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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Foregger's Autogenor: Revitalized Air for Athletes and Anesthesia



A century after two chemists—the German-Swedish Scheele and the English Priestley—independently discovered oxygen, future Austrian-American scientist Richard von Foregger (1872 to 1960, *right*) was born. As a young boy who grew breathless while racing through the Vienna woods, Foregger developed an early interest in oxygen. He remained athletic while studying chemistry in Europe, fencing frequently and swimming competitively in the 1900 Olympics. In 1772, Priestley discovered that mouse and flame could survive in an airtight jar when placed inside with a mint sprig exposed to sunlight. Similarly, in 1906, Foregger found that a man and a fluff of rabbits could last in a sealed box for six and fifteen hours, respectively, alongside an oxygen regenerator of his own design. The secret ingredient was fused sodium peroxide, which when exposed to water, could generate both oxygen and sodium hydroxide, a carbon-dioxide absorber. This life-sustaining device quickly evolved into the coffee-pot-like Autogenor (1908, *left*). Anesthesiologist and fellow athlete James Tayloe Gwathmey, once a circus acrobat, helped Foregger document the Autogenor's success first with marathoners and mountain climbers, and then with anesthetized patients. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Schaumburg, Illinois.)

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