further his medical experience. He left on a sailing vessel and returned "on a large immigrant ship" from Ireland as ship's surgeon.¹⁴ He probably arranged for his passage on the outward voyage in the same manner. How he managed to finance the remainder of his expenses is not known, but he was able to remain abroad for about two years.

Thomas used the two years to excellent advantage, and his report from Paris clearly shows the beginnings of the tempered and constructive conservatism which so characterized his later career and that had a profound influence on the development of gynecology. He observed that French practice was frequently so different from American practice, that it took him some time to overcome his prejudices and evaluate procedures with what he felt was an adequate degree of objectivity.

He mentions especially "the much more frequent use of the lancet" of which he clearly disapproved:

M. Gendrin is evidently of the old school, holds firmly to the maxims which, by many of us, would be thought worse than useless, and uses the lancet with an energy that

¹²"In Memorium. Dr. Theodore Gaillard Thomas," *Transactions of the South Carolina Medical Association* (hereafter SCMA) (1903), 313.

¹³"In Memorium. T. Gaillard Thomas, M.D., LL.D.," *Am. J. Obst.* 47 (April 1903), 502.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 502.

shows how much less than we, he appreciates the importance of the vital fluid.

Another area that caused Thomas serious concern, bordering on dismay was:

The exceeding boldness which they invade cavities which, but a few years since, were hermetically sealed to the application of all medicaments, and, even at present, are very rarely encroached upon, for that purpose, by the instruments of the American practitioner. I allude to the puncture and injection of tincture of iodine into the cavities of the pleura, peritoneum, knee joint and cold abscesses of all kinds, whether from caries or other cause.

All of Thomas's observations were not negative or reserved. He commented favorably on the accurate diagnosis of displaced or floating kidneys and appropriate non-intervention, the treatment of dermatitis of the scalp, a small and effective ophthalmoscope, and treatment for lead poisoning.¹⁵

Thomas's report from the Rotunda Lying-in-Asylum in Dublin is much less reflective of his developing philosophic stance in medicine than is the one from Paris. An epidemic of childbed fever had reduced the number of patients coming through the hospital and thereby reduced the number of interesting cases on which he was able to report. He described the epidemic in detail, however, and undoubtedly learned a great deal about the course of the disease from it.¹⁶

Thomas returned to New York sometime after April 25, 1855. He thereupon entered into a career that was to carry him into an important contributory position in gynecology. In 1859 he was elected to the faculty of Obstetrics at New York University Medical School and is said to have succeeded a prominent New Yorker, Gunning Bedford.¹⁷ More important, however, was the formation of his association with John T. Metcalfe, some

¹⁵T. Gaillard Thomas, "Foreign Correspondence," *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* IX (1854), 773, 776.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, X (1855), 477-482.

¹⁷Howard A. Kelly and Walter L. Burrage, *Dictionary of American Medical Biography* (New York and London: D. Appleton & Co., 1928), 203. There is a discrepancy here. The same work gives the year of Bedford's resignation for reasons of health as 1864 (89).

thirteen years his senior and already securely established as a successful and fashionable general practitioner in New York.¹⁸ General practice of the day included a considerable amount of obstetrics, and Thomas's post-graduate training in Ireland admirably suited him and gave him particular strength in that field.

The years between 1855 and 1872 were important for a number of events in Thomas's life and career. In 1861 he was recording secretary of the New York Committee that, together with similar groups from Philadelphia and Boston, was raising a fund to honor and reward William T. G. Morton for demonstrating that ether could be used as an anesthetic. In 1863 he was appointed to the faculty of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and two years later he was elected to the chair of Obstetrics. It was also in 1863 that he became a founding member of the New York Obstetrical Society. In October 1864, he gave the introductory address to the students at The College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, which gave a clear statement of his overall approach to medicine. In 1868 the first edition of his book, *A Practical Treatise on the Diseases of Women*, was published.¹⁹

