EDITORIAL

Anesthetists are carrying on under the present peak-load situation the same as practitioners of other specialties in medicine. On the home front, activities are complicated by a marked reduction in personnel, further augmented by an increase in the number of hospitalized patients that is quite general in extent. Some have the added but gratifying burden of training groups from the armed forces. Vacations this past summer were ofttimes difficult or impossible to arrange. Hours on duty are prolonged and periods of relaxation are usually few and widely separated. During this period when history is in the making, one suggestion for less strenuous but nevertheless fascinating activity is the reading of the history of the specialty in the past.

The librarian of the American Society of Anesthetists, Inc.* has always been interested in original applications of the various anesthetic agents and methods. It is common knowledge that claims and counter claims of this nature have marred the early days of this special field of medical practice. In an effort to locate additional reports, the librarian has called attention to an item of interest, cited below, with the hope and expectation that readers finding substantiating or controverting published or unpublished data of this kind will submit them to the headquarters' office which will serve as a bureau for the collection of such information. In this article by Riddell † entitled "Notes on Early Canadian Medicine," attention is directed to a claim for the first use of chloroform in Canada. "M. Pierre-George Roy has made a note in the *Bulletin des Réserches Historiques* (July, 1942). . . . The credit is given to Dr. E. D. Worthington who, in his 'Reminiscences of Student Life and Practice,' claims the honor of having performed the first surgical operation in Canada with the aid of chloroform as an anesthetic. This operation was made at Eaton Corner March 14, 1847, upon a man named Stone. Dr. Worthington amputated one leg of the patient in the presence of Dr. Rodgers of Eaton and Dr. Andrews of Cockshire. Stone did not lose consciousness, but he felt no pain.

"In Quebec, chloroform was first used surgically as an anesthetic on February 4, 1848. A French sailor from Havre had had both legs frozen. He was taken to the Marine Hospital and on February 4, 1848, Drs. Douglas and Sewell amputated both limbs. A medical man who assisted at the operations reported that Dr. Douglas did his work in one minute and forty seconds while Dr. Sewell, less speedy, took an hour."

According to Keys,‡ Duncan, a colleague of Simpson's, tried chloro-

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† Riddell, The Honourable William B.: Notes on Early Canadian Medicine, Med. Record, Vol. 156 (Feb.) 1943.

‡ Clark, A. J.: Aspects of the History of Anaesthetics, Brit. M. J. 2: 1029–1034 (Nov. 19) 1938. Quoted by Keys, Thomas E: The Development of Anesthesia, Anesthesiology 3: 14 (Jan.) 1942.

form on himself and on the next succeeding day, November 4, 1847 Simpson, Duncan and another assistant, Keith, inhaled it. Apparently satisfied with these preliminary experiments upon themselves, Simpson at once employed chloroform in his obstetric practice. According to Gwathmey,* Simpson made public this use of chloroform in a communication on November 10, 1847. Thus Simpson is credited with the original application of chloroform for anesthesia, although the above reference to the analgesic use of chloroform in Canada antedates his work by about ten months.

Another interesting commentary, one on the early use of nitrous oxide, not known generally, although mentioned without elaboration by Keys,† links this anesthetic agent with the development of the revolver. Samuel Colt,‡ a native of Connecticut, was interested in firearms and pyrotechnics from his early youth. This interest continued while he was employed in his father's dye-shop, where he gained some knowledge of chemistry. After he had definitely outlined his ideas of a revolving firearm, financial aid was necessary in order to carry on his experiments and manufacture his invention. Applying his knowledge of chemistry, he recalled the effects of nitrous oxide as reported by Davy, and left Connecticut on March 30, 1832, to deliver lectures on and demonstrate the effects of nitrous oxide to the public for an admission fee. By this means, he was able to acquire the necessary capital to begin the manufacture of his revolver.

His Boston appearance was recorded editorially in the *Boston Post*, June 22, 1832. Among his personal effects were found accounts of his demonstrations in the United States and Canada extending from New Orleans to Quebec. A report of one of his visits to Albany published in the *Albany Microscope*, October 26, 1933, gave a good idea of the way his lectures were received. "We never beheld such an anxiety as there has been during the past week to witness the astonishing effects of Dr. Colt's gas. The museum was crowded to excess every evening; and so intense was the interest which was manifest, that the doctor was compelled to give two exhibitions every evening.

"The effect which the gas produces on the system is truly astonishing. The person who inhales it becomes completely insensible, and remains in that state for about three minutes, when his senses become restored, and he sneaks off with as much shame as if he had been guilty of some mean action. No person will begrudge the two shillings for the gratification of half an hour's laugh at the ludicrous feats displayed in the lecture room." Although insensibility produced by nitrous oxide was again observed and in addition publicized in the public press, more than a decade had to pass before Wells administered the gas to produce anesthesia for pain relief.

* Gwathmey, James T.: Anesthesia, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1924.

† Keys, Thomas E.: The Development of Anesthesia, Anesthesiology 2: 565 (Sept.) 1941.

‡ Haven, P. T., and Belden, F. A.: A History of the Colt Revolver, New York, William Morrow and Company, 1940.