

**THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF ANESTHESIOLOGISTS
A CENTURY OF CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS**

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DEDICATION

To all members of the Long Island Society of Anesthetists, the New York Society of Anesthetists, the American Society of Anesthetists, and the American Society of Anesthesiologists who struggled and who continue to persevere in their quest to improve the "art and science" of anesthesiology we dedicate this book.

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FOREWORD

History of the American Society of Anesthesiologists

A benchmark anniversary such as the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) Centennial is an occasion to assess where we have been as individuals and as an organization. The editors of this book have compiled a series of articles to remind us that our profession and the ASA have not always been as we know them. It is only through the dedication and commitment of those who came before us that our specialty enjoys its current stature and respect. During the past century each succeeding generation has built on the achievements of its predecessors to such a remarkable extent that our practices bear little resemblance to those of a generation or two ago.

Today we routinely care for patients who in the past would have been considered unacceptable risks. We guide them safely and comfortably through surgery that would have been unimaginably complex to anesthesiology's pioneers. I am confident that our current generation will continue to build on past achievements and that future anesthesiologists will regard prospective improvements in patient care with equal admiration.

On behalf of all ASA members it is my privilege to commend the editors and chapter authors for this excellent collection of articles that highlights the multiple areas in which the ASA and our profession have grown and changed.

Eugene P. Sinclair, M.D.
ASA President, 2004-2005

PREFACE

This book chronicles the history of the American Society of Anesthesiologists during the past century. Beginning as a small group interested in overcoming some of the challenges confronting the anesthesia community, the original nine members saw their society grow into a national organization that now boasts more than 40,000 members. Over the 100 years there were countless fascinating stories to be told, of triumphs and tragedies, of good ideas that were brought forth before their time, of conflict, strife, and eventual success. Through the years, however, the recurrent theme is the desire of the physicians of the Long Island Society of Anesthetists, the New York Society of Anesthetists, the American Society of Anesthetists, and the American Society of Anesthesiologists to advance the "art and science" of anesthesiology.

This book has many contributors, and reflects the voice not only of current scholarship in the field of the history of anesthesiology but also of the many members who lived through some of the events described within these pages. As editors, we are thankful for the diligence and dedication of all our authors, some of whom have labored over their manuscripts for the past three years. For several authors, this is their first foray into writing history; it is our hope that they will continue to pursue this new endeavor. Many voices help bring the past forward, blending their cadence to produce the intricate symphony that is anesthesia history. Without their efforts, this book would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank the tireless professionals at the Wood Library-Museum (WLM) of Anesthesiology. Mr. Patrick Sim, the head librarian, remains a constant source

of inspiration, kindness, and knowledge. There is no task Patrick will not undertake, no fact that he cannot check, all done with amazing alacrity and good humor. Ms. Karen Bieterman, the assistant librarian, follows closely in Patrick's footsteps. Her attention to detail, expertise, and cheerful attitude have made the task easier for all of our authors. Ms. Judith Robins, the WLM collections supervisor, has helped resurrect and organize many of the papers referred to within these pages. She, too, possesses Patrick's "can do" attitude with an eagerness that makes working with her a rewarding experience. This book is all the richer for the various documents that provide first-hand knowledge of the events of our shared history.

Finally, we would like to thank the officers, Board of Directors, and House of Delegates of the American Society of Anesthesiologists for their support for this book. They have imposed no restrictions upon us, and have encouraged the publication of this book at every turn. To our families and co-workers, who have suffered through the birthing pains of this book, we express our gratitude. Without their love, support, and understanding completion of this volume would not have been possible.

It is our hope that you will enjoy reading this book as much as we have enjoyed creating it. Happy 100th Birthday to the American Society of Anesthesiologists! We sincerely hope another generation will consider our book a resource for beginning their celebration of the 200th anniversary of the ASA!

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IN THE BEGINNING: ADOLPH FREDERICK ERDMANN AND THE LONG ISLAND SOCIETY OF ANESTHETISTS

JAMES C. ERICKSON, III, M.D., M.Sc.

