

John Robert Cobb

February 28, 1903 — March 24, 1967

An orthopedic surgeon in New York for more than thirty years, formerly Director of the Scoliosis Clinic of the Hospital for Special Surgery, and a Clinical Associate Professor of Surgery in Cornell Medical College, Dr. Cobb died on March 24 after an illness of several years. Born in New York, he received the A.B. degree from Brown University in 1925 with a major in English literature. In his last year in college he decided to make a career in medicine, and lacking the required study in the premedical sciences, he spent a year in postgraduate study at Harvard to make up this deficit.

Dr. Cobb had a great interest in mechanics which was probably the determining factor in his decision to specialize in orthopedic surgery. After two years of surgical and orthopedic internship at New Haven Hospital, he received an appointment as a Fellow in orthopedic surgery at the Hospital for the Ruptured and Crippled in New York, whose name was changed to Hospital for Special Surgery. This institution became the center of his later professional life.

He was given responsibility for the care of patients with scoliosis, or curvature of the spine. He organized the Scoliosis Clinic at the hospital and, during ensuing years, registered and studied a total of 4000 patients who came to the hospital with this disability. He classified the curvatures whose cause could be found and pointed out the grave, disabling characteristics of curvatures associated with neurofibromatosis. He found that many of the curves picked up in the growing years, and particularly in girls, did not increase beyond acceptable limits and that only about 10 percent required corrective surgery and treatment in plaster casts. He was a careful and meticulous surgeon, and he watched over his patients like a father with his children. He proved that the risk of operative treatment was extremely small.

Although he became a specialist in scoliosis, he did not limit his work to this field but had well-rounded experience in other divisions of orthopedic surgery. He was appointed Orthopedic Surgeon to the Sea View Hospital in Staten Island where he demonstrated his rich experience in the care of patients with tuberculosis of the bones and joints, especially of the spine. He was appointed Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at the New York Polyclinic Medical School and Hospital, and Assistant Visiting Orthopedist at the Willard Parker Hospital. He also served as a consultant on the staff of St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, Long Island, the Eastern New York Orthopedic Hospital-School in Schenectady, and the Veterans Administration Hospital in Castle Point.

He was a Fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine, and member of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, American Medical Association, American Geriatrics Society, American Medical Writers Association, and the Association of American Medical Colleges. He was a diplomate of the American Board of Orthopedic Surgery, a member of the American Orthopedic Association, and president of the Alumni of the Hospital for the Ruptured and Crippled.

He had a long American heritage and belonged to the Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants.

He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Louise W. Tower Cobb; two sons, Robert T. and Allen T.; a daughter, Mrs. Joan Boyce; and several grandchildren.

Philip D. Wilson, M.D.