

# History of the South Atlantic Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: Biographical sketch of the First President

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Women's Health Services of Central Virginia

### Historical Perspective: The world in 1938 (1)

- First jazz concert held at Carnegie Hall, performed by Benny Goodman
- FDR establishes the March of Dimes
- Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" premier in NY
- Walt Disney releases "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs"
- Superman first appears in Action Comics
- Bugs Bunny first appears in Porky's Hare Hunt
- Joe Louis knocks out Max Schmeling in the first round
- Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act is signed into law by President Roosevelt
- Howard Hughes sets a new record, by completing a 91-hour airplane flight around the world, while Wrong Way Corrigan taking off from NYC for California and lands in Ireland.
- First patent for Nylon granted to Dupont
- Production of the Jefferson nickel begins, replacing the buffalo nickel
- The minimum wage is established by law in the U.S
- Orson Welles's radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* broadcast, causing panic in parts of the US
- Nazi Germany invades Austria (Anschluss)
- NY state makes syphilis testing mandatory in order to get a marriage license
- The US Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), prohibiting child labor in factories comes into effect
- Seabiscuit beats 1937 Triple Crown winner War Admiral by 3 lengths at Pimlico, regarded as one of the greatest match races in horse racing history
- Kristallnacht begins: first large-scale physical act of anti-Jewish violence
- Italian scientist Enrico Fermi, father of the Atomic Bomb, receives the Nobel Prize for Physics



FDR signing the food drug and cosmetic act 1938  
<https://www.fda.gov/media/70251/download>

### The Birth of the SAAOG

As early as 1935, a few visionary men saw a need for an organization of professionals along the South Atlantic seaboard to promote better obstetrics and gynecology. On October 23, 1937, Dr. R.A. Ross of Durham, NC sent a letter to the practicing physicians of obstetrics and gynecology in the states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Inviting them to consider such an organization.

The vision of these early pioneers came to fruition when Dr. W.Z. Bradford organized a meeting on February 4, 1938, at the Hotel Charlotte, Charlotte, N.C. Dr. Oren Moore presided over the meeting and succeeded in having a constitution and bylaws agreed upon. The group elected officers, among whom was Dr. J.R. McCord of Atlanta who served as the first president of this newly constructed organization. Of the physicians located in the states where Dr. Ross solicited, seventy founding members shared these values and ideas and joined this prestigious society. Dr. Ross originally suggested for the Society to be named the Southeast Ob/Gyn Society. The origin of the name South Atlantic Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is unclear. When founded, the purpose of the association was "to encourage the study, improve the practice and advance the cause of obstetrics and gynecology, to promote the development of the professional interest and to encourage friendship among such specialist in this area, and through invitation to its membership to grant recognition of special knowledge in obstetrics and gynecology to those who show themselves to be duly qualified."<sup>(2)</sup>

Kirkley in his extensive but unpublished research on the first 50 years of the South Atlantic is quoted that "the SAAOG has been referred to as a specialist's organization conceived in a North Carolina bar, with a gestation period of 2 years, laboring through five Southern states with parturition occurring at the Hotel Charlotte."<sup>(3)</sup>

### SAAOG's First President

#### Early life

James Robert McCord, Sr., M.D. was born on August 27, 1884, in Conyers, Georgia, the eldest of five children of Henry Young McCord, 1854-1943, and Ella Marietta Corilla Whaley McCord 1861-1947. (4) Conyers, now a suburb of Atlanta, in 1884 was a bustling post-Civil War community, rebuilt following partial destruction by fire during Sherman's march to the sea. (5) His father, born in Butts County, as a child, witnessed the burning of Georgian property. He went to school in Conyers and later attended Moore's Business College in Atlanta. H.Y. went on to be a founding partner of the McCord-Stewart company in Atlanta, a wholesale grocery business, later entering the banking industry. In 1903, when J.R. was 19 years old, the family moved to Atlanta. (4,6) The family's financial stability allowed them to live as part of Atlanta's growing upper class. J.R. had attended the famed old University School for Boys at Stone Mountain. Located on Ridge Avenue and built in 1900, the three-story Italianate brick building was considered one of Georgia's best, attracting students from Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida as well as the occasional international student. All of this helped to shape him into the young southern gentleman he would become. (7)