INTRODUCTION

Nine young men met for the first time in the Polhemus Building of the Long Island College Hospital (LICH) on Friday, October 6, 1905. They came from the several hospitals in Brooklyn, New York where they served as anesthetists in the operating rooms. Adolph Frederick Erdmann, M.D., who was appointed the Anesthetist for LICH in 1900 and instructed the interns on the service, invited “a few physicians practicing anesthesia in the area to get together and form a society to promote the art and science of anesthesia.”¹

ANESTHESIA IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The advent of anesthesia during the decade of the 1840s was met with great enthusiasm in the medical world, except for the skepticism of a few surgeons who believed that “pain during operations is in a majority of cases even desirable, and its prevention or annihilation is, for the most part, hazardous to the patient.”² In the United Kingdom, anesthesia was eagerly embraced and physician “anaesthetists” became welcome additions to the operating room personnel. Sir James Young Simpson, an eminent Scottish obstetrician, first used ether in his

practice and then introduced chloroform, which was quickly accepted in lieu of ether by many colleagues. Both Simpson and Dr. John Snow, who anaesthetized Queen Victoria for her eighth and ninth deliveries, had to contend with controversy regarding the ethics of relieving the pain of the parturient during her travail.^{3,4} The first anesthesia organization in the world, the London Society of Anaesthetists, held its initial meeting in 1892.¹ An examination of the many antique devices displayed in the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology in Park Ridge, Illinois attests to the interest and inventiveness of the British physicians. Their

innovations improved the vaporization of ether and chloroform and the delivery of the inhalation anesthetics to patients.

Controversies regarding patent rights for the new procedure and the drugs retarded the acceptance of anesthesia in America. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of open drop ether or chloroform poured or dropped on a towel, a rag, or other vaporizer was the accepted method for anesthetizing the many wounded soldiers of the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War and for most patients during the rest of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries in America. Surgeons directed all aspects of treatment of their patients. They recruited anesthetists from the operating room personnel, such as nurses, hospital porters (orderlies), janitors, and even the surgeons' secretaries. Where available, "anesthesia coverage" was delegated to interns and in medical school-affiliated hospitals, students were often designated to "pour ether." Instruction of the interns and students was often haphazardly taught by their predecessor on the service.⁵ General practitioners and surgeons frequently administered anesthesia for their own patients as well as for physician colleagues, changing their roles as anesthetist or surgeon from day to day.⁶ Generally, the anesthetist was regarded as the "low man on the totem pole" during the late 1800s and the early 1900s.

ADOLPH FREDERICK ERDMANN, M.D.

One of the first professional anesthetists was Adolph Frederick Erdmann, M.D. He was born in Brooklyn, New York on December 27, 1867 and attended Colgate University, graduating with a B.A. degree in 1893 at the age of 25 years. While at Colgate, "Fred" was active in school affairs as an editor of publications, a class officer, and the tenor soloist in the chorus and a quartet.

Erdmann then entered the Long Island College Hospital medical school and graduated in 1897. Licensed to practice in that year, he was appointed as a "house officer" and then as a gynecologist in Dr. Skene's Sanatorium in Brooklyn. During this period his interest and energies focused on anesthesia. He was appointed as the Anesthetist of the LICH in 1900 and he became an effective teacher of the interns when they were assigned to the anesthesia service. His love

