

## References

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(Accepted for publication October 3, 2014.)

**The Wondrous Story of Anesthesia.** Edited by Edmond I Eger II, Lawrence J. Saidman, Rod N. Westhorpe. New York, Springer, 2014. Pages: 944. Price: \$149.00.

The title of the book aptly describes the goal of the editors: to describe in detail the story of the birth and development of surgical anesthesia. Three distinct periods are examined: the early period up to and including the first demonstrations of anesthesia; the next 90 or so years—roughly 1860 to 1950; and the “modern era,” from 1950 to the present. The editors’ work spanned approximately 6 yr and included 86 national and international contributing authors. Several potential authors passed away before 2007—the official start of the project—and 10 colleagues died in the prepublication period. In the preface, the editors note an element of urgency in their mission: “We would have lost too many opportunities had we failed to act.”

The book is organized into two parts:

Part I: The Woven Story of Anesthesia: Eras, Exemplars, and Looking Forward

Part II: Individual Stories

“The Woven Story” seeks to illustrate the evolution of anesthesia from the earliest time through the modern era, even looking forward, in the last chapter, to “Predicting the Future.” Overall, the text flows nicely, the illustrations are

abundant, and tables and graphs are succinct and easy to follow. References are appropriate.

The “Individual Stories” may present more of a challenge to the individual reader because of the scope and depth of material contained therein. Topics include surgery before and after the discovery of anesthesia, the organization of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, the American Board of Anesthesiology, and the International Anesthesia Research Society, nurse anesthesia, the development of anesthesia in Australia and New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean Islands and Central America, South America, China, France, German-speaking countries, the British Isles, Japan, and the Nordic Countries. Research, critical care, anesthesiology education, ethics, patient safety, outcomes research, and numerous other areas are covered. So thorough are the listings that most subjects are covered. The contributors could be thought of as a “*Who’s Who*” in the international world of anesthesiology.

The strength of this book lies in its diversity and depth of material, which will appeal to individuals interested in our history. Individual chapters may serve as a launching pad for further research. Many lifetimes of experiences are woven into this volume, and one cannot help but leave this book with a deep felt respect for the men and women who have made so many contributions to anesthesiology and the evolving subspecialties. Certainly, no tome of this size will be found faultless, in areas of both omission and commission. Experts in particular areas may differ in opinion as to either historical events or the importance or impact of those events. References may be lacking or repetitive. In a broader sense, these perceived weaknesses might become strengths if they foster further debate, research, and new knowledge. Overall, I think the book leaves one with an optimistic view of the future for our specialty although one cannot help but sense a bit of nostalgia for the past from those individuals who were on the cutting edge of clinical developments and research in the formative years. On a more personal note, having trained in anesthesiology at the University of California-San Francisco in the 1990s, I had the privilege of working with several of the individuals who were involved in the creation of this book. I am sure there are many others like me from all over the world that can point to people in this book who have made a difference in their own lives, either personally or professionally, in anesthesiology, the history of our specialty, or both.

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(Accepted for publication October 15, 2014.)

Michael J. Avram, Ph.D., served as Handling Editor for this book review.