Post card from C. Kropp company, Milwaukee  
[https://cms4files1.revize.com/stonemountain/VisitorsCenter/Stones\\_Throw\\_brochure\\_2\\_.pdf](https://cms4files1.revize.com/stonemountain/VisitorsCenter/Stones_Throw_brochure_2_.pdf)

#### Education

After a short time at Georgia Tech and the Atlanta Medical College (at that time probably still known as the Atlanta College of Physicians and Surgeons), McCord ultimately found himself among the land of the Yankees, where he received his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia in 1909. Despite his time above the Mason-Dixon line, his heart remained in Georgia. He would return to his home state after further training in his chosen field of obstetrics and gynecology. (7) Dr. McCord's time in Philadelphia as a young man was peppered with the general experiences of an educational life. "Mac" or sometimes "Bert", as he was referred to by his Jefferson colleagues, was a member of the Orville Horwitz surgical society, but interestingly not of the gynecologic or obstetrical societies. He also belonged to the Coplin Pathologic Society, the Dercum Neurologic Society, and not surprisingly, the Southern Club, as he was a displaced gentleman from Georgia. He was also a member of the Phi Chi medical fraternity.

Even though he was serious about his studies and practice, Dr. McCord was something of a character. His classmates referred to him as "Hot Air Merchant" and he was almost voted "Fattest" in his medical class. To add to his character, he was an officer of the "Poker Club" where he held the position of "Bluffer." This unofficial club listed its objects as 1. The elevation of the standard of the national card game.; 2. The cultivation and advancement of profanity, bluffing, and sleeping late.; 3. The moral, intellectual, and social retardation of its members.; and 4. The worship of Bacchus in a credible manner. Every hard-working medical student appreciates rest, and Dr. McCord was no exception. He enjoyed rest and relaxation so much, he is quoted as saying "God bless the man who invented sleep." The editors added, "Yes, Bert, and you worship that hero in an appropriate manner on every available occasion, lectures included." Bert was also a member of the fictitious "Hyperthasia Coccygei Brotherhood" whose motto was to "Retire far to the rear and assume a sitting posture."

Tragically, in 1908, his only sister Mary, age 18, fell ill and died of complications from appendicitis. Her death affected him. It seems as if Dr. McCord was an enigma as there are accounts of stoicism, seriousness, and jovial nature. Perhaps most revealing to J.R.'s personality is the quote beneath his name in the "Autopsy", the class yearbook of 1909. He quotes Desdemona, from Othello, as she speaks to Iago about loyalty and love in the eyes of sorrow, "I am not merry; but I do beguile The thing I am by seeming otherwise." (8,9) Bert's post graduate training travels are less well documented; however, he was an intern in 1909 at Philadelphia Children's Hospital. Between 1909-1911 he was at Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn. In 1912, he received Obstetrical training at the Lying in Hospital in New York City. (7)



J.R. McCord graduation photo and group photo with Phi Chi fraternity  
"1909 Autopsy Yearbook" (1909) Jefferson Medical College Yearbooks. Paper 19. <https://ds.lib.emory.edu/items/yearbooks19>

