An Account of the History of the Journal Anesthesiology

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The year 1939 was one of ferment in the American Society of Anesthetists, Inc. Frank McMechan, a stalwart in the International Anesthesia Research Society, had recently died and serious consideration was being given by many people to amalgamation of the two societies. In a letter dated July 20, 1939, from John Lundy to Laurette McMechan, a woman devoted to her husband, to the society which they founded (I.A.R.S.), and to the journal of that society (Current Researches in Anesthesia and Analgesia), it was evident that Mrs. McMechan was debating in her mind the future of societies and journals in the field of anesthesia. The introduction of another journal in the field had been debated by others prior to the crisis precipitated by Frank McMechan's death. The publisher, Charles C. Thomas, had heard that there was talk about another journal and in a letter dated two years earlier (December 29, 1937) and sent to both Paul Wood and John Lundy, he proposed that he publish the new journal. In a letter of reply from Paul Wood dated January 4, 1938, the idea of a new journal seemed to be limited to a few enthusiastic people such as Paul Wood, John Lundy, and Ralph Waters, and the administration of the American Society of Anesthetists was reported as being rather reluctant. In this letter as well as in other documents in succeeding years, it was evident that the existing journal and its editor posed a serious deterrent. The correspondence between Charles C. Thomas and John Lundy, in particular, was active and of interest until the contract for printing the new journal was arranged in 1940 with Lancaster Press, Inc. (On March 5, 1938, publisher Thomas presented the basic items for a contract for publishing the new journal. The arrangements proposed by Thomas in 1938 are quite similar in philosophy and function as the contract finally implemented in January 1960.) Ultimately the decision was to keep the identity of the two societies and to start a new journal of the American Society of Anesthesiologists. This decision was based in part, at least, by a strong conviction held by the McMechans that there was no place in organized anesthesia for nurse anesthetists and they wanted no part of any organization that either tolerated or endorsed (as did the A.M.A.) nurse anesthetists. In addition, the McMechan organization was an international group and many in the American Society of Anesthetists believed that a national organization and a national journal were needed. There was reconsideration of this decision in later years but no change especially in relation to the two journals devoted to anesthesia.

On July 21, 1939, a meeting of the Board of Directors of the American Society of Anesthetists, Inc., was held in New York at which the principal items of business were the matters of amalgamation of the two societies and appropriate action regarding the journal of the I.A.R.S. and a publication of the American Society of Anesthetists, Inc. At this session, a letter from Philip Woodbridge dated June 30, 1939, was introduced. This letter stated among other things: "(1) That the American Society of Anesthetists approach the International Anesthesia Research Society and the Associated Anesthetists of the United States and Canada for the purpose of joining these groups into one. (2) That the American Society of Anesthetists publish a journal of anesthesia without further delay. Depending upon the results of negotiations suggested in the preceding paragraph, this might or might not take the place of, or be a continuation of Current Researches in Anesthesia and Analgesia. Dr. Cullen is Professor of Anesthesia, University of California School of Medicine, San Francisco.
If the latter, this would offer a suitable opportunity to change the name and editorial policy of that journal."

From the records available, this constitutes the official introduction of the idea of a journal of the American Society of Anesthetists, Inc. although, as has been mentioned, the idea of a journal had been introduced to the society as early as 1937. There is very little evidence to indicate that Philip Woodbridge had been active in the promotion of a new journal; his letter provided the spark that fired the group into concerted action. Some of the comments in the meeting of the Board of Directors are of interest. Paul Wood, then Secretary of the A.S.A., expressed the belief that there was evidence of "sufficient demand to warrant the publication of another journal of anesthesia." Others including Harold Kelley and Robert Hammond believed that one society and one journal satisfied the demand. It was brought out also that the A.M.A. had some interest in publishing a journal in anesthesia and that there would be merit in having the A.M.A. assume the responsibility. Correspondence in 1938 indicated that it was quite likely that Morris Fishbein would be pleased not to have the responsibility of initiating a new journal. The end result of the debate was the appointment by Brian Sword, President of the A.S.A., of a committee called either the Special Affiliation Committee or the Reorganization Committee. This committee had Henry Ruth as chairman, with Paul Wood, Ralph Tovell, Cline Chipman, F. Elmore Hubbard, Ralph Waters, John Lundy and Harry Shields as members. According to a letter of notification to Ralph Tovell from Paul Wood dated August 1, 1939, this committee was charged with "(1) an attempt to arrange for an amalgama-
tion or combination of the American Society of Anesthetists with other existing anesthesia organizations, (2) to arrange for journal publication either by cooperation with the present journal or by establishment of a new journal, and (3) finally to investigate and report to the Board of Directors upon the possibility of securing the services of Mrs. McMehan for the journal and organization, if combination efforts can be effected.” These objectives were reiterated in a letter sent by Henry Ruth to members of the committee on August 10, 1939. It appears from this letter that the committee was to report to the A.S.A. at its meeting on October 12, 1939.

