



## The Second Anesthetists' Travel Club Meeting: *Bootleggers, Madison and Ralph Waters!* ☆☆☆

Douglas R. Bacon \*

Department of Anesthesiology, University of Mississippi Medical Center, 2500 North State Street, Jackson, MS 39216



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### ABSTRACT

The second annual meeting of any organization is almost as critical as the first. A second meeting begins to assure the viability and importance of the organization. After the very successful first meeting of the Anesthetists' Travel Club in Rochester, Minnesota, in December of 1929, Ralph Waters (1883–1979) was charged with hosting the 1930 meeting at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The meeting was held Thursday December 18th through Saturday December 20th. Dr. Waters started the meeting at 8:00 AM with a tour of the operating rooms of the Wisconsin General Hospital. Lunch followed at the Memorial Union with the afternoon split between experimental surgery, and the anatomy, and physiology laboratories. There was an early dinner before the group took in the basketball game between the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Wisconsin. Friday's meeting was very similar; starting in the operating rooms at 8:00 AM followed by a Union Club lunch. The afternoon was spent in the Pharmacology laboratory with a 4:00 PM lecture entitled "Demonstration Clinical Effects of Barbiturates in Neuropsychiatry". Dinner was held at the University Club. Saturday's program followed the same lines, but with an afternoon tea and a dinner at the Waters' home. In February 1931, almost a year to the date from his first note, Waters wrote to those who had attended the meeting. He followed up on the clinical cases the group had seen, and commented upon the Guedel-Waters balloons for endotracheal tubes and the spinal he had performed. He even commented upon the use of cyclopropane in obstetrics. Thus, the Anesthetists' Travel Club meeting in 1930 successfully concluded.

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Establishing a new organization is difficult in the best of times. The Anesthetists' Travel Club was started in 1929 in Rochester, Minnesota at the Mayo Clinic. Inviting the leading physician anesthetists of the United States and Canada, John S. Lundy (1894–1973) hosted the meeting December 15–19, 1929. The group toured the Mayo Clinic operating rooms and the experimental laboratories, and they were invited to the Mayo Clinic Wednesday night staff meeting where the evening's discussions were recorded.<sup>1</sup> The group was kept purposely small at 12 guests and 3 hosts, for its function was interactive learning. The value of the meeting was in seeing the described techniques and to question the methods with the experts first hand. In the end, the traveler was expected to go back home and spread these innovative approaches to his colleagues.<sup>2</sup> Both those who traveled and the host felt the meeting

was a success. However, one meeting does not create an organization, and, in many ways, the second meeting of a new professional "society" is of equal or greater importance in insuring the viability of the organization.

In December of 1930, as the United States and the world was descending into the depths of the Great Depression a small group of anesthesiologists from across the United States and Canada descended upon Madison, Wisconsin, for a second "annual" meeting. Given the financial pressures each physician was under, why come to Madison? What was it they hoped to see that would justify the travel expense? In addition, how did an anesthesiologist get an invitation? In putting together the meeting, what did Ralph M. Waters (1883–1979) hope to accomplish? As the head of the Division of Anesthesiology in the Department of Surgery at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, his program was one of the few based in an academic medical center. Thus, the resources of the Departments of Physiology, Pharmacology and Anatomy could be used by the group so long as it did not interfere with the students' education. So, what should be demonstrated and by whom?

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\* Tel.: +1 601 984 5910; fax: +1 601 984 5939.

E-mail address: [dbacon@umc.edu](mailto:dbacon@umc.edu).

## The Early Organization

During the Anesthetist Travel Club Meeting in Rochester, on the final afternoon and evening of the meeting, John Lundy led a discussion concerning future conferences. Ralph Waters was willing to hold the meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, and to demonstrate the work he and his colleagues were doing at the university.

