



Original Research

The Earliest-Known Extant Motion Picture of Anesthesia in the World was Filmed in Buenos Aires

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In 1899 at the old “Hospital de Clínicas” in Buenos Aires (Fig. 1), the French cameraman Eugenio Py (1859-1924; founding pioneer of Argentine cinema) filmed a surgical procedure performed by Argentine surgeon Professor Alejandro Posadas (1870-1902; thoracic surgeon) (Fig. 2) to extirpate a lung hydatid cyst on a male patient (Video). The medical student Viale was the Posadas’ assistant.

Elgé, the camera used to film the event, was imported to Buenos Aires from France in 1897, two years after the Elgé was invented by the Lumière brothers. The film shows Posadas operating and the Argentine medical student Rodolfo Santiago Roccatagliata (1877-1925; MD in 1903 from the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina) (Fig. 3) administering anesthesia, holding in his right hand a bottle from which he sporadically drops a drug to an anesthetic mask (Fig. 4).

It is likely that anesthesia was performed with chloroform and hand mask “chloroform cone,” according to the consultation conducted with George Bause, MD, MPH (Fig. 5). This handmade mask was widely used in the countries of the New World. At this period in the Americas, young surgical house officers and medical students were expected to be able to fold their own cones, from a variety of textiles, around a stiff paper or cardboard conical shell.

The movie was made 4 years after the invention of motion pictures by the French brothers August Marie Louis Lumière (1862-1954) and Louse Lumière (1864-1948). The Lumière brothers are recognized as the first filmmakers in history, producing *Sortie de l'usine Lumière de Lyon* in 1895. The 46-second film showed workers leaving the Lumière factory.

In 1884 or 1885, Edison Manufacturing Company produced a film with multiple titles including *In the Dentist's Chair* or *Dr. Colton* or *Dentist Scene*. The film portrays Gardner Quincy Colton using nitrous oxide on a dental patient. There are no known copies of this film.

The film libraries in France and Belgium have confirmed that the film of Professor Alejandro Posadas performing surgery at the “Hospital de Clínicas” is the first operation filmed in the world. This film testifies that the earliest-known extant film of anesthesia in the world was filmed in Buenos Aires.

Acknowledgment

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Fig. 1. Hospital de Clinicas where the operation was filmed.



Fig. 3. Medical student Rodolfo Santiago Roccatagliata.



Fig. 2. Professor Alejandro Posadas (1870-1902).

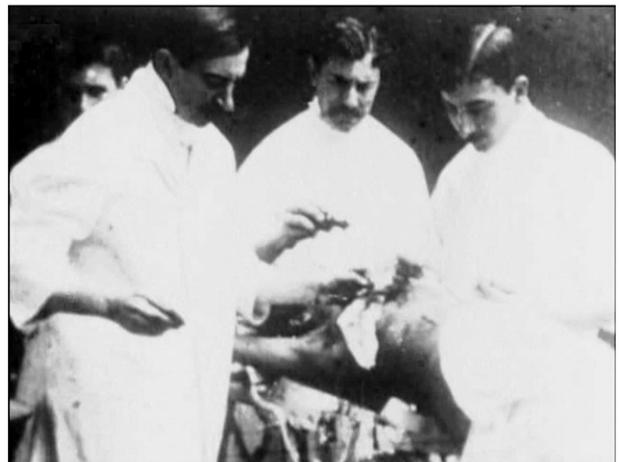


Fig. 4. Rodolfo Santiago Roccatagliata has in his hand the bottle that dripped chloroform.



Fig. 5. In this picture, the mask is on the face, and the anesthetist holds in his hand the bottle with the anesthetic.