



H = Hammer
B = Bullet

CHCl_3 = Chloroform
F = Fan Blade

Fig. 1. Chloroforming or etherizing safecrackers. While working in antebellum Baltimore, German merchant Abraham Oberndorf, Jr., received US patents for his toy, umbrella, and ladder designs. Naturalized as a citizen by the Confederacy at the outbreak of the Civil War, he served as a Private in Company H of the 10th Alabama Infantry. After the war, he worked in Kansas as a farmer and then a banker. In the latter capacity, he filed two patents for safeguarding bank vaults from thieves. On June 23, 1896, Oberndorf received US Patent No. 562,767 for his Safe Attachment. Hung inside “any safe or vault,” this invention uses a fan-blade to sense the concussion of a safecracker’s explosive. The triggered release of a spring-loaded hammer then strikes a bullet cartridge, the explosion of which shatters a glass bottle of a “stifling and poisonous gas” . . . “like chloroform or ether . . .” Any thief who persisted would suffer “death or insensibility.” —George S. Bause, M.D., M.P.H., Honorary Curator, ASA’s Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology; Clinical Associate Professor, Case Western Reserve University.