The A.S.A. passed the following resolution at its meeting on October 12, 1939, at the New York World’s Fair. The committee submitted the following report:

Dr. Wood: Mr. President: The Journal Committee finds:
1. That a strong publication in Anesthesiology is required by Society anesthetists, librarians, medical schools and hospitals.
2. That such a journal can be made self supporting by large subscriptions or by advertising, with smaller circulation.
3. That it is thought a journal with advertising could be made available to members of the publishing organization at no additional cost over their membership dues, possibly even in the first year of publication.
4. That such a journal, with advertising and non-member subscription increases can be a source of legitimate income to the publishing organization.
5. That with the possibility a section on Anesthesia in the American Medical Association is obtainable, and if the Society has a good journal which it desires the American Medical Association to publish, it might be arranged.

Therefore:

The Committee on Publications recommends that it be empowered to proceed with the establishment of a journal on the following plan as modified by its Editorial Board:

Name: "Anesthesiology," or "American Journal of Anesthesiology."

Edited for the American Society of Anesthetists, Inc., by a Board consisting of the Editor in Chief, Associated Editors, Foreign Editors (e.g., from England, Canada, Australia, South America), Consulting Editors (on subjects such as Surgery, Gas Therapy, Physics, Pharmacology, Engineering, Chemistry, Physiology, Dentistry), Managing Editors, and a suitable number of representative anesthetists selected by the Journal Committee.

The Editors to hold office for a period of two years, during the experimental period.

The publication to be issued with advertising.

The Editorial Policy to be established by a Committee on Policy, including the Editor in Chief, the Associate Editors, the Managing Editor and four members chosen by the Journal Committee.

COMMITTEE ON POLICY:

Editor in Chief—Dr. Ruth
Associate Editors (2) Drs. Towell and Rovenstine
Managing Editor—Dr. Wood
Drs. Waters, Lundy, Clement and Woodbridge

It is interesting that although the report of the journal committee which offered the resolution included the names of the Editor in Chief, the Associate Editors, the Managing Editor and other members of the Committee on Policy, these names were "not to be published" and were not officially proposed until the meeting on November 4 mentioned in the succeeding paragraph.

On the evening of November 4, 1939, a meeting of the Journal Committee and Publishing Committee of the A.S.A. was held and attended by Robert B. Hammond, E. A. Rovenstine, Henry Ruth, Brian Sword, Ivan Taylor, Ralph Towell and Paul Wood. The minutes of this meeting, as kept by Paul Wood, reveal that the membership of the A.S.A. was polled in regard to establishment of a new journal and of the 498 replying, only 79 wanted a journal sponsored by the A.S.A. It appeared also that intervening discussions with the I.A.R.S. established that the society intended to continue its separate existence and maintain its own journal. As an aside to the matter of establishing a new journal, it is interesting to note the discussion in the minutes about the manner of handling the subscription cost for the journal. Serious discussion was held about whether or not the dues for the A.S.A. should be increased one or two dollars per annum to bring the total dues to $11 or $12. Apparently 10 members out of 500 dropped out when the dues were previously raised from $5 to $10. The minutes also reveal that of several publishers contacted, at least one offered to publish a new journal at no cost to the society provided he could keep the
income from advertising. The minutes include official election of the editors and the policy committee, the same group listed unofficially in the report made to the A.S.A. on October 12.