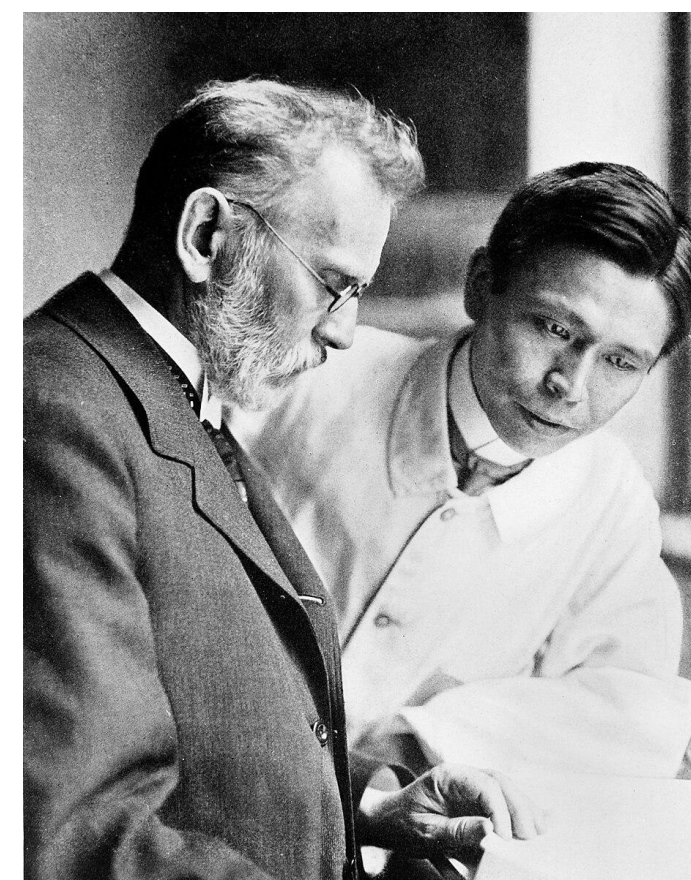
#### Personal life

It was sometime during this training that he met, courted, became engaged, and married Marion Crawford Roberts, daughter of John A. Roberts of Utica, New York. According to the engagement announcement in the Atlanta Constitution of March 23, 1913, Miss Roberts was the sister-in-law of Mrs. Walter Farley Roberts, the former Miss Daisy Stewart of Atlanta. Miss Roberts had made many friends in Atlanta upon the occasion to visit Miss Stewart, Bert being one, who coincidentally was also still training in New York. According to the Atlanta Constitution article of June 29, 1913, the marriage took place at the Roberts family home on Genessee street in Utica. Quite the affair, the matron of honor, Mrs. Walter Roberts, and the maid of honor, Miss Harriet Lowery, wore gowns of pink satin and carried pink roses and valley lilies. H.W. McCord, Jr., the brother of the groom, acted as best man. A reception followed and the garden at the home was beautifully illuminated with colored lights and Japanese lanterns. After a planned wedding trip, the couple returned to Atlanta. (10) In 1913, then, Dr. J.R. McCord returned to Atlanta to set up a practice in Obstetrics and Gynecology. As he settled into his practice, little publication and research occurred over the next few years. This is not surprising given that initially he needed to establish himself. Moreover, he had just returned to his home in Georgia with a new wife. On August 31, 1914, J.R. McCord, Jr., was born. (11) Walter Roberts McCord, Sr. was born November 11, 1917. (12)

His work was also briefly interrupted by enlistment July 8, 1918, and service in France as part of the Emory medical unit of World War I. (13) According to Chandler in the History of the Emory unit, Base hospital 43, U. S. army, American expeditionary forces, the Emory unit originally consisted of 150 men enlisted in the fall of 1917. The unit was trained at Camp Gordon and ultimately left for Bois France in June of 1918. The unit operated until it was relieved of duty on January 21, 1919. Not being part of the original enlistment, Dr. McCord served temporary duty in France as an attached officer, rank first Lieutenant. (14,15) By 1920, the McCords (Bert, Marion, J.R. Jr. age 5 and Walter age 2) resided on Springdale Road in Atlanta. (16) The rigors of an academic life may have been too much for his personal life. Bert and Marion divorced sometime before 1930. After the divorce, Bert returned to the family home. The US Census of 1930 records him as living with H.Y., his mother and brother H.Y. Jr. at the McCord home, 1226 Ponce De Leon Ave. NE in Atlanta. (17) Bert's wife remarried and lived with the children. (18) She passed away at age 58. J.R. Jr. served in WWII in the International news service and went on to become a well-known New York theater critic. He married later in life and retired to Vermont. (19) His younger brother Walter married Betty Fulton from Georgia and also served in World War II as a combat news reel photographer. He lived in Kentucky, had 3 children, and managed a photography studio. (20)