In regard to future parties, you may be right that the one held next year in Canada would be a better scheme than coming here to Madison. I of course got the impression from what was said Thursday afternoon that you would all visit me next fall. Perhaps it would be a good idea for you to give me a list of the men and their addresses and for me to write them asking each one to express his preference for the location of a get together next December. That would avoid any possibility of displeasing any one in any way. If you have a better suggestion don't be bashful with it.<sup>3</sup>

Alternatively, a Canadian group, from Toronto and Montreal was also enthusiastic about hosting the meeting in both cities. In Rochester, the discussion seemed to conclude that Waters would organize the meeting. However, in late December 1929, Waters wrote to Lundy expressing some concern that he had pushed the group and that he was willing to step aside if the Canadian group wished to proceed. Lundy wrote back in early January of 1930.

I feel that there would be no difficulty in having a meeting in Toronto or Montreal next year. Those boys are anxious to put it on and I believe they should be encouraged to do so. In speaking about the meeting in Canada I was merely voicing the opinion of the Toronto men and they convinced me that it suit them better than to come west next year. I believe they are right and I am enclosing for your convenience a list containing the names and addresses of the men who were here.<sup>4</sup>

A month later Waters would have to confess that he had misplaced Lundy's list, and had to request another copy!<sup>5</sup>

On February 8th, Waters sent out a letter to those who attended the meeting in Rochester, Minnesota the year before. It was very friendly, pitched toward not offending anyone, and it relayed his concerns that the decision to hold the meeting in Madison may have been hastily made. Water was therefore asking an opinion as to where the meeting should be held. However, his concluding paragraph best sums his feelings.

Personally I feel that we all derived enough benefit from getting together in Rochester to make it seem worthwhile to have a similar party yearly, and as I have intimated above, it will be a personal disappointment to me not to have you this coming year, although I will look forward to having you at a later date, if your decision is that we meet elsewhere in 1930.<sup>6</sup>

The responses to Waters' letter have not survived, but it was decided to hold the meeting in Madison. Over the summer, Lundy and Waters must have discussed the meeting, but did not necessarily correspond about it.

## Whom to Invite?

If the Anesthetists' Travel Club was going to thrive, new members for the group were critical. In October of 1930, Waters continues a discussion with Lundy of whom to invite. Two Syracuse, New York anesthesiologists, John J. Buettner (1874-1967) and Charles Wells (1881-1967) were considered. But Waters has reservations, stating, "I wonder whether he (Wells) would be agreeable to the gang in

December, if he were invited. I can readily conceive of his not fitting in, and I should like to have your opinion."<sup>7</sup> Lundy was lukewarm and asked Waters to seek the opinions of others at the Ninth Annual Congress of Anesthetists in Philadelphia<sup>8</sup> that year, but further stated the he was looking forward to the December meeting with "greatest pleasure".<sup>9</sup>

It became clear in early November that the meeting would not be a success unless new members were invited as many of the members who attended the previous year could not be present in Madison. Waters was faced with a dilemma: either postpone the December meeting or increase the invitation list. He firmly believed that each host should invite a group of colleagues that he know will enhance the group. This was necessary to keep the membership from becoming inbred or snobbish. Waters was careful to consider younger physician anesthetists in the invitation list as through their contributions these men represented the future of the specialty. Interestingly, Waters also mentioned the economic burden such a meeting could hold for a junior physician.<sup>10</sup>

Waters listed a number of physician anesthetists that he would recommend and wanted Lundy to consider. It is clear that Waters sought Lundy's approval for the invitees, and as the club was Lundy's creation, Waters clearly did not want to change the composition dramatically without Lundy's approval. The suggestions were:

|                                |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| David C. Aikenhead (1891-1973) | Winnipeg, Manitoba       |
| Albert Miller (1872-1959)      | Providence, Rhode Island |
| Gaston Labat (1876-1934)       | New York, NY             |
| Adolph Erdman (1867-1953)      | New York, NY             |
| Thomas Buchanan (1876-1940)    | New York, NY             |
| Edward Beach (1879-1944)       | Philadelphia, PA         |
| Thomas Collier (1875-1952)     | Atlanta, GA              |
| David Elliott (1902-1991)      | Louisville, KY           |
| William H. Long (1882-1967)    | Louisville, KY           |
| Charles Wells (1881-1967)      | Syracuse, NY             |
| John J. Buettner (1874-1967)   | Syracuse, NY             |