In 1872 the governing board of the Women's Hospital asked Thomas, along with Sims, Peaslee, and Emmet, to constitute a medical board to conduct the clinical affairs of the hospital. Sims had founded this hospital in 1855; and Emmet had been its surgeon in chief during Sims's sojourns in Europe between 1861 and 1871. The hospital's governing board replaced Emmet with the four-man board to curb his authority; and subsequently passed several regulations clearly meant to curb Sims's authority as well. Sims responded with an ill-considered and inappropriate public outburst and offered to submit his resignation. Although he did so from a sense of personal honor, he was shocked when it was accepted. Accusations of treachery by Thomas, Peaslee, and Emmet began to circulate among the profession. There followed an angry exchange of pamphlets between Sims and these three colleagues on the Medical Board. Thomas, as secretary of

¹⁸This association with Metcalfe afforded Thomas not only a secure financial base that he never had enjoyed before, but a lifelong friendship. All six editions of Thomas's book, *Practical Treatise of the Diseases of Women*, were dedicated to Metcalfe, and one of his sons was named for him. Metcalfe's comment "Zealous as an associate, faithful as a friend in my declining years he has unflinchingly sought to repay a debt (that was never due) by the devoted affection of a son" was offered on the occasion of Thomas's seventieth birthday. *Addresses*, 9.

¹⁹*Proceedings in Behalf of the Morton Testimonial* (Boston: George C. Rawl & Avery, 1861), 24; Annan, *American Biography*, 446; T. Gaillard Thomas, *Introductory Address Delivered at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, October 17th, 1864* (New York: W. H. Trafton & Co., 1864). T. Gaillard Thomas, *A Practical Treatise on the Diseases of Women* (Philadelphia: Henry C. Lea, 1868).

the board, was almost certainly the author of the texts that all three signed. Despite the heat of this exchange, both Thomas and Emmet were indebted to Sims for earlier professional recognition and never lost their respect and affection for him.²⁰

In 1876 Thomas was a founding fellow of the American Gynecological Society and was, in effect, its second president when Edmund Randolph Peaslee died before taking office. In 1879 he moved from the chair in obstetrics to a newly-created chair in gynecology, having, for the most part, restricted himself to that specialty in the meantime. In 1881 his title was changed to clinical professor of Gynecology. Although we do not know the specific reason for the change, it is probable that his practice and other activities were taking up so much of his time that some of his more formal duties as professor had to be relinquished. In any event, he was made professor emeritus of Gynecology and Obstetrics upon retirement in 1890, not emeritus professor of Clinical Gynecology. This was no doubt a tribute to his lifetime accomplishments, as was his appointment to the college's board of trustees. He became vice-president of the New York Academy of Medicine in 1878.²¹

Over the years, in addition to his clinical role with the Women's Hospital, he was surgeon to the New York State Women's Hospital, consulting physician to the Nursery and Childs Hospital of New York and to St. Mary's Hospital for Women in Brooklyn. He became internationally known with honorary or corresponding fellowships in obstetrical societies in London, Berlin, and Lima as well as memberships in obstetrical and

²⁰At the Anniversary Meeting of the Women's Hospital in November 1874, Sims arose just before its adjournment and attacked the board of governors for their interference with the practice of medicine including, among other things, restricting the number of visitors in the operating room to fifteen and prohibiting the admission of patients with cancer of the uterus. Sims felt that he had the right to have as many people in the operating room as he pleased and to admit selected uterine cancer patients for study. He had emerged as a *prima donna* and there was a faction of the board of governors which did not share in the general adulation of Sims. The outburst offended them and offered an opportunity to remove him. Drs. E. R. Peaslee, T. A. Emmet, and T. G. Thomas, *Reply to Dr. J. Marion Sims. Pamphlet Entitled 'The Women's Hospital in 1874'* (New York: Traw's Printing and Bookbinding Company, 1877). J. Marion Sims, M.D., *The Women's Hospital in 1874. A Reply to the Printed Circular of Drs. E. R. Peaslee, T. A. Emmet, and T. Gaillard Thomas Addressed "To the Medical Profession. May 5th 1877"* (New York: Kent & Co., Printers, 1877). *St. Louis Clinical Record* (extra), Vol. 4, No. 6 (Sept. 1877). For a detailed account and interpretations of this episode see Harris, *Women's Surgeon*, 295-306.

