

Correspondence

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References

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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Not Electric, Not Eclectic, But Eclectic Oil and Dr. Thomas's "Trial by Jury"



One of the stranger annals of pain management involved “Eclectic Oil.” Although advertisements for this nostrum appeared as early as 1858, the name of New York’s Dr. S. N. Thomas (*upper left and right*) was associated with the oil by 1876. Americans’ fascination with electricity and their romance with back-to-nature versions of medical practice resulted in a portmanteau of “electric” + “eclectic,” yielding “eclectic.” Eclectic Oil was an eclectic combination of alcohol, chloroform, camphor, and balsam fir with the tinctures of opium, guaiac, and catechu, as well as the oils of checkerberry, oregano, sassafras, hemlock, and turpentine. Formulated to be taken internally or externally by man or beast, Eclectic Oil was hailed for its “magical pain-killing and healing properties.” According to smaller print in the advertising (*lower left*) on the back of some trade cards, this panacea’s reputation was not “settled by a jury of twelve, but by thousands of intelligent, thinking people....” (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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