

Monumental Efforts

Perspiring Professionals, Conspiring Tradesmen ... Inspiring You?

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PLEASE page through this month's issue of ANESTHESIOLOGY for "The Monuments Men: In the History of Anesthesia, Too," an engaging historical article by Professor Luca Borghi of Università Campus Bio-Medico di Roma, Italy.¹ The author recounts how a sculptured bust of American anesthesia pioneer Horace Wells was concealed during the Nazi occupation of Paris. As the article's title suggests, Professor Borghi compares the anonymous gardener, the hero of the story, with the Allied forces' teams of museum and art professionals, nicknamed "The Monuments Men," who saved European artworks at risk from theft, loss, or destruction by the retreating Axis forces during World War II. Cowritten, coproduced, and directed by its acting star, George Clooney (Actor, Screenwriter, Film Director, and Producer; Los Angeles, California and Laglio, Italy) (1961-current), the 2014 movie, *The Monuments Men*, depicted how forces for Good could snatch artistic treasures from the clutches of evil, even behind enemy lines.

What I term Professor Borghi's "perspiring professionals" included two "doctors" who worked industriously in multiple professions. The private practice world of dentistry was represented by Dr. Horace Wells, D.D.S., posthumously (Dentist, Inventor, and Nitrous Oxide Pioneer; Hartford, Connecticut, 1815–1848) who earned his honorific (not honorary) title of "Doctor" after completing dental preceptorships. Besides pioneering nitrous oxide anesthesia, Dr. Wells divided his time between dentistry



"[This article is about how an] anonymous gardener-guardian ... sheltered Bertrand-Boutée's marble bust of Horace Wells from Nazi destruction."

and selling household items, including paintings from Europe and personal inventions such as his "coal-sifters" and "shower-baths." In contrast, the university world of Dr. Paul Bert, M.D. (Physician, Politician, Professor of Physiology, University of Bordeaux and University of Paris, France, 1833–1886) revolved around the academic doctorates that he earned in both medicine and science. Dr. Bert achieved success in many realms, including politics, education, and, what anesthesiologists are likely more familiar with, physiology. If Drs. Wells and Bert perspired at doctoring that which breathed or the "animal" (Latin *animalis*: "having breath"), then those that I dubbed "conspiring tradesmen" mastered the "mineral" (marble) and the "vegetable" (gardens). The sculptor of Paris' Wells-and-Bert monument was named René Bertrand-Boutée (Sculptor, Paris, France, 1877–1950). This "master" craftsman conspired with his patrons to sculpt a memorial link between Wells and Bert, two men who experimented professionally yet independently with nitrous oxide. Patrons and the public showered Bertrand-Boutée with fortune and fame, respectively. Those recognitions apparently escaped another tradesman, the anonymous gardener-guardian who sheltered Bertrand-Boutée's marble bust of Horace Wells from Nazi destruction. He or she secreted the sculpture inside a garden kiosk of what is known today as Paris' Place des États-Unis.

As for "inspiring you," Professor Borghi's story of rescuing art—of Good triumphing over Evil—reminds us of

Image: Bust of Horace Wells by René Bertrand-Boutée.

Corresponding article on page 521.

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the artistic and historic struggle behind many works of art. Human connections can add life to otherwise lifeless stone. Indeed, human sagas transform the merely marbled into the monumental.

Please relish reading “The Monuments Men: In the History of Anesthesia, Too” by Professor Luca Borghi.

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Reference

1. Borghi L: The monuments men: In the history of anesthesia, too. *ANESTHESIOLOGY* 2015; 122:521–3