A letter dated November 6, 1939, from Henry Ruth to Ralph Tovell, E. A. Rovenstine and Paul Wood outlines the results of the November 4 meeting. This letter listed the Editorial Committee “for the new journal on anesthesiology to be published by the A.S.A., Inc., as tentatively decided last night.” The letter also listed Henry Ruth as Editor in Chief and Ralph Tovell and E. A. Rovenstine as Associate Editors. Paul Wood was to function as Managing Editor. In addition, the letter listed an Editorial Board of fifteen people, four Contributing Editors, and nine Consulting Editors. The letter also listed an Editorial Policy Committee with John Lundy, Ralph M. Waters, Fred Clement and Philip Woodbridge as members. The letter states “these names will not be published with the journal, but will act as the steering committee for the society to determine the editorial policy of the magazine with the major editorial board of four.” The confusion associated with “editorial committee” and “editorial board” apparently started with the inception of the journal. The semantic confusion is significant because it developed an assumption that the journal functioned independently of the A.S.A. (an assumption and a way of practice that persisted for twenty years). The letter further requests that thought be given to such things as the size of the journal, the contents, the amount of advertising, etc. Consideration
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was to be given to separating the journal into sections dealing with research articles, clinical articles, review articles and abstracts. Obviously, early there was concern about the nature of articles to be published, a concern about the balance between “dog type” articles and “clinical” articles that persists to the present day. When the decision was made to use Lancaster Press is not known. There is no known official document (even in the files of the Lancaster Press) detailing the arrangements between the editorial board and the Lancaster Press. There is no document that indicates official notification of the selection of Lancaster Press as the printer. The excellent cooperation by this organization has, however, existed from Volume 1, Number 1, to the present and is evidence of a good choice by Henry Ruth who undertook the negotiations and made the decision.

In such a manner was the Journal, ANESTHESIOLOGY, started. We shall now look into the various factors that influenced the development of the journal.

Volume 1, Number 1, issue of ANESTHESIOLOGY appeared in July 1940, only nine months after the decision was made to start the new journal. The lead article was “The Place of the Anesthetist in American Medicine” by Howard W. Haggard, Director of the Laboratory of Applied Physiology at Yale University. The editorial for this issue was by E. A. Roventine. A letter dated April 30, 1940, accompanying the submission of the editorial contained the comment by the author that the editorial was “lousy.” The first issue had a number of articles on cyclopropane; one wonders if Volume 1, Number 1, of a journal these days would not include a high proportion of articles on halothane. A letter from Paul

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Wood to Morris Fishbein, then Editor of the J.A.M.A., mentions a problem in advertising policy in the first issue. For some curious reason, the source and validity of which were not investigated, cyclopropane could not be mentioned in advertisements in the J.A.M.A. Paul Wood was anxious to learn if this were true and if so what ethical problems would the fledgling journal encounter if it included advertisements for gas machines that made provision for cyclopropane administration. There is no documentation, but presumably the conflict was resolved without prejudice to a field in which such advertising seemed appropriate. Volume 1 had 368 pages but was a half-year volume. Volume 2 had 768 pages and Volume 23 had 894 pages. Of the November 1940 issue, 1,022 copies were mailed. Of the November 1963 issue, 12,603 copies were mailed to subscribers. Subscription rates per annum including postage was $6 for the first volume.

The first issue contained along with the main body of articles a section on Book Reviews and a section on Abstracts. This latter section was prompted in part by the publication, Anesthesia Abstracts, issued by John Lundy in 1927 in an effort to expand the literature available to anesthetists. Many of the abstracts were from that source or, at least, prepared by Florence McQuillan. This section later became Briefs from the Literature. The issue did not contain Current Comment. Apparently this latter section was proposed by John Lundy if a letter from Ralph Tovell to Henry Ruth on August 29, 1941, is interpreted correctly. In any event, the section on Current Comment appeared in a later issue of 1941 and presumably responsibility for the collection of some of the material was that of Fred Haugen.

In a circular letter sent out by Ralph Waters to former residents, he urged that they submit
material not only to the main body of Anesthesiology but also to the newly established section of Current Comment. He urged, also, that they consider themselves responsible for submitting good material and suggested that they not be too critical of the Editors for being fussy about the quality of manuscripts submitted. Case reports were added to Current Comment in 1942. Technical suggestions, forerunner of the Gadget portion of Current Comment, were initiated.

The journal did very well financially from the outset as disclosed by a Financial Report prepared by Paul Wood and circulated in August 1941.

