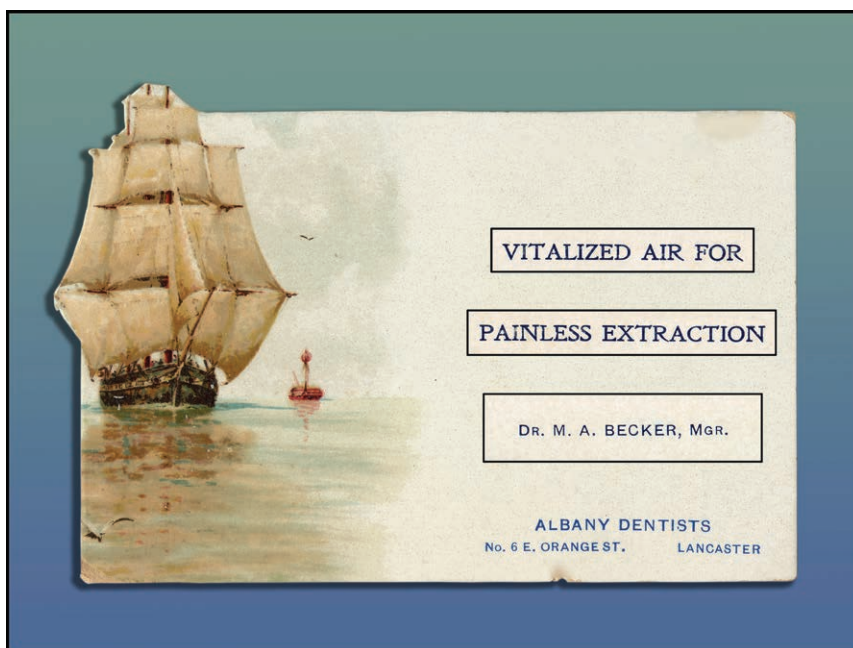


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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Exploding onto Lancaster’s Anesthetic Landscape: Dr. Michael A. Becker’s Vitalized Air



After earning his D.D.S. from Cincinnati’s Ohio College of Dental Surgery, Michael Augustus Becker (1866 to 1938) married in his home state before moving his new wife to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. As manager of the city’s “Albany Dentists” franchise (its trade card obverse with inserts from reverse, *above*), he was in charge of generating “Vitalized Air” for anesthesia and of vulcanizing rubber for dentures. In the latter capacity, Dr. Becker stood next to a pressurized vulcanizer “when it suddenly burst.” Lancaster’s *Morning News* reported that boiling water and steam severely burned Becker’s face, and he was “unable to use his eyes for some time after the accident.” Indeed, Becker was fortunate NOT to have had: (1) the exploding vulcanizer’s shrapnel kill or permanently blind him, (2) an ignition of the Vitalized Air’s supplemental mixture (alcohol-chloroform) burn him, or (3) a chain reaction engulf him with explosions involving the office’s gasometer or compressed gas cylinder(s). Because nitrous oxide supports combustion, Becker, though temporarily blinded, was indeed a lucky man. In future years, he would advertise his anesthetic mixture as “Becker’s Vitalized Air.” (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library–Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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