²¹*Transactions of the American Gynecological Society*, (hereafter *Tr. Am. Gyn. Soc.*) Vol. 1 (1877), 4. Vol. 4 (1880), 25. "Minutes of the New York Academy of Medicine," New York Academy of Medicine, Malloch Room, New York, Jan. 3, 1878.

gynecological societies in Boston, Philadelphia, and Louisville. The South Carolina Medical Association also made him an honorary member.²² Thomas continued to practice for a number of years after his retirement from the college.

Thomas's most important role in nineteenth-century medicine was his application of broad and sound principles of medical practice to the new specialty of gynecology. This was accompanied, however, by his fair share of specific clinical innovations. He was a pioneer in two operations designed to eliminate the risks of entering the pelvic cavity. At that time, this was considered the "capital" gynecological or obstetrical operation, highly dangerous and undertaken only with the gravest of indications. In 1870 he performed the world's first vaginal ovariectomy and the same year began to experiment with gastroyletrotomy, an approach to delivery which avoided entering the main portion of the pelvic cavity. It was a substitute for classical caesarian section. Although of very limited success, the operation was the subject of much interest and discussion in the late 1870s because of the very bad statistics associated with classical caesarian section. Both vaginal ovariectomy and gastroyletrotomy were superseded, however, as aseptic surgery markedly reduced the dangers of infection during operations in the pelvic and abdominal cavities. Thomas's perhaps too eloquently stated prediction that "the operation of gastroeletrotomy will no more be kept down . . . than the course of a comet would be stopped by an ecclesiastical bull" was very wide of the mark.²³

Thomas made significant contributions to the management of extrauterine pregnancy.²⁴ His comments in 1878 go into great detail including the observation that diagnosis, especially in tubal pregnancy, is critical, difficult, and often impossible. In 1882 with additional cases behind him, he was no less distressed by the diagnostic dilemma, observing that the surgeon

may be in error and the explorative incision which tells him of this error may prove fatal to a patient who without it may have recovered! Delay may be fatal and prompt action might save life; prompt action based on erroneous diagnosis may precipitate an issue which delays might have rendered unnecessary. Surely no more trying position than this can ever present itself to the conscientious physician.²⁵

²²*Diseases of Women*, 5th Ed. (1880). SCMA, (1870), 4.

²³*Tr. Am. Gyn. Soc.* 3 (1878), 28.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 4 (1880), 326-333.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 9 (1885), quoted by Speert, 58.

Thomas's views on the controversial issues of his day were often on the side which ultimately prevailed. Controversy over obstetrical anesthesia, which was first performed in 1847, was relatively short lived and occurred, for the most part, in the formative years of Thomas's professional development. He would have accepted the benefits of ether and chloroform as they emerged. As noted above, Thomas served as recording secretary of the New York committee, which among others in major cities, raised money to reward William T. G. Morton. He was not unaware, however, that even so magnificent a discovery as surgical anesthesia brought dangers of its own.

In the matter of aseptic delivery and prevention of child bed fever, Thomas was not so early in his public stand as he was in the matter of anesthesia. There are several reasons for this. The controversy surrounding the cause of child bed fever went on longer and was more heated, and the evidence of the benefits of sterile procedures was not so readily apparent or easily disseminated as the benefits of anesthesia. Public understanding of the disease's effects, its cause, and its prevention was much more difficult to obtain, and the ultraconservative practitioners much less likely to be criticized for not using sterile precautions during deliveries than for not using ether. Furthermore, no dramatic episode in the use of sterile technique occurred that could compare with the use of chloroform for anesthesia during the birth of Queen Victoria's son. Resistance continued well after Louis Pasteur had clearly demonstrated in 1879 the massive infection by extremely toxic bacteria (*hemolytic streptococci*) in women dying of child bed fever.²⁶ Speert, in his account of the ninth annual meeting of the American Gynecological Society in 1884, faults Thomas for using the vague and misleading term "absorptive fever."²⁷ However, in November 1883 Thomas delivered a long speech to the annual meeting of the New York State Medical Association on the current status and the future of obstetrics and gynecology. In it, he made a spirited and eloquent presentation on aseptic delivery and on details of current treatment when aseptic precautions failed.²⁸ That he then made a final plea for gastroyletrotomy in no way detracts from the conclusion that in the matter of aseptic delivery, he had been examining the evidence and had come to the correct conclusion several years before his presentation to the New York Medical Association.

