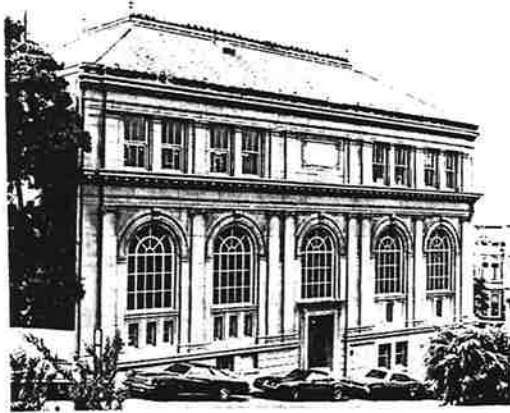


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The First State-wide Anesthesia Meeting in California

By Selma Harrison Calmes, M.D.

The first state-wide meeting of anesthesia practitioners in California took place May 15-16, 1922, at the Sentinel Hotel in Yosemite.¹ The meeting was organized by the newly-formed Section on Anaesthesia of the California State Medical Association. The new West Coast organization, the Pacific Coast Association of Anesthetists (PCAA), was also invited. This article reviews what happened at that first meeting and compares it with our meetings today.

Today, most of us go to state meetings by plane. Travel is usually quick and easy, compared to 1922. Cars had been allowed into Yosemite only nine years before this meeting.² Those who drove from San Francisco, Los Angeles or San Diego to Yosemite had a difficult trip, as the road services we depend on today—such as gas stations, motels and fast food restaurants—were not common yet. Motorists had to pack food for the trip and hope that their cars—so

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unreliable then—did not break down on one of the long stretches of lonely highway in the San Joaquin Valley. It was also possible to get to Yosemite by train in 1922; the Yosemite Railroad began in 1907 and came right into Yosemite Valley.³ Probably most of those attending the meeting came by train, because of the difficulty of car travel then, especially to such an isolated place as Yosemite. Like today, there still was the problem of loss of income while away from a private practice.



Because of difficult access then, not too many people went to Yosemite. Probably most of those attending the meeting had not yet been there, and they were probably distracted from the meeting by the dramatic scenery. (This certainly occurs now, if we're meeting in San Francisco with views of the Bay.) But, 16 papers were given and an executive session, which all could attend, was held.

The first session, the Anesthesiology Section meeting, started on a Monday at 8 p.m., an unusual start time to us. Perhaps attendees were enjoying Yosemite during the day. The meeting was chaired by the section president, Dr. Mary Botsford of San Francisco, the leading physician anesthetist in the state at the time and the first California physician to devote herself solely to anesthesia. Minutes of the meeting were taken by the Secretary, Dr. Eleanor Seymour of Los Angeles, a Botsford trainee who was the second most prominent physician anesthetist (this was what anesthesiologists were called) then.⁴ Six papers were given that night, one by a surgeon and five by physician anesthetists. All the physician anesthetists presenting that night were women trained by Botsford at Children's Hospital of San Francisco (CHSF). Botsford, chief of anesthesia at UCSF, gave the first paper, "Post-Tonsillectomy Pulmonary Abscess" (T&As were done without endotracheal tubes then, and aspiration of blood was common). Next was surgeon Saxton Pope, a prominent San Francisco surgeon, who spoke on the relation between the surgeon and anesthetist. Dr. Caroline Palmer, chief of anesthesia at Lane (later Stanford University) Hospital, spoke on "Organization of a Hospital Anesthesiology Department." Dorothy Wood, also at UCSF, gave the paper, "Analysis of Anesthetics Given in Eighty Consecutive Brain Operations at the University of California Hospital." Lorruli Rethwilm, working at both UCSF and CHSF, spoke on the "Clinical Uses of Oxygen." (Oxygen was not routinely given at the time, even when nitrous oxide was being used. Most anesthesia was ether or chloroform by mask.)

