

ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

“Agreeable” Coca Cordial: Cocaine with “a Rich Vinous Flavor”



From Detroit, the Michigan pharmaceutical firm of Parke, Davis & Company distributed bottles of “Coca Cordial” (*left*) as a “Palatable Preparation of Coca Erythroxyton Containing in an agreeable vehicle the active medicinal principle, free from the bitter astringent constituents of the drug.” Targeting “persons of delicate nervous organization,” the company advertised the utility of its medicinal cordial in 1886 for treating nervous exhaustion, irritability, indigestion, depression, nausea, vomiting, alcoholism, or opium abuse. An agreeably “rich vinous flavor” in each fluid ounce delivered “60 grains of coca leaves” (*right*, the oval label decorated with coca leaves), with their “sedative, tonic, and stimulant effects.” The widespread distribution of cocaine in cola beverages and in popular remedies such as “Coca Cordial” meant that American physicians and dentists had little explaining to do when offering patients cocaine as a local anesthetic. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

George S. Bause, M.D., M.P.H., Honorary Curator and Laureate of the History of Anesthesia, Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Schaumburg, Illinois, and Clinical Associate Professor, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. UJYC@aol.com.