#### Early career and research

According to Kirkley (3), Bert never fancied himself a good private practice doctor having stated that "he had not had the temperament for private practice." Dr. Kirkley, who was among the last group that Dr. McCord taught added that "most who knew him agreed." Thus, shortly after arriving in Atlanta, he drifted into academia as part of the faculty of Atlanta Medical College (21). In 1915, Atlanta Medical College became part of the school of medicine at Emory University. He remained on the faculty until his retirement as chair of the department in 1946. Dr. McCord began at this time a long career dedicated to clinical research, publication, and teaching. Even before establishing in Atlanta, McCord published commentary in the Atlanta Journal-Record of Medicine on the treatment of eclampsia in June of 1912 and later in May of 1914, on The Present State of Pituirin in Obstetrics. (22,23) After the influenza pandemic and World War I, Dr. McCord began a more intensive research career throughout the next two decades. Drawing from his experience at Grady hospital clinic caring for a predominately poor black population, McCord published extensively during this time on syphilis and pregnancy. (see Appendix) This work made him a national and international expert on the subject. He also published on some of his old favorite topics including the treatment of eclampsia, maternal mortality, the improvement of obstetric care, and teaching in obstetrics and gynecology. (7) During this time, he collaborated on the publication of the Standards of Prenatal Care, an educational publication of the Children's Bureau of the US Department of Labor, having worked on the original committee of 1925 and subsequently the revisions of 1939 and 1940. (7,24,25)



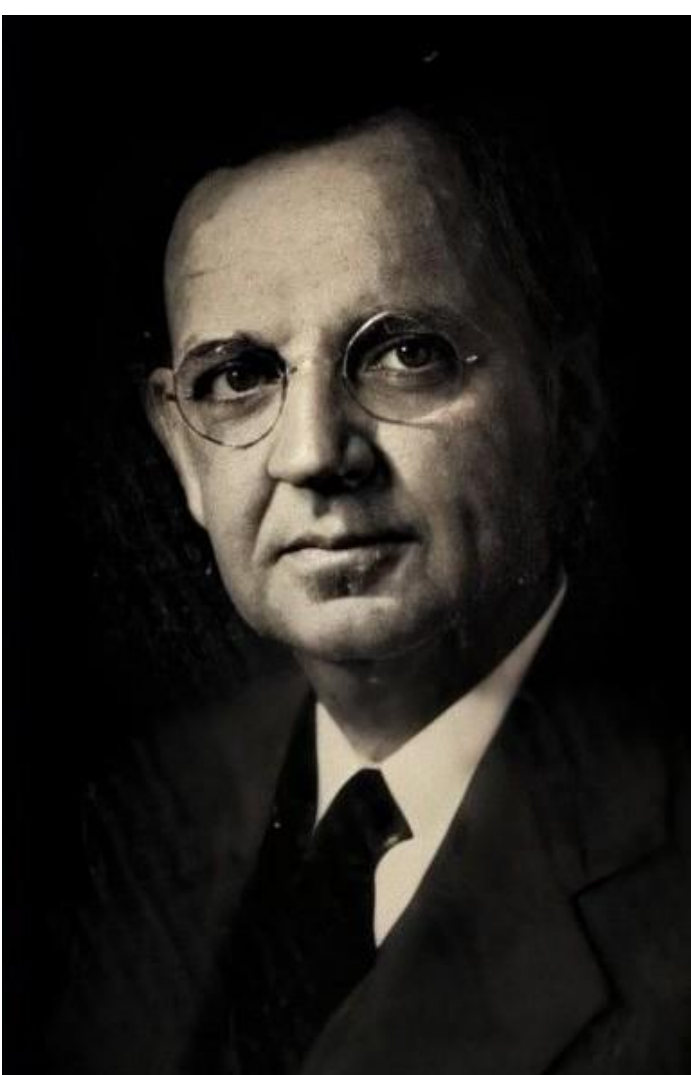
Hahn with Sabachon Hahn in his lab  
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#### Syphilis and Pregnancy: The Influence of McCord's Research