The management of the editorial review of manuscripts was at this stage of development of the journal (1942) largely a personal interrelationship between Editor in Chief, Ruth, and the two Associate Editors, Tovell and Rovenstine. Final decision on the suitability of manuscripts was left to the Editor, as it is today. Whatever system there was was flexible and workable primarily because the demand was not as great as today and there was not the urgency for as early publication as
possible. Each editor saw the comment of other editors at the time he made his own review.

There is an hiatus from 1942–1946 in the material available for review. The hiatus in material is due to the fact that Ralph Tovell was the major source for this account. In 1946 Ralph Tovell had returned to duty as an Associate Editor after four years in the Army even though he functioned to some extent in that capacity throughout his tour of duty with the Army. Stuart C. Cullen acted as an Associate Editor in the military absence of Ralph Tovell beginning in 1944. In 1946, the masthead no longer carried the temporary qualification and he became a full fledged Associate Editor. Very shortly, Roland Whitacre became an Associate Editor. Correspondence between Henry Ruth and Ralph Tovell indicated that at this stage there was beginning dissatisfaction with maintaining the huge coterie of people on the mast head on such appointments as members of the Editorial Committee, Contributing Editors, Foreign Editors, etc.
In 1947, some effort was being made to improve the Abstract Section in that a trial was made of assigning journals for abstracting to various departments of anesthesia throughout the country. This proved to be an unsatisfactory answer to the problem of providing current and useful abstracts. This year also marked the point at which there was appreciable dissociation of the journal from the society in that approval was given by the Board of Directors of the A.S.A. to establish a separate checking account for the journal from which money could be drawn for journal business by signature of two members of the Editorial Board. At this time, Fred Haugen was serving as Business Editor. Actually there was a succession of men functioning in the business end of the journal operations when Paul Wood resigned. William G. Schmidt held the position from July 1943 through 1946. Dwight Grove took over from Fred Haugen and held the position from July 1948 through June
1949. Miss Dorothea Taefner (now Mrs. Wall) began her long service to the journal in 1947 and assumed responsibility for the business operations when Dwight Grove resigned in 1949. The separation of journal and A.S.A. was enhanced in 1948 and 1949 as evidenced by a letter from John Hunt, Executive Secretary of the A.S.A., dated October 12, 1949, in which he stated, in essence, that all funds of the journal should be kept separate from A.S.A. funds and under the control of the Editor in Chief and that the Treasurer of the A.S.A. shall not be responsible for them. This is interesting in view of contrary interpretations of the relationship of the journal and the A.S.A. some ten years later.

By 1948, as reported in minutes of an Editorial Board meeting, the circulation of the journal was 4,674 of which 2,479 were members of A.S.A. It appears that by this time, more than 79 members of A.S.A. were interested in a new journal. The minutes also contain a motion that "the journal should become a monthly at the discretion of the Editor." The "discretion of the editor" qualification must have come about as a result of failure to implement a motion at the February 16, 1947, meeting of the Editorial Board which stated that the journal should become a monthly journal with the October 1947 issue. Minutes of meetings in the succeeding 15 years continue to show evidence of consideration of a monthly publication. In 1949, the business and editorial affairs of the journal were located at 121 North Broad Street, Philadelphia. Prior to then, some of the business affairs were managed from the central office of the A.S.A. and Henry Ruth conducted editorial and business affairs from his home. The use of space in his home was indicative of the selflessness with which Henry Ruth pursued his early efforts as Editor. The constantly expanding files were an increasing source of irritation to his wife, Wodie. Some of the business affairs were also conducted, prior to consolidation, at Mrs. Wall's home and in a small cubicle in the Flint Building across the street from the Hahnemann Hospital. In 1951, circulation had risen to almost 6,000 copies, and business and editorial activities were such that the office space had to be enlarged.

For 14 years the inside front cover of Anesthesiology carried a massive list of people comprising the Editorial Committee, Consulting Editors, Foreign Contributors, and others. In 1954 action was taken to limit official personnel to the Editor in Chief and Associate Editors.