Thomas's other purely technical contributions are too numerous to

²⁶Fielding H. Garrison, *An Introduction to the History of Medicine*, 4th Ed. (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Co., 1929), 585.

²⁷Speert, *Obstetrics and Gynecology in America: A History*, 57.

²⁸T. Gaillard Thomas, "An Address on Obstetrics and Gynecology," *The Medical News Philadelphia* 45 (1884), 561-566.

present in detail, but they are varied and cover much of the field. He was one of the first in America to use an incubator for the newborn. He devised or modified several instruments for special problems. He published early (and doleful) mortality statistics for hysterectomies. He devised a method for reducing the temperature of a patient during ovariectomy. He devised several other surgical approaches (e.g., for prolapse of the vaginal wall) and systematized the approach to female genital examination, including the use of anesthesia when necessary. Many of his comments on papers by his colleagues are on record and are contributory to the question at hand.²⁹

Of major importance to his reputation is his textbook, *A Practical Treatise on the Diseases of Women*.³⁰ It went through six editions. The first was published in 1868, the last, edited by Paul Munde, in 1891. The book was a success both at home and abroad. It was translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Chinese. It was one of only two books on the subject in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thomas Addis Emmet, Thomas's colleague on the medical board of the Women's Hospital, wrote the *The Principles and Practice of Gynecology*, the other book on the subject.³¹

One may argue that Gaillard Thomas was the most important gynecologist in America between Sims and Kelly. Although there were many excellent and enthusiastic gynecologists in the second half of the nineteenth century, the only other contender for the role of the primary late-nineteenth-century American gynecologist was Emmet.

Thomas's book appeared earlier and his last edition was published later than Emmet's. While Seale Harris, in an excellent biography of Sims, credits Emmet with greater influence than Thomas and others in the field between 1866 and 1900, the distinction of successor to Sims must at least be shared between Thomas and Emmet, if indeed it does not belong to Thomas. The publication of *Operative Gynecology* in 1898 by renowned Johns Hopkins gynecologist Howard A. Kelly superseded both Thomas and Emmet's books.³²

The signs of Thomas's talent and forward thinking appear early in his reports from abroad in which his conservatism in the matter of intervention is already apparent. Some years later, but still early in his career, he presented in considerable detail his position on the real role of the doctor to medical students at the College of Physicians and Surgeons (now the

²⁹See, Ricci, *One Hundred Years of Gynecology*. It contains seventy-two references to Thomas's contributions.

³⁰T. Gaillard Thomas, *Diseases of Women*, 6th Ed. (1891).

³¹Thomas Addis Emmet, *The Principles and Practice of Gynecology* (Philadelphia: Henry C. Lea, 1879).

³²Howard A. Kelly, *Operative Gynecology* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898).

Medical School of Columbia University). He pointed out that many illnesses, if left to themselves, will with time go away, and that in some situations the untreated recovered more quickly than the treated. He supported his position with his own clinical studies. He nevertheless observed that some diseases require vigorous intervention and that palliation is necessary in those who cannot be cured:

The idea that a physician is sent to give medicine is a grievous error which even now affects society and works great evil. Some of my most difficult tasks are preventing patients from closing themselves. The duty of our high calling is to prevent and cure disease and not to dole out medicines.