It is warranted, given that McCord's principal research contribution is data on the management and treatment of syphilis in pregnancy, that this should be briefly discussed. After WWI syphilis prevalence had increased in the US, specifically worse in the rural South. Although discovered in 1928, Penicillin was not mass produced or commonly used until post WWII (26). The practical diagnosis of the disease used the Wasserman test, a complement fixation-based process developed in 1906. The Wasserman remained in use until the 1960s when it was replaced by the now more familiar RPR test. Based on the work of Paul Ehrlich, German-Jewish scientist and Nobel Laureat of 1908, the treatment of syphilis during McCord's practice era used an arsenic based compound (arsphenamine, later neo-arsphenamine) usually combined with small amounts of Bismuth or Mercury. This is the famed Compound 606, Ehrlich's "magic bullet" (Zauberkegel). It was originally produced and marketed by the German Hoechst company beginning in 1910. Despite being difficult to administer, manufacture and store, as well as a toxic compound, during the following years, it became the most widely prescribed medication in the world. (27)



McCord circa 1938  
Courtesy of Historical Collections, Woodruff Health Sciences Center Library, Emory University



McCord circa 1942  
Courtesy of Historical Collections, Woodruff Health Sciences Center Library, Emory University

#### The McCord Legacy at Emory

In a publication from Emory, around the time of his SAAOG presidency, Bert's all-consuming interests were listed as his profession, his native state, and the Emory School of medicine. Despite other flattering offers, he remained at Emory, an institution that he believed was destined to be the South's greatest medical center. It is no wonder that he would remain in Atlanta and close to family who shared his Emory enthusiasm. H.Y. senior was a long time Emory supporter and general chairman of the Emory expansion campaign launched in 1926. Although not an alumnus himself, Bert's brothers were all Emory alumni. H.Y. Jr. served on the board of trustees. Brother Jefferson Davis McCord was Emory's first full-time director of athletics. His youngest brother Turner Ashby was a prominent businessman. (7) When H.Y. Senior was a trustee in the early 1900's a classics medal in Latin was named for the McCord family and is still awarded annually. (40) In 1966, a gift of \$750,000 from Mrs. Cordelia Scaife May, heiress to the Mellon-Scaife family fortune, established Emory University's Chair of Family Planning and Maternal Health. Established for the purpose of education, research and service related directly to the field of family planning, it is named for James R. McCord, the first chair of the department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. (7,41)



McCord circa 1955  
Courtesy of Historical Collections, Woodruff Health Sciences Center Library, Emory University

#### Mid to Late Career: Prestige and Fame

It is likely that these educational topics and his newfound notoriety caught the attention of the government in its efforts to improve obstetrical care in the southern states. Shortly after his inauguration in March of 1933, Franklin Roosevelt appointed Dr. McCord as a senior medical officer and special representative of the Children's Division of the Department of Labor. As part of his duties, he travelled all over the southeast, instructing doctors in modern obstetric practice. This subsequently became known as the McCord lectures. (21) Evidence of this throughout the south is documented eloquently in the 1937 transactions of the meeting of the medical society of North Carolina. Early in 1935 after hearing of the instructional value of the McCord lectures notably in Mississippi and South Carolina, North Carolina petitioned the Children's Bureau for a similar program in the state and were instructed to contact Dr. McCord. The first of these was organized in October in Greenville, the second in early November in Gastonia and the third in late November in Raleigh with attendance of 56, 75, and 96 physicians, respectively. Dr. Bayard Carter of Duke University wrote in a letter to the Society: "May I congratulate you upon the McCord lectures. ... It really was a great step forward." It is noted, however, that as of the spring of 1936, Dr. McCord had retired from the position but that the Children's Bureau continued to support these activities. (28) Initially, it may seem unclear as to Bert's timing for leaving his appointment at the Department of Labor. He had, however, become quite active in multiple pursuits. In addition to his aforementioned teaching, research, and publication, he served as the vice-chair in 1928 and subsequently chair of the section on Obstetrics of the Southern Medical Association, presenting the chairman's address in 1929, "The Prevention of Congenital Syphilis." (29,30) In 1930, he became a member of the American Gynecologic Society. (31) He was appointed chairman of the section on Obstetrics and Gynecology of the American Medical Association in 1935, presenting his presidential address at the meeting in Atlantic City on Syphilis and pregnancy. (32,33) He also became a member of the advisory editorial board of the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology in 1934. (34) The "Gray" journal at that time was the "official organ" of the American Gynecologic Society, the American Association of Obstetricians, Gynecologists, and Abdominal Surgeons, and multiple local and regional societies of the era. Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, it is around this time that Emory, now established as a significant academic power in Atlanta, developed a permanent department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Dr. McCord was elevated to full time professorship and asked to become the first department chair. He assumed those duties on March 1, 1936. In filling out the usual identification sheet for the President, Bert wrote under references, "I have been here long enough not to need references." Dr. McCord continued to publish during the 1930s continuing his interest in syphilis but bringing new focus on education and maternal mortality (7).

