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The Past and The Future
Of Veterinary Education

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Part One: A View of The Past

A Slow Beginning

Although the practice of the veterinary art extends back to the earliest beginnings of civilization, it has only been during comparatively recent times that the education of veterinarians has been conducted along formal lines. The first veterinary school was founded at Lyons, France, in 1761. Following the example set by France, schools of veterinary medicine were soon organized in several other European countries.

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Formal veterinary education in the United States did not appear until well after the middle of the nineteenth century. There were several factors which contributed to the tardy development of scientific veterinary medicine in this country. Primary among these was the fact that the land was sparsely populated and animal numbers on farms were still small. Such conditions of privation presented little chance for contacting infectious agents and even less possibility for the development of extensive epizootics.

Lack of interest in the veterinary profession during this period can also be attributed to the cultural background of the rural population. They were a very religious group and if an animal, or human for that matter, sickened, they considered it an act of Divine providence and did little to interfere with its pro-
gress (3). Most of these people were of rather recent English origin and were prejudiced against anyone connected with the veterinary profession. A large share of the blame for this feeling can be placed at the doorstep of the London Veterinary College. Due to the early faculty's gross misconception of what should constitute a veterinary education, the graduates from this school were little, if any, better than the common farrier or quack of that day.

Another factor contributing to this feeling of indifference, or as was often the case, outright disgust, toward anyone dealing in the treatment of animal diseases was the marked increase in charlatans in the profession during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Following in the wake of increased numbers and values of livestock, this group grew by leaps and bounds. Since they generally came from the more ignorant and often disreputable elements of society it is little wonder that the public came to place little faith or respect in the profession. With the exception of a mere handful of trained veterinarians, the practice of veterinary medicine during this period was controlled entirely by the self-trained empiricist.

The First Schools

As early as 1806, Dr. Benjamin Rush, founder of the first American medical school, attempted to interest agricultural leaders in establishing a veterinary school. His efforts were of no avail, however, and nearly half a century passed before definite steps were taken in this direction.

The first school of veterinary medicine in the United States was established at Philadelphia in 1852. Although a faculty and buildings were provided and announcements freely distributed, the school could not interest students in attending. In the words of Dr. Robert Jennings, the founder of the school (9), "— young men of education and respectability would not engage in a profession of so low a standing. In that day the title of veterinary surgeon was rarely heard, and but few persons in this country understood its meaning. The members of the profession were known only by the appellation of "Farrier or Horse or Cow Doctor." For thirteen years the school tried in vain to become established. In an effort to revitalize the school it was reincorporated as the Pennsylvania College of Veterinary Surgeons. This school met with the same fate as the first and closed its doors only four years after its initiation. Neither of these schools produced graduates.

The next attempt at establishing a veterinary school was made by a physician turned veterinarian, Dr. G. H. Dadd. In 1855, Dr. Dadd opened the Boston Veterinary Institute. The course of instruction covered two terms of four months each. The cost for the entire course, including the examination fee, was $104.00 (2). The school soon encountered difficulties and closed in 1860. Although it is controversial, it appears that this school managed to graduate a few veterinarians (9, 5, 6).

The first semblance of a successfully established veterinary school was that of the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons founded in 1857 by Dr. John Bussted. The school was hampered by internal strife from the time of its inception until its doors were closed in 1875. During the eighteen years of its existence eighteen veterinarians were graduated.

The faculty from this school split to form two new schools, the American Veterinary College and the Columbia Veterinary College. These schools were more successful than their predecessor and produced several hundred graduates.

The course of study by 1880 had been extended to two terms consisting of six months each (1). The majority of the faculty in these early schools held both veterinary and medical degrees. The fees for a regular session amounted to approximately 150 dollars.

By this time the profession had made some inroad on the number of quacks. It was estimated by Dr. Bates (4) that in 1881, eight hundred veterinarians were practicing in the United States. Over half were graduates; a few were reliable non-graduates and the rest were considered to be quacks.

Iowa State University Veterinarian
Another source of veterinarians during this period was the bogus veterinary degree. The following editorial (7) presents the evidence: “...we infer that considerable business in this direction has been done somewhere in this country. We print, in part, one characteristic letter from a western man who 'meant business': 'Desire a diploma, but cannot spend time necessary to get one. Will give just 150 dollars for same—if we can deal; if not, all right. Anything you may say upon the subject will be strictly between us.' Sincerely, etc. 'P.S. You need not take the trouble to send me a lecture upon the immorality of my proposition; it would be wasted. Am a western man, and will do just as I agree, quietly, as it will be of a service to me and cost you nothing.'"

The Period of Rapid Expansion

Between the years of 1879 and 1900 twenty-three veterinary schools were established. Today only five of these are still in existence. The majority of these schools were proprietary in nature. Since their existence depended almost entirely on student fees, their primary concern was to produce as many graduates as possible. In order to do this, their standards were generally very low. Completion of grade school was considered to be the minimum requirement for entrance, but some schools were willing to waive this requirement in light of maturity and practical experience. The schools were located in large cities. Their physical plant usually consisted of an old livery stable or some similar type of building. Since most of the instructors maintained a private practice along with their teaching duties, the strong part of the curriculum was developed around the clinical area. When the students were not dissecting or in lecture they accompanied the professor on private calls (8).