He followed with some very modern sounding examples, e.g., advising the patient with palpitation of the heart to give up tobacco. He emphasized that for the physician there is a vantage ground between two extremes neither "verging toward meddlesome intervention on the one hand nor imbecilic neglect on the other."³³ This "middle of the road" stance runs through much of Thomas's writing, especially in those of a more general professional nature. His presidential address to the American Gynecological Society contains a scathing denunciation of a rampant dogmatism in medicine in general and gynecology in particular. In it he cites examples of women suffering repeated surgical indignities with no relief of symptoms because of visits to a series of practitioners with disparate views. In the same address he also decries the quality of many medical journals (some could hardly be classified as such). He suggests that efforts be made to establish peer review for journals, thus promoting the development of consensus in matters of treatment as well as eliminating the mass of quack material available at the time. He could, of course, be as strong in his advocacy. His defense of developments in surgical gynecology is as strong as his denunciation of dogmatism, although tempered by the recognition that the pendulum could swing too far and that critical judgment of indications was essential.³⁴ His choice of surgical over medical treatment for most gynecological problems is understandable. Knowledge of reproductive physiology was rudimentary and knowledge of the role of hormones in gynecological function and disease lay far in the future.

Thomas was also an early American advocate of teaching at the bedside when most formal education in academic medicine was didactic. His "Quiz

³³Thomas, *Introductory Address*, 28, 31.

³⁴*Tr. Am. Gyn. Soc.* 4 (1880), 25-44.

Classes" were well received (he probably got his first teaching assignment on the strength of their success) and undoubtedly impressed upon him the value of direct contact with students. Dr. William H. Welsh, himself closely associated with one of the great bedside teachers of all time, Sir William Osler, was in attendance at Thomas's seventieth birthday celebration and had this to say:

It is a defect in our system of medical education that young men who feel the impulse to follow an academic career have no such opportunity to make manifest their fitness as teachers and investigators as afforded by the private — docent system of the German universities and the extramural training of the Scottish universities.

Our quiz system is a poor substitute for these. . . . It was in Bellevue Hospital in these early days when Dr. Thomas established that class in diagnosis which . . . marked a real reform in medical education in this city. . . . Here each student was assigned a patient whom he was to examine by all means known at the time — by sight, by inquiry, and by physical and chemical methods. . . . Certainly it was important work, especially important when we consider the condition of medical education at that time and how rare was the opportunity for the student to come into direct personal contact with the object under study.³⁵

Thomas's relations with northern and southern colleagues, especially during the Civil War, are of interest. American history is replete with stories of able Southerners who have gone North in search of opportunities for wealth, position, recognition, and power, especially after 1865. Although he started his pilgrimage before hostilities began, Thomas is an example of one of these Southerners.

Unfortunately, no primary-source evidence of Thomas's attitude toward the war has been found. Two obituaries indicate that he came south shortly after secession to offer his services to the Confederacy. Family tradition has it that he was told that the Confederate Army needed no obstetricians.³⁶ On returning to New York he is said to have "endured great odium from the northern men" and to have been suspended from the New York Academy of Medicine as a suspected southern sympathizer. He is believed to have

³⁵William H. Welsh, In *Addresses*, 39.

³⁶Charles E. Thomas, Notes and Correspondence, MUSC.

thought the southern cause "hopeless" and to have opposed secession.³⁷ Two meetings which were concerned with Thomas's relation to the New York Academy of Medicine in May 1861 seem to reflect a reluctance on the part of many members to act against him. Thomas was recording secretary of the academy, and as he got up to read the minutes, he was challenged by a least two members on his fitness to hold office in the organization because of his "traitorous sentiments." The meeting was finally adjourned after parliamentary maneuvers by Thomas's critics failed to make his status an issue. At the next meeting the academy resolved itself into a committee of the whole, produced many "warm and patriotic speeches" and then reported that Thomas had tendered his resignation as secretary. This was accepted. The academy minutes record no further action on the matter. There is no evidence that Thomas ever resigned from the academy or even considered it.³⁸