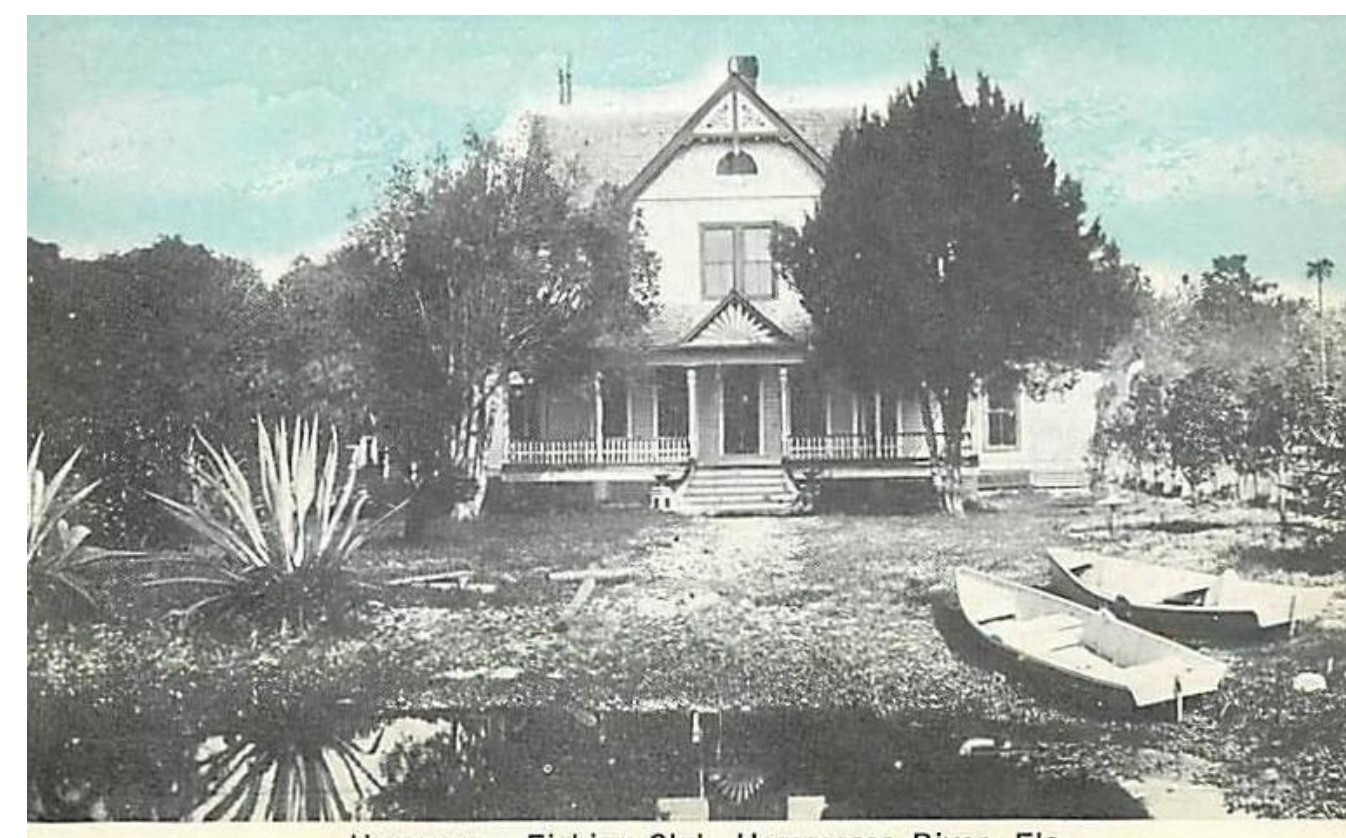
#### McCord's Role in SAAOG

His reputation as an educator and academic, known throughout the country, brought him to the attention of organized societies of obstetrics and gynecology. The exact circumstances that led to his election as the first president of the South Atlantic Association are not recorded; however, given the objectives of the organization, his regional work with the McCord lectures alone would have made him an appropriate choice, notwithstanding his recent chairmanship of the AMA section. As the first meeting in 1938 was of an organizational nature, records indicate that the first true annual meeting of the association was held February 10-11, 1939, in Charleston, home state of the next elected president. (35) The lectures were varied but Bert provided a presidential address on premature rupture of the membranes as a method of inducing labor. (36) His presidency no doubt helped to attract to this first annual meeting, noted academics of that era including Dr. George W. Kosmak, editor of AJOG, Dr. Fred Adair, chairman of the committee of Maternal Welfare, Dr. Walter T. Danreuther, Chairman of the ABOG, Dr. Edward A. Richardson of Johns Hopkins, and Dr. Rudolph Holmes of Chicago. (31) After completing his SAAOG presidency, in 1939, Bert was elected president of the American Association of Obstetricians, Gynecologists and Abdominal Surgeons presenting his presidential address at the September meeting in 1940 with "Some Remarks About Maternal Mortality in the South." (37)

#### Late Career and Death

By the 1940's Dr. McCord had reached his high-water mark and settled in at Emory to finish his career. In 1946, he retired as chair but remained professor emeritus until his passing. In March of 1946, Emory bestowed upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science. In 1949, upon officially leaving practice, the Atlanta Constitution called him "perhaps one of the two or three best-known teachers of obstetrics in America." (7) In 1954, he returned for the medical school's centennial banquet to a standing ovation. Bert moved to Ocala, Florida to enjoy retirement. During his retirement, he was active with the Elks and a member of the Methodist Church. In the spring of 1959, he was given an award of honor by the Medical Alumni Association of Emory for his contributions to medical education. On March 26, 1960, J.R. McCord passed away at Munroe Memorial Hospital in Ocala after a long illness. Services were held at Springhill and interment was March 29 at Westview Cemetery, Fulton County, Georgia. Pall bearers included past SAAOG presidents R.A. Bartholomew, and John B. Cross. (38,39)

