

# 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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## THE CREATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF ANESTHESIOLOGISTS: AN INTRIGUING DECADE

Douglas R. Bacon, M.D., M.A.

From the transition that began on February 13, 1936, until the final name change on April 12, 1945, the New York Society of Anesthetists transformed itself into the American Society of Anesthesiologists. The society's outlook changed also, from the greater New York City area to the entire United States, and eventually the world. The issues the society had to grapple with also changed from certification, to how best to represent United States anesthesia to the world. Thrown into the mix was a world war, where the need for physician specialists was acute, and the society's response would have lasting implications for a decade and a half after the war's end. This chapter chronicles the coming of age of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, the establishment of the a second specialty-specific journal, the creation of an international public display, and maturation of the leadership to the point where they were able to negotiate with the Armed Forces and strengthen the infrastructure that would lead to the post-war "boom" in anesthesiologists.

### FEBRUARY 13, 1936

The business meeting of the New York Society of Anesthetists (NYSA) was tense. Paul Wood (Fig. 1) had placed before the assembled multitude a motion to change the society's name. In the audience was Adolph Frederick Erdmann, the founder of the Long Island Society. He was unconvinced of the need to change the name, and Erdmann expressed his displeasure for all to hear. It was Wood who calmed him and explained that the name change was necessary to high-

light the new nature of the society. Fellowship had made the society national in membership and character. The American Medical Association (AMA) wanted two national societies to sponsor a certification board. The name New York was parochial. To further the specialty board and to place anesthesia on the same footing as all medical specialties, it was necessary to change the society's name. With this explanation, Erdmann's opposition dissipated.<sup>1</sup> Wood's proposal that the name be changed to the



Figure 1. Paul Meyer Wood, M.D. (Photograph courtesy of the Wood Library-Museum).

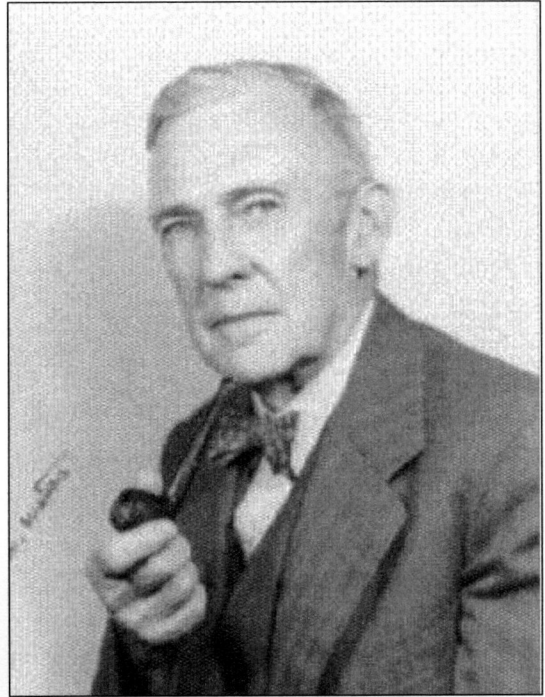


Figure 2. Ralph Milton Waters, M.D. (Photograph courtesy of the Wood Library-Museum).

American Society of Anesthetists (ASA) was unanimously adopted.

The new name of the society emphasized the split that was occurring in organized anesthesiology. In 1933 Francis Hoeffler McMechan and the Associated Anesthetists of the United States and Canada (AAUSC) were offered a chance to form a section on anesthesia within the AMA and they turned down the request,<sup>2</sup> convinced that the AMA did not favor physician specialists in anesthesiology. McMechan went his own way, creating the International College of Anesthetists,<sup>3</sup> a body whose certifying criteria were weak and whose wings spread all over the world. However, McMechan was criticized by those within organized anesthesiology who felt that all physicians, including those who worked with nurse anesthetists, should be included in any certification process.

Ralph Waters, (Fig. 2) chairman of the first academic anesthesia department at the University of Wisconsin and widely respected within organized anesthesia, led the opposition. He reasoned that physicians such as John Lundy at the Mayo Clinic, who had made tremendous contributions to the field but worked with nurse anesthetists, would be excluded.<sup>4</sup> Waters contended that any certification process without these leaders would lack validity.<sup>5</sup>

McMechan's response to Waters' contention was sharp, and chiding. It was unethical, he wrote Waters, for a physician to work with nurses. McMechan further wrote:

“While very few may consider that a basic standard of ethical practice is not necessary, just recently the New York Anesthetists have been appealing to the