

The American Veterinary Profession



Photo by Charles E. Packard

**The American
Veterinary Profession**
Its Background and Development

J. F. Smithcors, D.V.M., Ph.D.

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About the Author

J. F. SMITHCORS is a past president of the American Veterinary Historical Society and a member of the Council of the American Association for the History of Medicine. His collection of veterinary historical books, dating from the sixteenth century, is one of the finest of its kind.

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Besides this book, he is author of *Evolution of the Veterinary Art* and of numerous historical articles in veterinary and medical journals of the United States and England.

Dr. Smithcors holds a bachelor's degree from Rutgers University and a doctorate from Michigan State University. He obtained his master's and doctor of veterinary medicine degrees from Cornell University. He is editor of American Veterinary Publications, Inc.

FRONTISPIECE: *The professional concern and care of the veterinarian are conveyed by Christian Petersen's sculpture in the Veterinary Quadrangle at Iowa State University.*

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To The Veterinary Profession

of the United States and Canada —
whose heritage has afforded me
many hours of pleasure — this volume
is dedicated — in the belief that:

“the orderly contemplation
of its own history is a proper
and profitable pursuit for any
profession —

which takes pride in its
ancestry and entertains
some hope for posterity.”

PREFACE

THE YEAR 1963 MARKS THE CENTENNIAL of the American Veterinary Medical Association and immediately follows that of the Ontario Veterinary College. Although it may not have been apparent at the time, the founding of these two institutions coincided with the ushering in of a century of unparalleled progress in veterinary medicine. Earlier attempts to form veterinary schools and associations had met with from little more than moderate degrees of temporary success to complete frustration. The reasons for success being elusive earlier were, perhaps, not fully appreciated at the time, and these same circumstances prevailed for years following the founding of the Toronto Veterinary College (now OVC) and — to an even greater extent — the United States Veterinary Medical Association (now AVMA).

Both institutions, however — each under an aegis indicative of a broader sphere of influence — have lived a hundred years. This in itself is worthy of note. But more important is the fact that each has brought in its wake other schools and associations which together have formed the backbone of the American veterinary profession.

Not all veterinary institutions established during this period have met with unqualified success, however, nor have all the problems facing the veterinary profession been solved. And what is more to the point, many of these relatively recent — and some still existent — shortcomings are deeply rooted in the more remote past. Thus the knotty and persistent problems of professional ethics, of promotion of veterinary services, of public appreciation of the role of veterinary medicine in human welfare, of lay encroachment into the veterinary domain — these and other problems not only have interrelationships within the

existing scheme, but are related to circumstances and events of long ago.

Perhaps with the resurgence of equine practice, but more likely with the increasingly cosmopolitan view of the profession being taken by veterinarians in recent years, there no longer need be any hesitation in considering the past for fear of finding the skeleton of a horse doctor in the medicine chest. In fact, it is becoming more and more apparent, inasmuch as today's problems are not all of recent vintage, that an awareness of past shortcomings — as well as accomplishments — can be utilized as a steppingstone to future greatness.

Thus the do-it-yourself mania — as in mastitis treatment, for example — can be related not only to the apparent success of empiric methods, but to a deeply-rooted tradition in these matters. The colonial farmer can hardly be blamed for attending his stock as best he could, for not only were there no bona fide veterinarians in America before 1800, there were but a precious few until well near the end of the century. The rash of “everyman his own farrier” type of work, and the farm papers that advertised “a free horse doctor with every subscription,” made capital of this penchant of the home handyman.

To a large extent it appears to have been the influence of these agencies that convinced the American animal-owning public that the services of veterinarians were essentially an unessential luxury. This had the unfortunate consequence of delaying the emergence of a veterinary educational system for a century beyond its beginnings in Europe — and of favoring the short-term trade school type of institution once a need for educated veterinarians was realized. And in all too many instances, even the better-educated practitioner of more recent times fell into the snare of giving away his precious heritage — the art of diagnosis — while making a living on what he could dispense.

With the above in mind, I have considered it essential to delve deeply into our more remote past — the background of the American veterinary profession (Part I). Previous writings on American veterinary history have largely written off the colonial period; in fact, with few exceptions the material on colonial veterinary medicine presented in books and articles to date can be summarized but briefly: there was no veterinary service in colonial America.