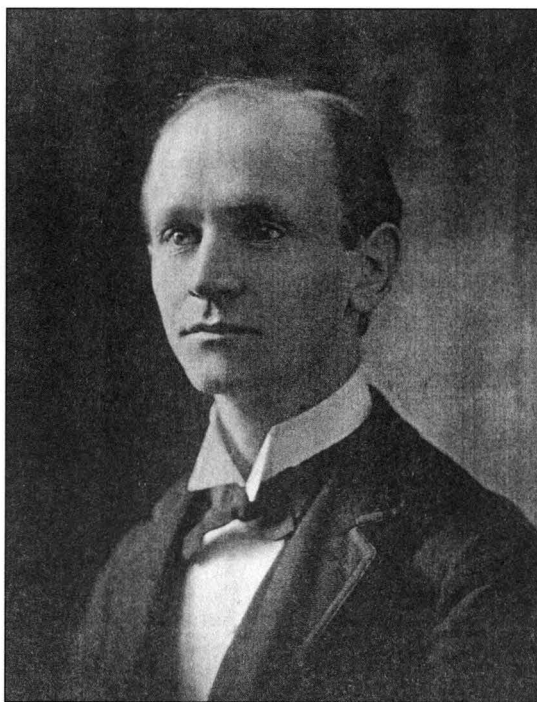


Figure 1. Adolph Frederick Erdmann, M.D. in 1898. (Courtesy of the Colgate University Library and Alumni Records).

for music continued, and he sang in the choir of the Strong Place Baptist Church where he subsequently met and married Miss Wilda G. Rood, the contralto soloist, on June 6, 1900. The year 1900 was an important milestone for young Fred Erdmann. Between 1900 and 1905 he advanced further in all aspects of his life. He participated in the Oratorio Society of New York and was active in his church,

teaching a Sunday school class for Chinese students as well as singing in the choir and at times performing the duties of the church organist. Fred and Wilda began their family, with Katherine Gertrude being born in 1901 and Kenneth Rood in 1903. They were followed by Dorothy Rosalind in 1906 and Frederick John in 1908.⁷

During 1903 Erdmann published his first paper titled "A Report on Present Methods of Administrating General Anesthetics in the Brooklyn Hospitals, with Comments" in the October 1903 issue of the *Brooklyn Medical Journal*.⁸ The concluding statement of this paper reflects his zeal for improving the practice of anesthesia and the instruction of young physicians:

"It is the privilege of every practitioner by manifesting his keen interest in what they are doing, and of every surgeon who now is the chief of their service, as well as every anesthetist specialist who has the opportunity of assisting them by skillful instruction and faithful example, to lend a hand in improving all the anesthetic services in every hospital. Then some day all will feel that everything has been done that can and should be done to place the science of anesthesia upon its proper plane with the other cognate sciences whose aim is to make man well."

Erdmann was appointed an Instructor in Anesthesia at LICH in May, 1905. The same year he called for the meeting of men who were interested in anesthesia. Seven young physicians and one medical student responded and joined Erdmann in founding the Long Island Society of Anesthetists (LISA), which became the world's second anesthesia organization. The Founders and their ages in 1905 were:

Adolph Frederick Erdmann, M.D.
37 years

Robert Ormiston Brockway, M.D.
35 years

George Lamb Buist Jr., M.D.
33 years

Arthur Hubert Longstreet, M.D.
32 years

Herman Franklin McChesney, M.D.
about 30 years

George Frank Sammis
21 years

Harold A. Sanders, M.D.
26 years

Louis Stork, M.D.
26 years

George William Tong, M.D.
27 years

In addition to Erdmann, the founding members⁹ were:

Robert Ormiston Brockway, M.D.
He was born in 1870, graduated from Long Island College Hospital in 1905, and was licensed in the same year. His specialty was listed as Neurology in 1916.

George Lamb Buist, Jr., M.D.
Born in 1872, he graduated from Yale University School of Medicine in 1900 and was licensed in 1901. His specialty was listed as Internal Medicine.

Arthur Hubert Longstreet, M.D.
He was born in 1873, graduated from University of Vermont College of Medicine in 1900, and was licensed in 1901. The specialty listed was Surgery in 1916, and then Obstetrics in 1931.

JAMES C. ERICKSON, III, M.D., M.Sc.

Herman Franklin McChesney, M.D.

The year of his birth is not listed, but was probably about 1875. He graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University in 1902 and indicated his specialty as Surgery in 1931.

