

The Ether Monument: A Story of Beauty and Controversy

Rafael Ortega. Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, USA, 2009, \$27.50 US,
DVD film, 22 minutes running time

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Based on Dr. Ortega's book, *Written in Granite: an Illustrated History of the Ether Monument*, this concise yet captivating documentary in DVD format pays tribute to Boston's beautiful *Ether Monument* and to the remarkable story that it represents. The eloquently narrated story of the Monument, which was constructed in 1867 in the north-west corner of the tranquil Boston Public Garden, is illustrated by a magnificent collection of paintings and photographs. The film, directed by Dr. Rafael Ortega, captures the beauty and balances the controversy associated with the history of anesthesia and this important Monument. The film is a recent addition to the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology located at the American Society of Anesthesiologists headquarters in Park Ridge, Illinois.

The film begins with a description of the important events in the history of anesthesia, highlighting Dr. William Morton's public demonstration of ether anesthesia in Boston in 1846. Paintings, photographs, and artwork are presented that depict the impact of the discovery of anesthesia on surgery, medicine, and the relief of human suffering. The narrator describes the importance of Dr. Morton's demonstration in creating the field of Anesthesiology and places it into context by describing the historical use of certain plants and other substances with analgesic properties that were used throughout time.

Despite the incredible success and excitement that was associated with Dr. Morton's ether demonstration, a great

deal of controversy also ensued. Three other individuals were credited with the discovery of surgical inhalation anesthesia: Jackson, Wells, and Long. Intense disputes erupted, and the newspaper and media coverage of the resulting debate, *The Ether Controversy*, are presented in the film. Monuments representing all four individuals have since been erected.

As tangible evidence of this extraordinary event, renowned architect, Henry Van Brunt, built *The Ether Monument*, which was crowned with a sculpture by J.Q.A. Ward representing gratitude for the relief bestowed by anesthesia on human suffering. The film describes the details of the building and restoration of the Monument and includes an interview with a descendant of Thomas Lee, the benefactor of the Monument.

This film is important for physicians, students, and historians alike. It is a great reminder of the fascinating and complex history of the field of Anesthesiology, and it demonstrates the importance of preserving the visible symbols that represent the use of anesthesia in our past. The documentary is well filmed and wonderfully narrated and conveys relevant and interesting information. The documentary was a pleasure to view. Hopefully, the choice of film as a medium for presenting this information will promote the sharing of ideas and inspire discussion about this important event in the history of both Anesthesiology and Medicine.

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