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# Horace Wells Memorials in the City of Hartford, Connecticut

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## Introduction:

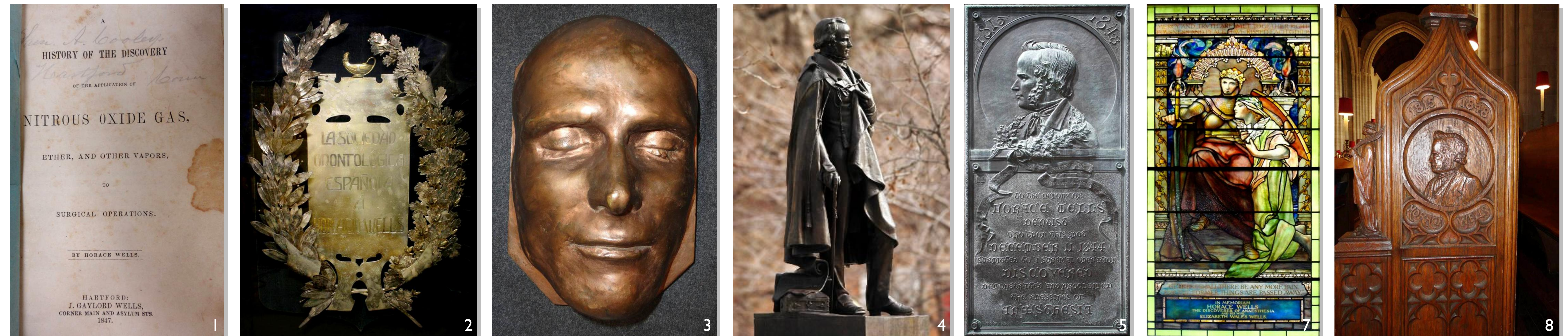
Hartford, capital city of Connecticut was where Horace Wells conducted most of his work on the only anesthetic gas still used in clinical practice since the 19th century – nitrous oxide. Wells was born and raised in Hartford, Vermont, studied dentistry in Boston and established his practice in Hartford, Connecticut. Various icons celebrating Wells' unique contributions in discovering the analgesic properties of nitrous oxide are located throughout this city.

## Materials and Methods:

We consulted staff at Connecticut Historical Society (CHS) and at Hartford Medical Society to help identify sites and artifacts in Hartford that honor Horace Wells. Thereafter, we visited and studied each of these sites.

## Results:

In 1847, Wells wrote a pamphlet titled 'History of the Discovery of the Application of Nitrous Oxide Gas, Ether and Other Vapors to Surgical Operations.' (Fig. 1). In 1907, the Spanish Dental Society honored Wells by awarding the city of Hartford a silver coat of arms. (Fig. 2) After Wells' tragic death in 1848, his friend and dental colleague, John Riggs, prepared a death mask. (Fig. 3). The original mask was used by T. H. Bartlett in 1874 to sculpt a bronze statue of Horace Wells that was erected in Bushnell Park<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 4). Wells' office was located on Main Street, Hartford, and a plaque has been inserted onto the modern structure that stands in its place currently (Fig. 5). Horace and Elizabeth Wells were buried initially at Hartford's Old North Cemetery. However, in 1908, Charles T. Wells (Horace's only son) disinterred his parents' remains from Old North Cemetery and reinterred them at Cedar Hill Cemetery. He also commissioned sculptor Louis Potter to create a fitting memorial consisting of a large granite grave marker with a bronze plaque on the front surface, and two angel figures on either end depicting the glory of his father's discovery.<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 6) Charles' efforts to recognize his father's discovery also led him to order from Louis C. Tiffany, a stain glass window (Fig. 7) that adorns Center Congregational Church. The Chapel at Trinity College has a pew dedicated to Horace Wells (Fig. 8).<sup>3</sup> American artist Charles Noel Flagg (1848-1916) painted a portrait of Horace Wells, and this is part of the collection at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art (Fig. 9).<sup>3,4</sup>



1. Horace Wells' 1847 manuscript (CHS); 2. The silver coat of arms awarded to Horace Wells by the Spanish Dental Society in 1907 (CHS); 3. A copy of Horace Wells' death mask, prepared by John Riggs (CHS); 4. Horace Wells' statue at Bushnell Park; 5. Plaque honoring Horace Wells at the site of his office; 6. (below) Horace Wells' gravestone plaques, Cedar Hill Cemetery; 7. Tiffany window, Center Congregational Church; 8. Wood carving adorning a pew at the chapel in Trinity College; 9. Horace Wells' portrait by artist Charles Noel Flagg (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art)



## Conclusions:

The city of Hartford, Connecticut celebrates Horace Wells' achievements with many historical monuments, gifts, books and paraphernalia; thereby remembering his role in the discovery of the anesthetic effects of nitrous oxide. His work was recognized not only in the United States, but also in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

## References:

1. <http://www.bushnellpark.org/attractions/horace-wells/>
2. <http://cedarhillfoundation.org/notable-residents/horace-wells/>
3. Wolfe, Richard J and Menczer, Leonard F. I awaken to glory. 1994. Boston and Hartford, The Boston Medical Library in The Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine; and The Historical Museum of Medicine and Dentistry
4. <http://timbreetdent.free.fr/portraits/n-portrait-wells.jpg>