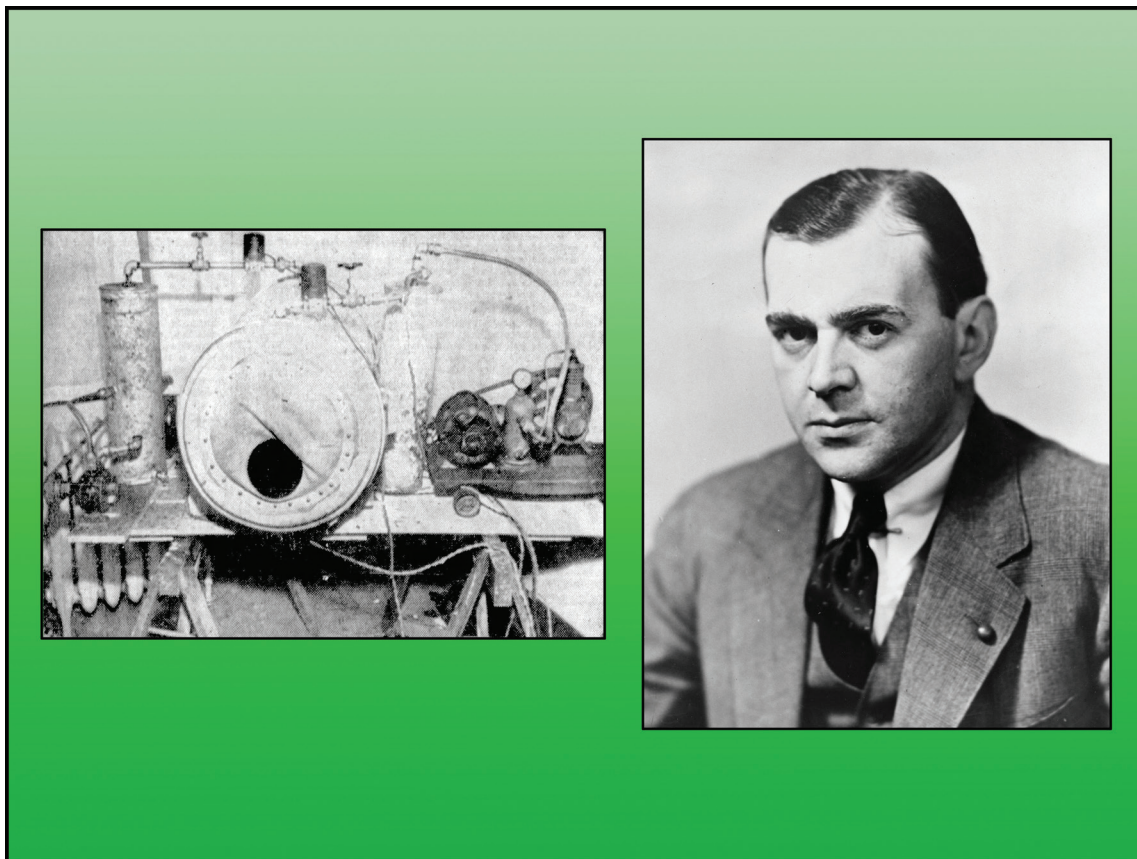


ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Turning Trash Cans into Iron Lungs: Dr. Robert M. Coffey, the “Genius of Juneau”



Portland surgical pioneer Robert Calvin Coffey named his youngest son Robert Mayo Coffey (1906 to 1972, *right*). The latter earned his M.D. at the University of Michigan and returned with his wife to his native Oregon. By 1937 the couple and their two young daughters were living in Juneau, Alaska. When neighboring children were quarantined with infantile paralysis, the resourceful Dr. Coffey began converting trash cans into iron lungs (*left*), just in case any children developed breathing difficulties. Electrical valves on Coffey’s “pressure and reserve tanks” alternated positive and negative pressures for up to 26 respirations per minute. For Coffey’s innovative preparations during Alaska’s poliomyelitis outbreak, this “genius of Juneau” was headlined in newspaper articles nationwide. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

George S. Bause, M.D., M.P.H., Honorary Curator and Laureate of the History of Anesthesia, Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Schaumburg, Illinois, and Clinical Associate Professor, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. UJYC@aol.com.