George Frank Sammis

Born in 1884, he graduated from the Long Island College Hospital in 1907 and was licensed in 1908. His listed specialty was Surgery in 1916. Sammis attended the initial meeting of the LISA while still a medical student. After graduation, he became an active participant in anesthesia-related meetings, presenting papers and demonstrations. He was listed as a member of the Associated Anesthetists of America in 1916.

Harold A. Sanders, M.D.

He was born in 1879, graduated from the New York Homeopathic Medical College and Flower Hospital in 1905, and was licensed in the same year. He specialized in Anesthesia, became a member of the Associated Anesthetists of America and was the author of articles related to anesthetic techniques of the day. He played an active role in the LISA, serving as president and then as secretary. When his home was destroyed by fire in 1911, all LISA records were lost. Dr. Sanders was not listed in the American Medical Association (AMA) Directories after 1916.

Louis Stork, M.D.

Born in 1879, he graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University in 1903 and was licensed to practice in the same year. He listed his specialty as Surgery. Dr. Stork was erroneously identified as Louis **Stock** in the *Anesthesiology* article celebrating the Jubilee year of American anesthesia and the error was perpetuated in a subsequent publication.¹

George William Tong, M.D.

He was born in 1879, graduated from the Long Island College Hospital in 1903, and was licensed to practice in the same year. He specialized in Anesthesia, published articles

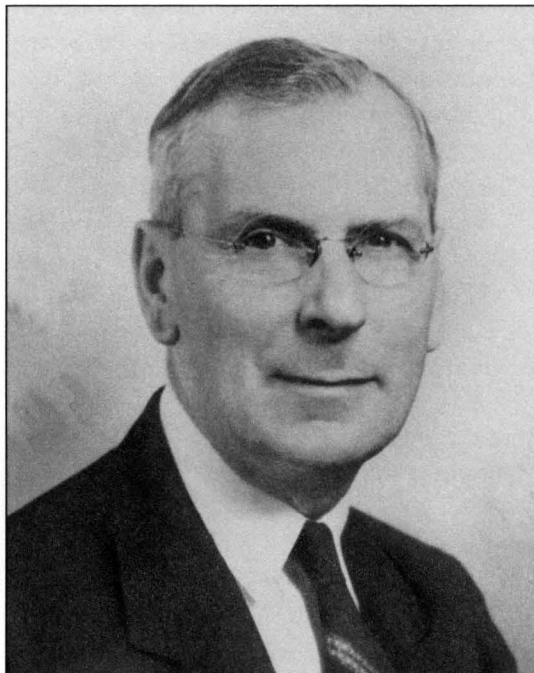


Figure 2. George W. Tong, M.D. (Courtesy of the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology).

in the *American Journal of Surgery*, and invented an eponymous pharyngeal airway. Dr. Tong was honored in 1956 by the International Anesthesia Research Society as the sole surviving member of the nine founders of LISA. He died in 1961.¹⁰

The group discussed future plans for the nascent society. They decided to meet quarterly to discuss scientific and business matters during their sessions, and stated that dues shall be \$ 1.00 per year --- a far cry from today's dues structure. The Constitution and By-laws of the LISA, Article 2, Section 1 stated that: "Any visiting or resident hospital anesthetists or any regularly qualified

physician whose particular interests center in anesthetics may become a member of this Society after having satisfied the conditions here in after prescribed.” The loss of the records of subsequent meetings precludes any detailed description of the activities of the group. The February 1907 issue of the *Long Island Medical Journal* included an announcement of the formation of the Long Island Society of Anesthetists in January 1906 and named the President as Dr. William C. Woolsey and the Secretary as Dr. Erdmann.¹² Although Dr. Woolsey did not attend the initial meeting, he apparently joined the group soon afterward. This second issue of the first volume of the *Long Island Medical Journal* was dedicated to anesthesia-related articles. The Table of Contents of the journal consisted of:

