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Written in Granite: An Illustrated History of the Ether Monument. By Rafael A. Ortega, M.D. Boston, Plexus Management, 2006. Pages: 71. Price: \$100 (or larger donation).

Harper's Weekly of September 26, 1868, in consecutive short articles, describes the unveiling of two monuments. One in Guilford, Connecticut, is 17 ft tall, made of Rhode Island granite, and commemorates Fitz-Greene Halleck (1790–1867), an American poet of renown in the mid-1800s. The article concludes with the commentary, “The present predisposition of the American people to honor with monumental designs the memories of their great and good men, and to preserve, in like manner, the record of their noble and heroic achievements, is a gratifying proof of increased civilization. It indicates an improved art, taste, and better still, increased reverence for wisdom and virtue.”¹

In light of those sentiments it is somewhat surprising that the other article, titled “The Good Samaritan,” gives notice of the placement in the Boston Public Garden of a monument not to a man, but to “the discovery of sulfuric ether as an anesthetic.”² The sculpture atop the monument, inspired by the scriptural parable, is pictured with the article. The three men most prominent in the concept, design, and execution are mentioned. The sculptor, J. Q. A. Ward (1830–1910), is named first, along with a description of his work, including four bas-reliefs and the figures surmounting the monument. Thomas Lee (1779–1867), the benefactor, is credited with originating the design and bearing “the whole expense of \$40,000.” Henry Van Brunt (1832–1903) is named as the architect. The article concludes by saying, “The design and beauties of the group which we illustrate will be readily perceived by the intelligent reader.”²

Readers of all sorts and particularly those who enjoy anesthesia history, historical images, and beautiful photographs will appreciate Rafael A. Ortega's recently published book, *Written in Granite: An Illustrated History of the Ether Monument*. Here is an entire book dedicated to the monument Thomas Lee commissioned nearly 20 yr after the first public demonstration of ether at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Ortega begins by relating a brief history of anesthesia that nicely sketches the context of the ether story. He includes William E. Clarke, the medical student who administered ether for a dental procedure in 1842, preceding Crawford W. Long's initial use of the vapor by 2 months.

Although Lee was civic-minded, if there is a special reason for his philanthropic act, it is not known. He apparently had rather specific ideas about the monument because he insisted on New England granite for the sculpture of the Good Samaritan, relieving the suffering of his neighbor. He clearly did not intend to honor any one person as the discoverer of ether because no individual's name appears on the monument. Lee might have given some insight to his motives had he spoken at the dedication of the monument on June 27, 1868, but regrettably, he passed away in 1867. Lee's friends selected Henry J. Bigelow (1818–1890) to speak at the unveiling. He was the surgeon who arranged Morton's demonstration and was also present on that day in October 1846. The text of Dr. Bigelow's speech and of the mayor's acceptance is found in the book.

Although *Harper's Weekly* seems to minimize the work of Henry Van Brunt, Ortega gives a clear picture of his considerable efforts related to the monument. Especially interesting are Van Brunt's letters to the sculptor, John Quincy Adams Ward, and the description of Van Brunt's struggle to select appropriate inscriptions. In a separate chapter, the book describes the contemporary reactions to the Ether Monument. One criticism is well founded. It was soon noted that the bas-reliefs are recessed and difficult to view. Dr. Ortega has digitally created composite photos that reveal these four beautiful sculptures

for the reader. The themes of war and religion are apparent in the design of the monument. The book briefly explores the controversies the discovery of ether stirred in both these areas and the events that led to the acceptance of anesthesia in battlefield hospitals and to treat the pain of childbirth referred to in Genesis 3:16.

The historic photographs of the Boston Public Garden included in *Written in Granite* show a public space much different from today. The Ether Monument stands in an open area not overshadowed by trees. The buildings across Arlington and Beacon streets are easily seen. The book contains lovely color photographs showing the monument in modern day taken by Dr. Ortega. Some show the monument dappled with light and overhung with arching branches of green foliage and red flowering trees. It is a shame that the lighting for night viewing was not completed before the book went to press, as the stunning photo seen in the January 2007 *ASA Newsletter*, also by Ortega, is not included.³

The Ether Monument has stood as a reminder of a significant part of our history for nearly 140 yr. The urban environment, vandalism, and natural soiling from the overhanging mature trees have contributed to wear and tear, even to the granite on which Thomas Lee insisted. Fortunately, today those visiting the Public Gardens in Boston may enjoy the renewed beauty of the Ether Monument after a refurbishment completed in the fall of 2006. Dr. Ortega's purpose in writing this book is to generate interest in the Ether Monument and to raise an endowment for ongoing restoration and maintenance. Further information may be found at www.ethermonument.org.*

We tend to think that sentiments written in stone are permanent. The monument to the poet Halleck, although made of granite, did not guarantee his place in perpetuity with those commonly included in the pantheon of American verse. Conversely, the history that we hold dear, even if commemorated in granite, must be preserved to remind the next generations. Donating to this cause and receiving this book will enliven your understanding of anesthesia history while preserving the monument to ether.

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References

1. Halleck's monument. *Harper's Weekly* September 26, 1868; 12:620
2. The Good Samaritan. *Harper's Weekly* September 26, 1868; 12:620
3. Ortega RA, Zambricki ER: The ether monument is finally restored! *ASA Newsl* 2007; 71:29

(Accepted for publication March 28, 2007.)

Medline: A Guide to Effective Searching in PubMed & Other Interfaces, 2nd Edition. By Brian S. Katcher, Pharm.D. San Francisco, Ashbury, 2006. Pages: 136. Price: \$31.95.

How and where do I find the best available information on a biomedical topic? The “I” in this question may be a clinician, an educator, a basic science researcher, a trainee, or a patient, and the answer to this question is contingent on the questioner. A harried clinician does not want an encyclopedic review of a disease when seeking information about normal ranges for specific laboratory values, and the basic science researcher typically finds primary, rather than secondary review literature of greater interest. The answer is also context sensitive. The patient with an unusual symptom will seek information using the symptom, rather than disease class that might lead to this symptom, to

* Available at: www.ethermonument.org. Accessed March 9, 2007.