Whatever the specifics of Thomas's membership in the academy at that time, the indirect evidence suggests that neither his personal nor professional status suffered very much from his southern origins. He married the daughter of a prominent New York family, when anti-southern feeling must have been at its peak. Despite the attitude of a small minority of the members of the New York Academy of Medicine, he was appointed to important positions and functions during and soon after the war.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt of his personal loyalty to his friends and relatives in the South and to his southern heritage (if not to the region's politics). In the war's final days in the winter of 1864-65, Thomas's sisters, Anna Hasell and Cornelia, his mother, and a family friend, Dr. Burgess, traveled to South Carolina with a safe conduct pass from President Lincoln, which John Metcalfe had obtained through Lincoln's physician.³⁹ The reason for this trip appears to have been either a desperate effort to stem the course of Cornelia's illness or, more likely, to enable her to die among familiar surroundings. Unfortunately, she died aboard ship off Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, just before Christmas 1864. On their sad journey to take Cornelia's body to Ridgeway, South Carolina, the little group ran straight into Sherman's marauding army and experienced several frightening, but not life threatening situations. There is also a hint in Anna Thomas's diary of assistance that Gaillard Thomas gave to Charleston

³⁷ SCMA (1903), 37. "In Memorium, T. Gaillard Thomas," *Am. J. Obst.* 47 (April 1903), 505.

³⁸ Phillip VanIngen, *The New York Academy of Medicine. Its First Hundred Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 114. Academy Minutes, May 15, 1861.

³⁹ Anna Hasell Thomas Diary, manuscript, 1864-1865, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

friends in the early days of the Federal occupation. At one time all of the food in the city had been taken by the occupying forces and the friend, Mrs. Boag, is quoted as saying that "if it had not been for Gaillard Thomas's kindness she did not know what they would have done."⁴⁰

Thomas was quite proud of his English and Huguenot ancestry. He made the first donation to the Huguenot Society of South Carolina when it was organized in 1885 and became its first life member.⁴¹ He published two documents having to do with the history of the Huguenots. One consisted of two pamphlets on Huguenot descendants, and the other was an important list of French and Swiss Huguenots compiled from an old manuscript.⁴² It should be emphasized that Thomas paid for their publication by Knickerbocker Press but was not the author of either document.

The South Carolina Medical Association's obituary of Thomas, an honorary member, even allowing for the laudatory nature of such essays, shows clearly the high regard in which Southerners held Thomas. The obituary was signed W.P.P. It was undoubtedly the work of W. Peyre Porcher, a cousin of Thomas's.⁴³

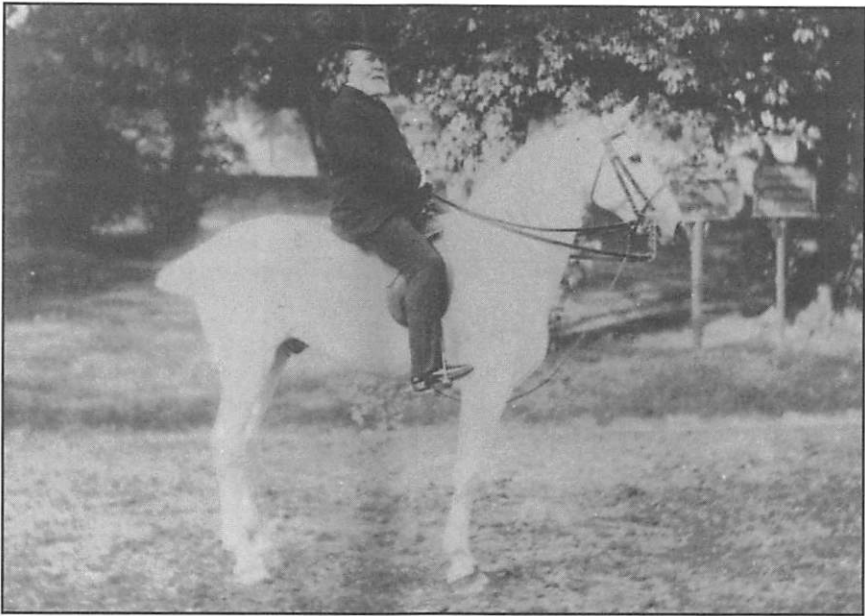
It was probably inevitable that Thomas's combination of professional skills, integrity, and personal charm would lead him to a well-to-do patient clientele. In the 1870s he built a summer cottage "Thanet House" at Southampton, Long Island, and contributed subsequently to the development of that area as a recreational area for prominent New Yorkers. Tradition has it that no small part of this process was the movement of prominent New York women to the area to be near their obstetrician during their pregnancies. Thomas discovered this area, which was at that time essentially an unspoiled wilderness, on a holiday drive with his wife. It bore