## Making the Final Meeting Arrangements

In a November 17, 1930, letter, Waters discussed possible dates for the meeting. He felt that the last 3 days of the week before Christmas, December 18th, 19th and 20th, would be ideal. The students would be leaving the University of Wisconsin on the 18th or 19th and thus the laboratories and operating rooms would be less crowded and the group would be able to interact more with the faculty and have a better view of the clinical demonstrations. On December 3, 1930, Waters sent letters of invitation to 34 physician anesthetists: John Blezard (1888-1971), W. Eason Brown (1891-1957), Ansel Caine (1882-1961), Arthur Guedel (1882-1956), Robert Hammond (1883-1956), Charles Robson (1884-1969), Henry Ruth (1899-1956), Harry Shields (1887-1974), Lincoln Sise (1874-1942), Charles Stewart (1887-1958), Brian Sword (1889-1956), John Lundy, Thomas Collier, Everett Tyler, Royal Adams, Wesley Bourne (1895-1978), Adolph Erdman, Thomas Buchanan, Gaston Labat, Charles Wells, William Hamilton Long, E. Leslie Burwell (1889-1956), Edward Beach, Albert Miller, John Buettner, David Elliott, Philip Woodbridge (1895-1978), Charles McCuskey (1893-1980), Ralph Tovell (1901-1967), David Aikenhead, Wilmer Baker (1891-1973), Harold Griffith (1894-1985), Frederick Clement (1892-1979), and Charles LaRocque (1887-1936).

A week before the meeting, Lincoln Sise felt that he could not leave Boston and the Lahey Clinic. He sent Philip D. Woodbridge instead. Sise felt that he would learn the new material through Woodbridge's report. However, in Sise's letter there is a friendly admonition to be "...careful now and don't have too good a time at that last dinner."<sup>11</sup>

The day prior to the meeting, Waters wrote to Lundy that he would not meet Lundy's 4:00 AM train but had arranged for a room for him at

the Memorial Union with breakfast to start at 7:15 AM and the program at 8:00 AM. Yet the opening line of the letter, “Bootlegger not essential, but a probable convenience”,<sup>12</sup> is interesting. At the height of Prohibition, alcohol was considered essential enough to consider illegal means to obtain it!<sup>13</sup> Most likely the libations served at the opening dinner and at Waters’ home on the final evening, and on both occasions the bootlegger’s services were needed.

## The Program

The meeting began at 8:00 AM on the sixth floor and in the operating rooms of the Wisconsin General Hospital. In attendance were Drs. Eason Brown, Arthur Guedel, Charles Robson, Henry Ruth, John Lundy, Thomas Buchanan, John Buettner, Philip Woodbridge, Charles McCuskey, Wilmer Baker, Harold Griffith, Robert Hammond and Harry Shields. The represented Toronto, Ontario, (Brown, Robson, and Shields), Montreal (Griffith), Beverly Hills (Guedel), Philadelphia (Ruth), New York City (Buchanan), White Plains, New York (Hammond), Syracuse, New York (Buettner), New Orleans (Baker), Boston (Woodbridge) and the Mayo Clinic (Lundy and McCuskey).<sup>14</sup> New to the group were Baker, Buchanan, Buettner, Griffith and Woodbridge. Wilmer Baker was substituting for his partner Ansel Caine (1882–1961) who had attended the first meeting. The morning of the first day of the meeting John Blezard wrote to Waters from Edmonton that he could, “...only express how sorry I am not to be with you today” and his hope to be in attendance at future meetings.<sup>15</sup>

The first session was entitled “demonstrations of drugs and methods in clinical anesthesia” and the group saw oxygen and carbon dioxide in use in Waters usual methods including the “To and Fro” canister. Interestingly, the program lists a second topic of the absorption of carbon dioxide by the use of soda lime. The absorption of carbon dioxide was of great interest as inhalation agents like cyclopropane were expensive. These agents were economically viable only if the anesthetic breathing circuit were closed. Yet, a closed circuit led to a buildup of carbon dioxide, which in turn could cause severe acidosis in the patient. Clinical sessions lasted all morning, which was followed by lunch at 11:30 AM the Memorial Union.<sup>16</sup>

