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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Awnings before Yawnings: Advertising Anesthetic Stupor at “the Cooper”



An “albumen print” is glued crookedly to the obverse of this trade card (*above*) selected from the Wood Library-Museum’s Ben Z. Swanson Collection. The print depicts Manhattan’s Cooper Institute, a tuition-free school founded in 1859 as “Cooper Union” by philanthropist Peter Cooper. The original caption read: “*Presented by COLTON DENTAL ASSOCIATION. 16 COOPER INSTITUTE.*” Horrified by the numerical misprint, dental anesthetist Gardner Q. Colton (1814 to 1898) demanded the darker overprinting: “COOPER INSTITUTE, NEW YORK CITY / 19.” Besides directing patients to Room No. 19 for dental extraction while “yawning” under the anesthetic “stupor” of nitrous oxide, the overprinting helped non-Manhattanites localize “the Cooper” to New York City during the celebrations of 1876, America’s centennial year. Centered over the broad first-floor awning was a pair of second-floor awnings, each of whose sides advertised “COLTON / DENTAL,” and looming over those awnings was a banner sign reading, “COLTON’S.” (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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