⁴⁰Bands of Union soldiers ransacked the house of their aunt twice within forty-eight hours. They took everything of value and stripped the house of food. They Soldiers burned an outbuilding and threatened to burn the house. At that time there were ten women in the house with no protection. However, there is nothing in the account which suggests that they were ever physically threatened. *Ibid.*, 133-138, 142-143.

⁴¹*Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina* 42 (1937), 42.

⁴²"Contributions to the History of the Huguenots of South Carolina" consisting of pamphlets of Samuel DuBose, Esq., of St. John's Berkeley and Professor Frederick A. Porcher of Charleston, South Carolina. Published for private circulation by T. Gaillard Thomas, M.D. (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1887). "Liste des Francois et Suisse" from an old manuscript list of French and Swiss Protestants settled in Charleston, on the Santee and at the Orange Quarter in Carolina, who desired naturalization. Prepared probably about 1695-96. Published by T. Gaillard Thomas (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1888).

⁴³SCMA (1903), 313-316.



Theodore Gaillard Thomas, ca. 1901. Thomas was an avid horseman and served as president of the New York Riding Club. Courtesy of the Waring Historical Library, Medical University of South Carolina.

considerable resemblance to the South Carolina coast, and he was attracted to it for that reason. Thomas contributed far beyond his mere presence to the development of the area. He was a founding member of St. Andrews Dunes Church. He bought its first building, an abandoned Coast Guard Reserve station, and had it moved to the church's permanent site. He was the key figure in organizing the Village Improvement Association of Southampton, and other associations dedicated to civic betterment, as well as three social clubs: the Meadows, The Golf, and The Southampton Club. Thomas was a member of various clubs in New York as well. One of his major long-term interests was the New York Riding Club, where he served as president. He is seen in a surviving snapshot at the age of seventy wearing a top hat and sitting his horse with great dignity. He had been an avid horseman all his life and carried his well-developed sense of presence into the saddle.⁴⁴

⁴⁴James Joseph Walsh, *History of Medicine in New York: Three Centuries of Medical Progress* (New York: National Americana Society, 1919), 455-458. Charles E. Thomas, Notes and Correspondence, MUSC. *Time*, July 2, 1969. *Am. J. Obst.* 47 (1903), 506. Pamphlet, St. Andrew's Dunes Church, 1993 (Southampton, New York: 1993), 2.

Theodore Gaillard Thomas died suddenly while vacationing in Thomasville, Georgia, on February 28, 1903. According to James Pratt Marr, death resulted from a ruptured aortic aneurysm.⁴⁵

Despite his professional reputation during his lifetime, Thomas is little remembered today. Why? One may only speculate. His contributions, although wide ranging and significant, lack a specific identifiable focus. He left no Thomas instrument, no Thomas syndrome, no Thomas procedure. His diplomatic ability to avoid controversy while taking strong positions deprived him of the crusader's image. Prominence as a "society physician" in nineteenth-century New York may have detracted from his scientific reputation; and standing in the long shadow of fellow South Carolinian, Marion Sims, may have dimmed the lustre of his memory. Even so, Gaillard Thomas was a major figure among the founders of American gynecology and should be so recognized.

⁴⁵Marr, 139.