However, too little attention has been given to the rather obvious fact that — in all ages — when men and animals have coexisted there have been problems which properly fall within the veterinary domain. A major thesis of this book is that this very lack of a veterinary service compounded problems once the veterinary profession began to take

shape. The deceptively apparent immunity of animals to disease for a century or more — occasioned in part by lack of numbers — beclouded men's minds into believing that animals could continue to thrive without much attention — until long after the great animal plagues threatened the very existence of the burgeoning livestock industry.

The second part of the book deals with the development of the veterinary profession in America, together with some consideration of the interplay of other agencies in this development. For several reasons, the largest part of the story is based upon events which have occurred within the framework of organized veterinary medicine on a national basis, i.e., the AVMA. While it is obvious that many developments worthy of note have originated with individuals or groups more or less apart from AVMA influence, it has been expedient — even necessary — to limit consideration to those events which have reached the national level. Thus, however valid, the topics reported as being of interest to the profession at any given time are largely selected from those receiving attention at national meetings. By the same token, primary attention has been given to men who have reached prominence through the national association.

Several topics, however, have been considered more or less apart from the main thread of the story, including the epochal achievements of the Bureau of Animal Industry, the veterinary public health movement, and the *American Veterinary Review*. In addition, the section on veterinary education has been written by Dr. George C. Christensen. Lt. Col. Everett B. Miller, VC, had nearly completed a section on veterinary military history for inclusion in this book when unforeseen circumstances prevented his finishing it. At the suggestion of General Russell McNellis, VC, the introductory part of Colonel Miller's *United States Army Veterinary Service in World War II* (Office of the Surgeon General, 1961) has been included here as an abbreviated version of this most important aspect of our veterinary history. To both of these individuals I am indebted for making this a better book than it would have been otherwise.

As presented, the book represents the distillation of several thousand volumes — by conservative estimate, somewhere between one and two million pages of material — most of them turned page by page. As the work draws to a close, it is obvious that the best part of six years' research and writing — one year of it full-time — has been inadequate to achieve the consistency and balance a work like this should have.

Specialists in particular fields will undoubtedly find errors of omission and commission; and to those who might want to go further into any particular subject, a note about the documentation of this work — or lack thereof — is indicated. My books and papers — some 3,000 pounds of them — were shipped west in 55 boxes; 54 arrived: the one with my lists of references apparently is still somewhere between East Lansing and Santa Barbara. As far as the book proper is concerned, however, all is not lost, for much internal documentation is included — enough to give an adequate entry into the pertinent literature. The early agricultural and veterinary journals are well-indexed, and there are relatively few specific items mentioned in the text that could not be found with reasonable facility.

Acknowledgements: The study on veterinary medicine in colonial America was supported by a grant from the American Philosophical Society, much of this work being done from original source materials at the Clements Library of the University of Michigan. Much of the later study was supported in part by a major grant from the American Veterinary Medical Association, with most of the work being done at the Michigan State University Library. To these agencies, and to the many individuals who have helped me in many ways, I am deeply grateful.

I am especially indebted to Marty my wife for doing the final typescript, and for her patience in enduring a somewhat ascetic life for lo these many years. I would be remiss in not mentioning my former students — several hundred of them — who over several years compiled several thousand subject matter and biographical references from the early agricultural and veterinary literature; these are on file in the Veterinary Medicine Library at Michigan State University. A grant from the Michigan State University All-University Research Fund was used to defray the cost of preparing the illustrations, and a fair portion of the book represents the fruits of research, the bread and butter for which was supplied by Michigan State University while I was a staff member there.

I would also acknowledge the special assistance of Bert W. Bierer of South Carolina for the help derived from his monograph on *American Veterinary History* (mimeo, Baltimore, 1940), and of David L. Cowen of Rutgers University for his critical reading of a portion of the manuscript. Also to Mary Ellen Haggerty of Detroit for the original paintings from which the illustrations on page 2 are reproduced and to Charles Packard for the frontispiece photograph; and to W. W.

Armistead of Michigan State University for his active support of veterinary history as a discipline, and for the quotation which appears with the dedication of this book.

A special word of thanks is due Marshall Townsend and the Iowa State University Press for help with problems incident to publication, and for the technical excellence and format of the book.

Finally, a word about the style of the work. My *Evolution of the Veterinary Art* has been both criticized and commended for its lapses from matter-of-fact reporting. Since it is manifest that I cannot please everyone, I have chosen to continue writing in my own style. The very selection of materials requires at the outset a philosophy of some sort, and I would hope that my own commentary, implicit or otherwise, will stimulate rather than stifle thoughtful consideration of the matters presented.

J. F. SMITHCORS

Santa Barbara, California

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