

ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

“MEDICAL DEPARTMENT U S N CHLOROFORM FOR ANESTHESIA”



Labeled as a “QUARTER POUND [OF] CHLOROFORM PURIFIED FOR ANESTHESIA,” the chloroform screw-capped inside this amber bottle was manufactured by Mallinckrodt Chemical Works. A less flammable but more potent anesthetic than ether, chloroform offered both fire safety and space-conserving advantages aboard naval vessels. However, any sailor who inadvertently swallowed chloroform faced fearsome antidotes, such as “emetic of mustard” and “spirits [of] ammonia aromatic in water.” If these failed to revive the chloroform drinker, the bottle’s label cites, almost as an afterthought: “Artificial respiration.” (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.)

George S. Bause, M.D., M.P.H., Honorary Curator, ASA’s Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Park Ridge, Illinois, and Clinical Associate Professor, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. UJYC@aol.com.