1. Spinal Analgesia:
Robert. H. M. Dawbarn, M.D.
2. The Techniques of Tubation of the Pharynx to Facilitate Administration of Anesthetics:
Junius H. McHenry, M.D.
3. Major Surgery with Minor Anesthesia:
John A. Bodine, M.D.
4. Conditions Governing the Selection of a General Anesthetic:
William C. Woolsey, M.D.
5. Nitrous Oxide and Gas-Ether Sequence for Inducing Anesthesia, with Special Reference to the Bennett Apparatus:
Arthur H. Longstreet, M.D.
6. The Chloroform and Ether Solution for Anesthesia:
G. H. Ding, M.D.
7. Ethyl Chloride and the Newer Anesthetics, Some Personal Experiences:
A. F. Erdmann, M.D.
8. Ethyl Chloride in Oral Surgery:
Richard C. Brewster, M.D.

In addition, there were columns by the editor, Paul Monroe Pilcher, A.M., M.D., announcing the formation of the LISA and the editor’s ideas relating to some of the papers listed above. The selection of these topics for the second issue of Volume I of this new journal suggests the dynamic impact of Dr. Erdmann on the practice of anesthesia and surgery at LICH and in the medical community.

By 1911, the original group of nine Founders had grown to 23 members, all from Brooklyn except for Thomas Drysdale Buchanan, M.D., James Tayloe Gwathmey, M.D., and James T. Lumbard, M.D.¹ The AMA Directories indicated that these three physicians practiced in New York City.⁹ They were prominent anesthetists of their era; Dr. Buchanan became the first President of the American Board of Anesthesiology. One of the first major American texts of Anesthesia was authored by Dr. Gwathmey and published in 1914.² Reflecting on the burgeoning interest in anesthesia in 1911, the members proceeded to rename the LISA “The New York Society of Anesthetists,” with Dr. Erdmann becoming its first president.¹ He was succeeded by Dr. Gwathmey in 1912 and assumed the duties of Secretary of the new organization. In 1925, Erdmann was elected President of the Eastern Society of Anesthetists, another new organization of anesthetists. In the 1940s he was the Historian of the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

ERDMANN’S ACHIEVEMENTS, AWARDS, AND ACCOLADES

During the decades that followed, Dr. Erdmann continued his anesthesia practice in hospitals in the Brooklyn area, maintaining his staff affiliation at the Long Island College Hospital until 1922. He retired in 1937 from

the Norwegian Deaconess Hospital and the Brooklyn Eye and Ear Hospital. He was the author of eleven papers related to various aspects of the conduct of inhalation anesthesia, and apparently authored papers in the German medical literature. He invented various devices for administering inhalation anesthesia, as well as modifications of existing equipment. His use of recorded music to sooth the anxieties of patients undergoing surgery under local and general anesthesia was featured in an article in the *Scientific American* in 1933 as well as in the lay newspapers.¹⁴ Erdmann's collection of anesthesia equipment and literature was extensive and after retirement he gave the items to Dr. Paul M. Wood, thus contributing substantially to what would become the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.

Erdmann was a frequent participant in medical seminars and meetings, and when not presenting papers on clinical subjects, he often made extemporaneous comments from the floor. Four of his papers and several spontaneous comments were related to his experiences with ethyl chloride as a general anesthetic. After retirement to Lisbon, New Hampshire in 1937, he continued to attend anesthesia meetings. While in Montreal, Canada for the 1941 convention of the American Society of Anesthetists, he was struck by an automobile and sustained fractures of the skull and a shoulder.¹⁵ A few months later he sent a note to the *ASA Newsletter* informing them of his successful recovery. In Lisbon, he expressed his interest and love for the natural world by creating a natural history museum in the local high school. Erdmann was interested in astronomy and botany as well as mineralogy. His collection of semi-precious stones was given

to the school's museum and he became its Curator.⁷ From Lisbon, Erdmann moved to Laconia, New Hampshire in 1948, near the home of his daughter, Mrs. John (Dorothy) Eckels. He died in Laconia on August 16, 1953 at the age of 85 years.¹⁶