At 1:45 PM, the group reconvened on the sixth floor of the Science Hall in the Anatomy Laboratory. Two demonstrations were completed, one entitled “changes in lung volume due to position” and another entitled “anatomy of the sympathetic nervous system”. At 3:00 PM, fifteen minutes was spent in experimental surgery on the sixth floor of the medical building. Descending four flights, the afternoon scientific sessions concluded in the physiology laboratory of Dr. Walter J. Meek (1878–1963) were four demonstrations transpired. The first was labeled “intestinal obstruction”, the second, “cardiac output determination by means of x-ray”, the third, “sensory nerve impulses” and the fourth “coronary circulation effect on electrocardiograph”. The sessions concluded by 5:00 PM, where after the group went to an early dinner after which they proceed to the field house to catch the University of Wisconsin basketball team take on the University of Pennsylvania at 8:00 PM.<sup>17</sup>

Friday began in a similar way with clinical demonstrations in the operating rooms of Wisconsin General Hospital at 8:00 AM. The morning’s topic was “endotracheal” anesthesia and the group most likely would have seen the Guedel-Waters tube with its inflatable cuff in action, which was another leading technologic piece of equipment in anesthesia. Lunch was once again in Memorial Union at 11:30 AM. The afternoon was spent on the fifth floor of the medical building in the Pharmacology Laboratory under Dr. Arthur Tatum’s (1884–1955) careful supervision. The topics were “artificial respiration”, “intraocular pressure with Tribromethanol”, the “effect of barbiturates on cardiac output” using an isolated heart, a comparison of “oral and intravenous doses and length of effects of barbiturates”, and “picrotoxin”. At 4:00 PM

there was a “demonstration [of] clinical effects of barbiturates in neuropsychiatry”. Dinner at 7:00 PM was held in the University Club.

The final day of the meeting began as had all the others with the group gathering at 8:00 AM in the operating rooms. The days demonstrations were “drugs and methods in clinical anesthesia” and tribromoethanol in combination with various drugs and techniques”. While the location of this day’s luncheon was not specified, the program was unique. Each participant was allowed to “date your man”. Each traveler was encouraged to “date” a faculty member “in order to discuss or ask questions about the work” he had just seen. The afternoon was far more social. A tea was arranged with the Professor and Chair of the Agricultural Bacteriology Department Edwin George Hastings (1872–1953) and his wife Elvira Jane (1875–1951). Mrs. Hastings was Dr. Waters’ older sister. At 5:30 PM, Dr. Waters and his immediate family hosted dinner at their home.

## Post Meeting Analysis

Ten days after the meeting, on December 27, 1930, Harold Griffith wrote to Ralph Waters expressing his gratitude for the meeting. With an eye toward next year’s meeting, Griffith was appreciative of the depth and breadth of the meeting. He was working on a list of what was seen, he wrote Waters, to convey to the other physician anesthetists in Montreal and especially Wesley Bourne, Charlie Stewart, and Charlie LaRocque, who would be hosting the meeting with Griffith in 1931. In so doing, Griffith was fulfilling John Lundy’s original vision of the meeting—each attendee would go back to his hometown and introduce the new techniques he had seen. He wrote:

...no one else in America could have put on just such a comprehensive show as you did. You and your associates gave me many new ideas along various lines, and I am now just thinking things over and intend to try out a good many new things in our work. ...I am writing out a fairly comprehensive description of all the you showed us...what a difficult task we have undertaken to give you anything to compare with it when you visit Montreal next year.<sup>18</sup>

On February 9, Waters wrote to the physicians who attended the meeting with a summary of the meeting. It was a form letter, a style that Waters admitted he disliked. He informed the group that his colleagues at the university were most impressed with the caliber of the attendees.<sup>19</sup> This comment is critical, especially at a time when physician anesthetists were rare and the administration of anesthetics was often left to non-physicians.