#### Postscript



Homosassa Fishing Club, Homosassa River, Fla.

Vintage Post card of the Atlanta Fishing Club(Atlanta). Courtesy of John Wilcox  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/hatteretNC/posts/558661284773458/>

Homosassa, Florida and Citrus County have long been a getaway destination for the recreational angler. In a 1938 alumni news publication J.R. admits to being from a "fishing" family and occasionally slipped away, like many Emory men, to Homosassa for diversion. (7) His father was a charter member of the Atlanta Homosassa fishing club. (42) By his own admission, Bert was likely no stranger to the beauty, solitude and relaxation of a good fishing trip. In an article for [chronical.online](http://chronical.online), Marrotte paints a picture of the club's founding and history. (43) The members made annual treks in January for fun and relaxation. Fishing was so good that one angler claimed to have caught 21 fish in an hour. In the early years members travelled via the Homosassa rail spur until it was discontinued in 1941. The club motto was always upheld, "check your opinions at the door and just fish." The Homosassa area also attracted other celebrities. There is a "legend" that Grover Cleveland, an avid fisherman, was known to Homosassa, but the hard evidence is lacking. Dazzy Vance, the hall of famer Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher, moved his family to Homosassa springs in the 1920s. After retiring in 1935, he started a fishing lure company in 1937. (44,45) H. Y. McCord was a financial backer of the Atlanta Crackers baseball club, 1901-1965, dubbed "the Yankees of the minors" until the Braves moved from Milwaukee in 1966. Being a baseball family as well, the McCords surely would have known of Vance and his activities. Other baseball legends fished the waters as well, including Vance's friend Babe Ruth. Bert spent his retirement years in Ocala and, although there is no record of his fishing escapades, his proximity to a legendary fishing ground must have piqued his interests. One can envision those sunset years, floating on the Homosassa or Crystal River with an antique Dazzy Vance lure, waiting for the next strike. There may be no greater epitaph for a life well lived other than "Gone Fishing."



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