

**A Biography of and Interview with
Clifford H. Hoppenstedt, DVM
Class of 1935, College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University
and**

**Gilbert F. Hoppenstedt, VMD
Class of 1940, University of Pennsylvania**

Author and Interviewer: Dr. Donald F. Smith, *Austin O. Hooey Dean Emeritus*

Ivy League Brothers

Our parents were dedicated to the proposition that we were going to have a better life than them, slaving on a farm. I can't say enough good about them.¹

Seated next to his 95-year-old brother in Clifford's New Paltz home, Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt testified of his parents' commitment to assure that their children had access to education beyond high school. He recalls with gratitude, their encouragement and sacrifice that made veterinary education possible for him and his brother during an era when few rural young people had the opportunity to attend college.

Clifford ('Kip') H. Hoppenstedt, DVM Cornell University 1935

The oldest of three children of a southern New York farm family, Clifford was born October 3, 1913 and matriculated in veterinary medicine at Cornell in fall 1931. Being the last class without the requirement for pre-veterinary university experience, they were a large group (82), though many did not complete the program due to academic, financial or personal problems.

Dr. Hoppenstedt returned home to practice in Gardiner after graduating. When that job did not work out, a Cornell professor advised him of an opening at the ASPCA hospital in lower Manhattan. This was an unexpected career choice for a young man with little formal education or previous experience in caring for dogs and cats. However, jobs were scarce during the Depression and Kip willingly moved to New York City to care for the pets of those who were unable to afford private veterinary care.

A year later, he opened a large animal practice in Pleasant Valley, New York. In 1940, Dr. Fleming, his previous mentor, moved to Kentucky, leaving a vacancy in Gardiner. Seizing the opportunity, Dr. Hoppenstedt immediately returned to his hometown to establish a practice where he remained for the rest of his professional career.

¹ Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt, interview 2009.



Clifford H. Hoppenstedt 1935

During his 35-year tenure in Dutchess County, Dr. Hoppenstedt's practice migrated from large animal—predominantly cattle—to mostly small companion animals, reflecting the loss of agricultural base in the rural community and the expanding pet care needs of the local population. Eventually, he sold his practice to Dr. Lyle Goodnow '71, who continues to provide veterinary services through the Gardiner Animal Hospital.

Dr. Hoppenstedt was active in organized veterinary medicine in the region and state, and served as president of the New York State Veterinary Medical Society in 1965. He enjoyed golf and other outdoor activities during his retirement years and continues to live in his New Paltz home. He and his wife—now deceased—raised two sons: Richard, who lives in Syracuse, and Robert, who lives in Connecticut.

Gilbert F. Hoppenstedt, VMD University of Pennsylvania 1940

Gilbert arrived at Cornell in 1935 and spent a year in the College of Agriculture, then entered the veterinary class of 1940 at the University of Pennsylvania. Unlike his older brother, Gilbert was required to pay tuition because the University of Pennsylvania did not have the tuition-free land grant status of Cornell. However, Clifford was not without student expenses because Cornell charged fees to its students to make up costs not covered by the State appropriations.

The difference between the two Ivy League schools was also apparent in the relative priority given to instruction for farm animals compared to companion animals. Cornell placed a strong emphasis on livestock and poultry, while Penn provided more instruction in canine and feline medicine.



Photograph by Donald F. Smith

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt 2/9/09

Though Gilbert's class at the University of Pennsylvania had several Jews, they were not as numerous as the 17 who started in Clifford's Cornell class in 1931.² Despite the fact that many of the Jewish students were from New York City and other urban areas and had little previous animal experience, both men reported their Jewish classmates to be excellent students and well-liked.

Following graduation, Dr. Hoppenstedt worked in a small animal hospital in Deal, New Jersey. Two years later, he moved to Towson, Maryland, and worked in a farm practice with another Penn graduate, John D. Gadd, VMD '32.

At the end of the war (1945), Dr. Hoppenstedt returned to New York and opened a practice in Kingston (Ulster County). A general practice primarily servicing cattle and other large animals for many years, it became increasingly pet-oriented starting in the mid 1970s as

² Quotas for Jewish students (often unspoken) were common in medical and veterinary colleges in the 1930s. Against this backdrop, Cornell admitted a surprisingly large number of Jewish students in that decade.

farms were displaced by suburban residential areas. Dr. Hoppenstedt also worked for the Ulster County Health department.

After selling his practice in 1990 to Dr. Todd Bannister '79, Dr. Hoppenstedt continued to work until 2000. He has two daughters, Sandra Hutton and Suzanne Hoppenstedt. Dorothy, his wife of 47 years, died in 1992.