In his third paragraph, Waters reported on the cases that the group saw in the operating rooms. He pointed out the endotracheal tubes did not harm the patient any more than more conventional methods that did not include tracheal intubation. He noted that one patient had “laryngeal irritations” that were relieved by steam inhalations for a short period. He also apologized for the lack of a new rubber tube that was far superior to anything seen in the United States, even better than John Lundy’s! It was being shipped from London, and Waters had hoped to demonstrate nasal intubation with, as he described, “...a funny crooked forceps for heading these tubes in the pharynx when they are being inserted by direct vision laryngoscopy”. He further stated that a satisfactory seal could be obtained by shortening the balloons used on the Guedel-Waters tubes and attaching them to this new nasal tube. If the cuffs could not be attached, packing the pharynx with Vaseline gauze worked just as well.<sup>18</sup>

Obstetrical cases were also a cause for concern and follow up. In one case, Waters had administered a spinal “hurriedly” for a caesarian section and the patient had symptoms of nerve injury at the time. Post operatively the patient developed “...an acute neuritis, involving the

left leg, with a slight tendency to foot drop..."<sup>18</sup> but made a full recovery. He also commented on the cyclopropane cases the group saw. He noted no unusual postoperative complications, and he reported that the obstetrician noted decreased bleeding from the uterus and "surprisingly good contraction" for general anesthesia.<sup>18</sup>

The letter closes with Waters thanking the group for coming and telling them that he derived great pleasure from their trip to Madison. He very much was looking forward to the Canadian Meeting in Toronto and Montreal later in the year. Finally, Waters wished everyone a happy and prosperous 1931.<sup>18</sup>

Waters also sent personal letters to those who did not attend. He wrote to Lincoln Sise about the meeting and opened the letter with how much he had missed having Sise at the meeting. He further went on to state that he hoped he hadn't ruined Sise's partner, Philip Woodbridge and "...that news of his terrible carryings on may not have come back to Boston...".<sup>20</sup> Waters went on that he did his level best to keep Woodbridge sober, but without great success. Apparently Woodbridge drove a Rolls Royce and was mistaken for a chauffeur on the streets of Madison.<sup>19</sup> Either the bootlegger had done his job too well or Waters is relating an inside joke between two old friends!

Sise replied 4 days later. He told Waters how much he wished he could have come to Madison. His partner, Woodbridge had given him a full report, but it "...is not like being there and getting the details first hand".<sup>21</sup> Sise was also both surprised and pained to learn about Woodbridge's behavior. He noted that he had also seen the car and stood at attention saluting when Woodbridge passed by, much to the latter's annoyance!

## Conclusions

The success of the second meeting of the Anesthetist Travels' Club is clear from the correspondence of those who attended. Seeing firsthand the latest techniques that undoubtedly Waters had discussed in other national meetings added a unique dimension to their understanding and eventually practice of anesthesia. Travel to Wisconsin in early winter was not easy, and, during the Great Depression, it would have been a financial hardship. Thus, the value placed on being in Madison cannot be overlooked. Neither can the fact that two of the original members of the group sent partners to this meeting. Lincoln Sise sent his junior partner Philip Woodbridge and Ansel Caine sent his colleague Wilmer Baker.

The value placed on the camaraderie of the social events of this meeting needs to be acknowledged. Dinners were a time when the events of the day could be discussed, perhaps lubricated by the services of the bootlegger. Even more important was Waters' opening of his home to host the final reception. Being in the home of the host sent a clear signal about how Waters felt about these men and the importance of their social interaction on a deeply personal level.

The Anesthetists' Travel Club would, over the next decade, help found the American Board of Anesthesiology and create the official and recognized definition of a specialist in anesthesiology. During the 1930s, the group would provide the senior leadership of the American Society of Anesthesiologists that worked alongside the American

Medical Association and the American Board of Surgery in this endeavor.<sup>22</sup> The journal *Anesthesiology* would be edited by Travel Club members through the first decades of its existence. In many ways, the current infrastructure of the specialty can be traced back to ideals set forth by the Travel Club. Thus, the second meeting of the group in Madison, the meeting that established the chronicity of meetings and the value of coming together, cannot be under rated. Waters willingness to host the meeting, and the members of the faculty of the University of Wisconsin that provided the scientific content, helped create the modern specialty of anesthesiology.

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