By 1954 it was evident that Henry Ruth was in ill health and Ralph Tovell often functioned as Acting Editor. The year 1955 was one of change and enhanced activity. Henry Ruth resigned as Editor due to illness and Ralph Tovell took over as Editor in Chief. By this time E. A. Rovenstine decided for a number of reasons that he should retire from the Editorial Board. It was decided also to have a serious appraisal of the journal operations primarily from an editorial standpoint and William E. Porter was asked to do this task. His inquiries resulted in some major changes in format and editorial policies. These changes plus other efforts resulted in an appreciable reduction in the backlog of accepted manuscripts and delay in publication. Stevens J. Martin and James E. Eckenhoff were added to the Editorial Board. Huberta Livingston was charged with the responsibility of editing the Book Reviews. In July 1955 the journal had outgrown its quarters again and a move was made to 3 Penn Center Plaza. Later (in 1958), Roland Whitacre came to an unexpectedly early death and John Pender was appointed to replace him on the Editorial Board.

In 1956, Henry Ruth died and with him ended an era in the history of the journal. In this same year, a readership survey was undertaken under the direction of William E. Porter of the State University of Iowa. The results of this survey were reported some time later, but it is interesting to note that much of the information concerning the attitudes of personnel in the practice of anesthesia obtained by the readership survey are similar to information currently being secured by the survey being conducted under the auspices of the A.S.A.

The year 1957 was one in which the journal, particularly its business activities, was brought into closer relationship to the A.S.A. At the request of the A.S.A., Clarence Munns conducted a survey of A.S.A. activities including
the journal. Although his concept of journal operations was influenced largely by his connection with a state society journal, he did, nevertheless, recommend that operation of the business end of the journal be more closely linked to A.S.A. business operations. This return of the journal to "the fold" was prompted by many things including an overhaul of A.S.A. functions, the sound financial status of the journal operation, some questions of tax liability, closer identification of the editorial board with the other committees of the A.S.A., etc. After much discussion and many extreme suggestions including transfer of both business and editorial operations to the Chicago office, it was finally decided to enter into a contract with J. B. Lippincott Company for the business operation and leave the editorial functions to a committee of the A.S.A. One should recall the recommendations made by a publisher in 1938.

Actually, the same office force and editorial board remained with the journal. The Medical Publications Division of J. B. Lippincott Company took over direct responsibility for the business management, and the editorial board continued to exercise sole judgment on editorial matters. The arrangement has worked satisfactorily for all parties concerned. The contract was effective January 1, 1960. Lancaster Press remained as printer.

The year 1959 marked a significant change in editorial policy in that under the editorship of James E. Eckenhoff, a series of review articles and symposia issues were started. It is interesting that the minutes of the February 16, 1947, Editorial Board meeting contain a passed motion indicating opposition to issues devoted to one subject. The first symposium issue was in the fall of 1959 and dealt with muscle relaxants. Subsequent review articles and symposia have met with enthusiastic reception. Ralph Tovell's long and intimate association with the journal ended in 1959, years in which he put tremendous energy and thought into the development of the magazine. John Adriani was appointed to replace Ralph Tovell. James E. Eckenhoff remained as Editor until 1963. Leroy Vandam was appointed to the Editorial Board in 1961 and assumed the Editorship in 1963. Arthur Keats was appointed to the Editorial Board in 1963 and the most recent addition was S. G. Hershey.

No account of the journal would be in true perspective without including reference to a devoted staff. Mrs. Margaret Pruitt joined the staff in February 1950 and left in June of 1952. However, she returned in April 1956 and has remained as the backbone of the editorial staff since that time. Others significantly involved in the editorial end of things were Mrs. Maxine Holmes, 1949 to 1950, and Miss Margaret Baney, who had a substantial association with the developing journal from November 1951 until February 1958. Since 1951 the business matters were capably handled by Mrs. Mary Reilly and Miss Ruth Keim. Under the able direction of Mrs. Wall others dedicated to the development of the journal as a paying proposition were Miss Helen Keim and Mr. Charles Townner.

What the next 25 years will bring is impossible to predict. It is evident, however, that a journal spawned from the enthusiasm of a small group of pioneers in anesthesia has grown from a speculative venture into a substantial journal in the medical field. Its pages reflect the eagerness and devotion of the early supporters and the growth in scientific stature of the specialty. It is an example of the foresight and ambition of the first editors. As an example of modern scientific literature, it is a journal of which the specialty can be proud.