Soon after his retirement from professional activity in 1937, the fledgling American Society of Anesthetists declared Erdmann "A Member in Good Standing for Life" and presented him with an engraved, silver membership certificate. It stated that he

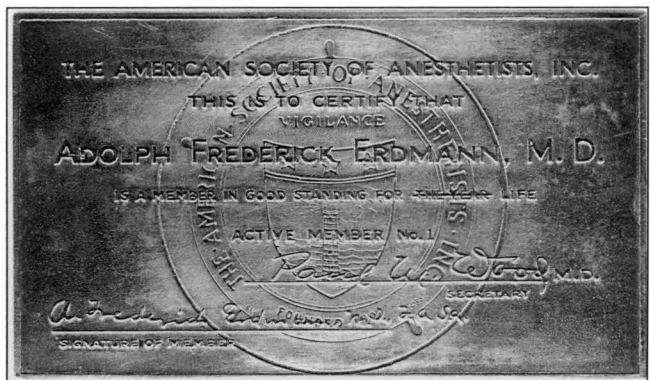


Figure 3. Silver engraved membership certificate awarded to Dr. Erdmann in 1937. (Courtesy of Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology).

was "Active Member Number 1" (Fig. 3). The certificate now resides in the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, donated to the Museum by Dr. Ellison C. Pierce, Jr., President of the American Society of Anesthesiologists in 1984 and the Distinguished Service Award recipient in 1996. It was originally given to Mrs. Pierce by a descendant of Dr. Erdmann.

A decade later, in 1947, the American Society of Anesthesiologists awarded him the prestigious Distinguished Service Award. Despite a diligent search, neither a certificate nor a plaque has been located signifying this honor, although correspondence from Mr. John H. Hunt, the ASA's Executive

Secretary, to Dr. Erdmann regarding the award is in the Erdmann collection at the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology. Throughout his career he was an energetic, tireless advocate for the advancement of the sciences as applied to anesthesiology. He was one of the first professional anesthetists in America and fostered the creation of

organized groups of physicians who met to discuss and to improve the clinical care of patients. He should also be remembered as a staunch advocate for training “medical men,” the physicians of his day, in the knowledge and techniques for anesthetizing surgical patients and relieving their pain.

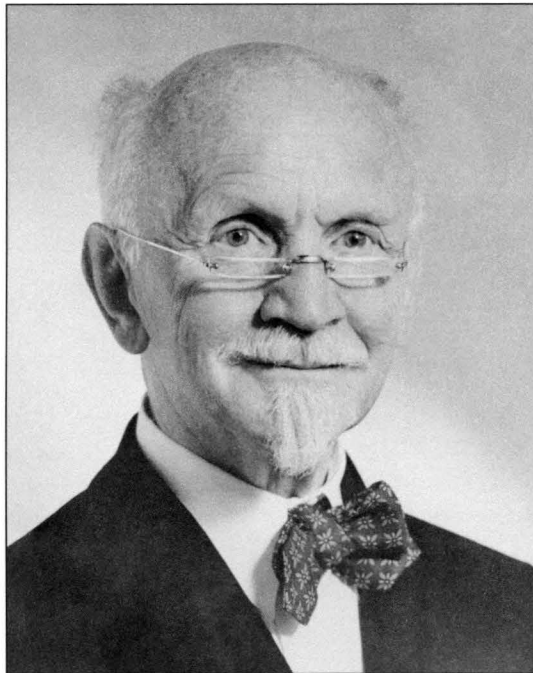


Figure 4. Adolph Frederick Erdmann, M.D. Born: December 27, 1867. Died: August 16, 1953. (Courtesy of the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology).

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to Patrick Sim, Librarian of the Wood Library-Museum, for his encouragement and support, to Mrs. Carole Siragusa for her unstinting technical assistance, and to Carl Peterson of the Colgate University Library who located the 1898 photograph of Dr. Erdmann.

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