At 2 p.m. the next day, the PCAA meeting began, chaired by Dr. George Wallace of Los Angeles. His President's Address was on "Spasticity from Inflammation in Relation to Anesthesia." Mary Murphy, another Botsford trainee, spoke on "Time as an Element in Anesthesia in Children." A surgeon, Harlan Shoemaker of Los Angeles and then president of the Los Angeles County Medical Association, spoke on "Anesthesia and Its Relation to the Patient, from a Surgeon's Standpoint." Frank McMechan, the Cincinnati, Ohio, anesthesiologist who was busy organizing America's physician anesthetists into regional associations and dealing with nurse anesthesia, gave his talk, "Suggestive Leads in Anesthesia." This session ended with a speaker from the Mayo Clinic, Albert J. School, talking on sacral anesthesia. He presented 400 cases of urologic and gynecologic surgery done under caudal anesthesia.

The executive session followed. Business was to first elect officers. In addition to Dr. Waller as PCAA president, Botsford was elected vice-president, and Seymour was elected secretary. Resolutions were passed congratulating the State Board of Medical Examiners for limiting the administration of anesthetics to legally qualified physicians, urging the Health Department of San Francisco to eliminate nurse anesthesia at the San Francisco City and County Hospital, and urging the American College of Surgeons to eliminate the "nurse technician" and to confine administration of anesthetics exclusively to physicians. The business meeting ended with acceptance of the new society's seal and motto, "It is God-like to relieve pain," suggested by Dr. McMechan.

The final session began at 8 p.m. Two of the five scheduled papers were canceled, probably because of lack of time. Another Botsford-trainee, Louise A. Oldenbourg of Oakland, spoke on "Ethyl Chloride as a General Anesthetic," and Neil Trew of Los Angeles spoke on the "Physiologic Effects of Nitrous Oxide." (Nitrous oxide was becoming more popular because a new McKesson machine for nitrous came out the year before, making it easier to administer. Nitrous oxide then was usually given as 100 percent. If the patient became very blue, oxygen might be added, if available, the so-called "secondary saturation technique." If muscle relaxation was needed, ether would be added.) Two more Botsford trainees, Mary Kavanaugh and Edith Williams, gave a "Symposium on Intratracheal Anesthesia" and demonstrated apparatus.⁵ (Endotracheal intubation was just beginning to be used. Cuffed endotracheal tubes were not available until 1927.)

It is unusual for us today to ask surgeons to speak at our meetings. Surgeons of the time were perpetuating nurse anesthesia, for convenience and financial reasons, and probably also for control reasons. Anesthesiologists needed the

surgeons' support to deal with the nurse anesthesia issues, but never got total commitment; **the factors of convenience and money were too powerful to overcome by reasoning about patient safety.** There is other evidence—the resolutions passed—of the ongoing fight against nurse anesthesia then. None of the meeting's activities accomplished anything significant because there were not yet enough physician anesthetists to do the work.

The meeting's program also shows the great influence of Dr. Mary Botsford in developing California anesthesia to that time. Most of the presenters from the state were trained by her. The papers presented by the groups' members focused on the latest techniques—some of which did not survive (the secondary saturation technique of nitrous oxide, for example). Looking back, their knowledge seems desperately inadequate compared to our knowledge today. No doubt anesthesiologists 75 years from now will see our practices, as shown by our meeting programs, as unusual and unsafe.

¹ Russell CP. *One Hundred Years of Yosemite: The Story of A Great Park and Its Friends.* (Yosemite Association, Yosemite National Park, CA) 1992. pp 96, 226. The Sentinel Hotel was also known as Yosemite Falls Hotel. It was built in 1876 and torn down in 1939. Maps of the time give two locations for the hotel. One undated map c. 1920 shows it just to the west of Yosemite Falls. A 1932 map showed it west of Sentinel Bridge by Happy Isles.

² Russell, Ibid, p 221.

³ Russell, Ibid, pp 109, 62-64.

⁴ For more on Botsford and Seymour, see Calmes SH. Anesthesia in California: The leading figures in the early years. *CSA Bulletin* 1999;48,1:54-63, and Calmes SH. Anesthesiology in California: The early years. *Bull Anes Hist* 1999;17:8-12.

⁵ Seymour, E. Pacific Coast Association of Anesthetists, Joint Session with the Section on Anesthesiology of the California State Medical Society, Yosemite Valley, May 15-16, 1922. Minutes First Scientific Session. *Ca State J of Med*, 1922;20:323-324.