

Arthur E. Guedel Memorial Anesthesia Center



The Guedel Center

The center offers an outstanding collection of rare and contemporary anesthesia literature, audiotape and videotape resources, as well as the ability to research specialized topics.

The History of the Arthur E. Guedel Memorial Anesthesia Center

By Selma Harrison Calmes, M.D., President of the Guedel Board of Trustees

Where Did the Guedel Come From?

When the ASA moved its headquarters from New York City to Park Ridge, Illinois, in 1947, there no longer was space for ASA Secretary's Dr. Paul Wood's large collection of anesthesia equipment and memorabilia. This collection was the beginning of the Wood Library Museum (WLM). He had donated the collection to the New York State Society of Anesthesiologists (which would develop into the ASA) in 1933. A separate WLM Board was incorporated in 1947 to find a home for the equipment collection. At the spring 1960 meeting of the ASA Board of Directors, the California delegation proposed that Wood's collection be transferred to ASA headquarters, "to be catalogued, displayed and loaned to members of the society." This called for more space, and plans for an addition to the headquarters building were drawn up.

Meanwhile, some CSA members led by Dr. Bill Neff of Palo Alto, then Chair of Anesthesia at Stanford, argued this would mean "burying the WLM in suburbia." Dr. Neff felt strongly that many more people would travel to San Francisco than Park

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Ridge. And, he had space available, the then-vacant library building of the old Stanford-Lane Medical School; the school had recently moved from San Francisco to Palo Alto. The ASA sent an inspection team to San Francisco, but building plans in Park Ridge were too far along and the two-story addition for the WLM was dedicated in 1962. Wood's equipment collection now had a home, but deeply concerned feelings about the choice of Park Ridge remained among some on the West Coast.



Then, Chauncey Leake, Professor of Pharmacology at UCSF and a person with strong ties to anesthesia, had the idea for another anesthesia history association on the West Coast. He suggested dedicating it to the memory of the only pioneer of modern anesthesia on the West Coast, Dr. Arthur Guedel of Los Angeles. Leake had been good friends with Guedel, who often visited UCSF to do research. Under Dr. Neff's leadership, the Guedel Center materialized and opened in 1962 in a billing agency's building. Space became an issue as the collections of equipment and journals grew. As a result, the Guedel Center moved in the late 1970s to its current location in the old Stanford-Lane Medical School Library, the building Neff had in mind for the Wood collection. By then, the building was the library for the California Pacific Medical Center and the University of the Pacific Dental School, but space was still available.

Because of the strained feelings about the choice of Park Ridge for Wood's collection, there was not much interaction between the Guedel and the WLM until the mid-1980s when three Californians joined the WLM Board. The WLM has developed into a well-organized, essential part of the ASA, and it is recognized as the premier library and history museum in the world for our specialty. All WLM Board committee members work actively for the WLM, including outside the regularly scheduled Board meetings, so things get done. Important assets have been acquired over time, such as a first-class museum and an equipment curator, and there is prudent financial management. The Guedel, in contrast, is a much more casual organization. In fact, since Dr. Neff's death in 1997, those near and dear to the Guedel have entered an extended process of determining its future direction.

(Editor's Note: The Guedel Memorial Anesthesia Center is located at 2395 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, California 94115.)