Coinciding with the remarkable increase in the number of proprietary schools was the establishment of veterinary schools connected with tax supported colleges. The first was founded in Iowa in 1879. Others rapidly followed; at Harvard in 1882, Pennsylvania in 1884, Ohio in 1885, Cornell in 1896 and Washington in 1899. With the exception of the school at Harvard these schools are still functioning. Demands for greater state support for all phases of higher education were prevalent during this time. This was the period when much of our higher educational structure was being reshaped around the pattern of the highly esteemed German State Universities. Dr. James Law, the first Dean of the Veterinary School at Cornell, expressed the common sentiment of the time in his inaugural address of 1896. After contrasting the type of schools existing in the United States with those in Europe, especially those in Germany, Dr. Law (10) pointed out, “These continental veterinary colleges would have been no more thorough than the English or American had they been dependent on private enterprise. But there is no veterinary college on the continent of Europe today that is not a ward of the government. Each one has been founded and is sustained by the commonwealth—.”

From the beginning, the tax supported schools were superior in quality to the proprietary schools. They offered a more thorough curriculum, were more strict in their matriculation requirements, and extended the course of study to three sessions of eight months each.

The Prolific Period

In the years between 1900 and 1918, the profession experienced its most productive period. During this period over 10,000 veterinarians were graduated from 27 veterinary colleges. From 1910 to 1918 an average of 757 students was graduated each year (12). Late in this period the four-year course of study was adopted by the majority of the schools. Another improvement in the standards came when the entrance requirements were raised by the state supported schools, and a few of the private schools, from the grade school certificate to successful completion of high school.

It was during this time that schools were founded at Alabama, Arkansas, Colo-
rado, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, and Texas. The schools at Arkansas and Georgia remained open for only a few years, but the other five have functioned continuously.

The Years of Adjustment
Immediately following World War I the numbers of graduates dropped sharply and continued dropping until 1927. From 1918 to 1930 the schools produced a yearly average of less than 200 students (11). The number of schools fell from a high of 23 in 1916 to a low of ten in 1933. Several reasons are responsible for this phenomenal reduction in students and schools. Many people were of the opinion that the rapid replacement of the horse by the automobile was to be the death-blow of the veterinary profession. There just wasn't any future in becoming a "horse doctor." The poor condition of agriculture during the twenties offered little stimulation to extend the profession into that area. The proprietary schools, being pushed on the one hand by the decrease in student enrollment and on the other by the association for improved standards, gave up the struggle and rapidly disappeared from the American scene. The last private school closed its doors in 1927.

Starting with 1927, being stimulated by an improved agriculture and an enlarging interest in small animals, the number of graduates began to rise slowly. This increase, oddly enough, continued through the depression years of the thirties. The reason often cited for this apparent prosperity during such dark days is that since other professions were overcrowded, students chose the underpopulated field of veterinary medicine in which to establish their careers. As contrasted to other professions, few veterinarians were forced to engage in work outside their profession during the depression years. The federally supported tuberculosis eradication program also played an important role in the revitalization of the veterinary profession.

Between the years of 1931 and 1936, the schools extended the course of study to five years. This established the pre-veterinary year which allowed full concentration on technical studies during the professional years and gave the student at least some chance for cultural subjects in the pre-veterinary year. In the latter part of this same decade the schools brought about a further improvement in the quality of the entering student by establishing the practice of selectively restricting the number of beginning students.

Re-expansion
The second World War brought great changes to American agriculture and thus to veterinary medicine. Demands for veterinary service rose almost as sharply as the values for livestock. At the same time the military services were also competing for the veterinarian's talents. These demands coupled with the fact that more veterinarians were at retirement age than there were men to replace them created an acute vacuum in the profession. In an effort to remedy the situation the schools were mobilized under the A.S.T.P. (Army Specialized Training Program). The professional training was stepped up so that it was completed in two years and eight months of continuous study. Although the A.S.T.P. lasted for only a short time in the field of veterinary medicine, the stepped up program was continued throughout the war years.

After the war, prices of animal products soared still higher and veterinarians services were even more in demand. Returning veterans, wanting to enter upon a course of veterinary training under the G.I. bill, were often handicapped by the lack of a school in their home state. Classes were readily filled in the existing schools from a huge backlog of residents of the respective states. This situation, along with the continuous cry for more veterinarians, brought about a clamor in many states for the establishment of veterinary schools. In response to these demands, seven veterinary schools were founded between the years 1945 and 1948. These schools are located at Tuskegee Institute, Georgia, Missouri, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Illinois, and California. A latecomer to this new group of schools is the Iowa State University Veterinarian.
one founded at Purdue University in 1957. This brings the total of veterinary schools in the United States to eighteen.

By 1949 all the schools had extended the pre-veterinary requirement to two years. This has allowed ample time for the student to gain a sound foundation in the sciences and to become acquainted with a few of the humanistic studies.

This brief review of the history and developmental struggles of veterinary education brings us to the present, and therefore, to the threshold of the future. Our interest naturally lies in this direction.

The concluding portion of this paper will deal with, "Where to from Here in Veterinary Education." This article will appear in our spring issue.

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