



Research Article

Royden McIntosh Muir and His Anesthetic Links Between South Africa, London, and the United States



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 February 2016
Received in revised form 24 April 2016
Accepted 16 May 2016

Keywords:

History of anesthesia
Cyclopropane
Anesthesia equipment
Foregger Midget
Water-sight flow meter

ABSTRACT

New Zealand born, Dr. Royden McIntosh Muir, MBChB(Edin), DA(RCS&RCP), emigrated to Cape Town in 1921 having specialized in anesthesia in London after World War 1 and became one of South Africa's earliest and leading anesthesiologists. He was appointed honorary anesthetist and clinical teacher by the University of Cape Town at South Africa's first medical school in 1922, and lecturer in 1927. Aware of Cape Town's isolation at the southern tip of Africa, he undertook extensive tours studying anesthetic practice at major hospitals in London, the United States and Canada in 1933 and 1938. He became a lifelong friend of Ralph Waters in Madison, who coached him in the use of cyclopropane, and he subsequently introduced cyclopropane into England and South Africa. In the United States, he met Richard von Foregger, founder of the New York based Foregger Company, from whom he later commissioned a purpose-built anesthetic machine marketed by Foregger as "The Muir Midget." Muir was a founder member of the South African Society of Anaesthetists in 1943 and was elected as its second president the following year. Based on what he had seen in academic hospitals in the United States and England, he fought until his retirement for the improved recognition of the specialty in South Africa and the establishment of adequately staffed departments of anesthesia at teaching hospitals in that country.

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Introduction

Roy (Royden) M. Muir was born British, of British parents, in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1891 (Figure 1). His parents were James McIntosh Muir and Annie Isabel Jacob Muir (*née* Sisson). After commencing studies at the Victoria University College in Wellington, New Zealand, he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, graduating with an MBChB in 1914. Brought up with a roving spirit, his choice of medicine as a career was largely influenced by the possibilities of working as a ship's surgeon.¹

After graduating, Muir entered the services of a steamship company and traveled around the world. At the outbreak of World War 1, he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps and saw service in France, becoming a lieutenant, and then temporary captain in 1915.² Because of his love of the sea, he applied for a post as a ship's surgeon. After working as senior casualty surgeon at the Royal Infirmary Home in

Hull where treatment was accorded to batches of wounded from the battlefield,³ he served on several hospital ships including the HMS Hospital Ship *Dongola* that took part in the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign (Figure 2).⁴

During the war, he developed an interest in anesthesia. After demobilization, he traveled to London to take up the study of anesthesia, then establishing itself as a full-time specialty. He returned to the sea in 1919 as ship's surgeon on the Union Castle Line *Berwick Castle*, and in 1920 on the White Star Line/Shaw, Saville & Albion Line R.M.S. *Corinthic* that provided a passenger and freight service between Britain and New Zealand via Cape Town.

Muir Emigrates to South Africa

During his voyages, Muir decided that the proximity of sea and mountains in South Africa's (SA's) Cape Province suited his lifestyle and he emigrated to Cape Town in 1921 to join the country's first "specialist anesthetist," English born and trained, Dr. George Bampfylde Daniell, in private anesthetic practice^{1,5}. At the time there was no formal training or accreditation of anesthesia in SA

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Fig. 1. Dr. R.M. Muir, MBChB(Edin), DA(RCS&RCP). Image courtesy of Nagin Parbhoo History of Anaesthesia Museum.

and the term “specialist anesthetist” is used to refer to medical practitioners who confined their practice to the specialty. Muir had been trained in the use of ether and chloroform and brought with him a Pinson ether “bomb” that he used for maintenance of anesthesia after induction with the Hewitt’s wide-bore ether inhaler⁶

(Figure 3; both items are now displayed in the University of Cape Town’s (UCT’s) Nagin Parbhoo History of Anaesthesia Museum).

Bampfylde Daniell emigrated to SA in 1889 and returned to England in 1902 to devote more time to anesthesia. He worked at several hospitals in London and Edinburgh, becoming a Lecturer and Instructor in Anesthetics at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.⁵ He returned to SA in 1906 and the following year became the first doctor in SA to be appointed as an anesthetist to a hospital in SA when he was appointed to the post at Johannesburg Hospital.⁵ Daniell designed or modified anesthetic equipment and published over 20 articles on various aspects of anesthesia.⁵ In 1919 he was appointed honorary anesthetist to the New Somerset Hospital, the UCT’s and SA’s first teaching hospital. Honorary anesthetists were appointed to the hospital as unpaid nonteaching medical staff. They came to the hospital together with the surgeon they worked with in private practice and from whom they were paid for cases anesthetized in private. In 1921 anesthesia was introduced to medical students as a subject in their fourth year of a 6-year Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery degree. Daniell was appointed the first Lecturer and instituted a course of 12 lectures on the theory and practice of general surgical anesthesia.^{5,6}

Muir soon established himself in Cape Town as an exceptionally able anesthetist and his practice thrived.¹ In 1922 he was appointed as a clinical teacher in anesthesia by UCT and became a salaried lecturer in 1927.⁶

Although the public hospitals where the honorary doctors worked at that time were reasonably well equipped, the majority of private patients in Cape Town were operated on at a number of small, poorly equipped private nursing homes where anesthetists had to provide their own equipment and oxygen cylinders.⁷ Nitrous oxide was expensive and not readily available. It had to be imported from England, and the turnaround time for empty cylinders to be sent to England for testing and refilling before returning to SA as deck cargo was at least three months. The first commercial manufacture of nitrous oxide in SA by the firm Allen-Liversidge Industrial Gas Ltd commenced in 1928.

In November 1923, Muir married novelist and poetess Daphne Aimee de Waal, only daughter of Sir Frederic de Waal, the first Administrator of the Cape Province and his wife Lady Sara de Waal (Figure 4). At their “society wedding” attended by more than 500 guests, Sir James Rose-Innes, Acting Governor General of SA, proposed the health of the newlywed couple and commented on the international aspect of the marriage, which united SA and New Zealand.⁸ Early on in



Fig. 2. HMS Hospital Ship SS Dongola. Image courtesy of King’s Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancashire, United Kingdom.

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