From his home in Hurley where he lives independently, Gilbert enjoys his weekly visits with his brother in nearby New Paltz, and occasional visits from his younger sister who lives in Newark, Delaware.

Interview

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Subjects: Clifford H. Hoppenstedt, DVM '35
Gilbert F. Hoppenstedt, VMD '40
Interviewer: Dr. Donald F. Smith
Interview Date: February 9, 2009
Location: New Paltz, New York (Ulster County)



Photograph by Donald F. Smith

Dr. Clifford H. Hoppenstedt and Dr. Gilbert F. Hoppenstedt 2/9/09

Interviewer's Notes:

I appreciated the opportunity to interview the Hoppenstedt brothers, not only because of their reputation as prominent New York State veterinarians, but also because they had attended two different veterinary colleges during the 1930s. Their description of curricular differences between Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania explains how the land grant system at Cornell guided instruction towards cattle and other agricultural animals, while Penn gave more attention to the emerging issues of pet health care. As with other interviews in this collection, these two men helped me understand what it must have been like to be raised during the Depression. They illustrate the extraordinary personal commitment required to become veterinarians in that era, and also the sacrifices that their parents made to assure them an opportunity for success. (Dr. Donald F. Smith)

Dr. Smith:

Good morning. This is Donald Smith from Cornell University. I am in New Paltz, New York¹ with two Doctors Hoppenstedt. Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt graduated from Cornell University in 1935, and his brother, Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1940.

I am at the home of Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt, who is better known to his friends as “Kip”. Dr. Hoppenstedt—Clifford, Kip—thank you for doing this interview. Also Dr. Gilbert

¹ The administrative seat of Ulster County, NY, approximately 80 miles north of New York City.

Hoppenstedt, thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you. Would you like to say a few words to begin the conversation?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

At the time I entered Cornell, it was the last class to enter [veterinary college] directly out of high school.² The class was very large and one of the reasons was that people heard they were going to a five-year class and they immediately tried to speed up and get ready for the four-year class.³

Dr. Smith:

Where did you grow up?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

We grew up on a dairy farm in Pine Bush.⁴ To make a living, my mother kept boarders, and my father had a dairy that supplied milk to Borden's Dairy Plant.

Dr. Smith:

Did your parents have a first-generation farm, and where did they come from?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

My grandmother was born into a German-Amsterdam family. Her original ancestors came over to America before England took over New York City.

Dr. Smith:

So you grew up on a dairy farm. [Dr. Hoppenstedt: Oh yes.] How many cows did you have?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

We milked about 35.

Dr. Smith:

You were the oldest in the family, then your brother. Your sister was younger. [Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt: Yes].

Did you have an interview in 1927 when you went to Cornell? How did you apply to Cornell?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

I wanted to be a veterinarian and I simply wrote an application. That's all there was to it in those days.⁵

² Beginning with the class of 1936 that matriculated in the fall of 1932, a minimum of one year of college work was required for entrance, college courses to include Chemistry (6 hrs), English (6 hrs), Modern Language (4 hrs), and the balance in electives, preferably Botany and Zoology.

³ The college Announcement lists 82 names of freshman students in fall 1931.

⁴ Rural community southwest of New Paltz, in Orange County.

⁵ A faculty Committee on Admissions was not formed until the 1933-34 academic year at which time personal interviews were often conducted.

Dr. Smith:

You had two women who were in your class in the first year.⁶

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Yes, I can't give you much history on them. One of them was Esther Teich and I can't remember the other one's name. But neither one graduated.⁷

Dr. Smith:

What was it like having women in your class?⁸ Did you consider that unusual?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

No, we didn't think anything about it.

Dr. Smith:

You knew Helen Goldhaft.⁹ She graduated in 1933.

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Sure, I knew who she was, but I don't mean that we were friends or anything. Tevis, of course, was in my class. I knew him well.

Dr. Smith:

You graduated in 1935. Where did you go when you graduated?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

I actually worked for a practitioner here in New Paltz. He didn't have volume enough of work and I wasn't a good student besides. So he asked me to go elsewhere. I went back to Cornell and they gave me the name of the Humane Society in New York City. They had an opening and I ended up there.¹⁰

Dr. Smith:

How long were you in New York City?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt (responding for his brother):

Between one and two years.

Dr. Smith:

You knew C.P. Zepp in New York?¹¹

⁶ Ruth Cross (Cleveland, OH) and Esther Teich (Huntington, NY) are listed among the 82 freshman students in the Class of 1935 in the College Announcements of 1932-33.

⁷ Dr. Hoppenstedt (and, in a separate interview, Dr. Tevis Goldhaft '35) recalled that Esther Teich was married in her sophomore year, and left the college.

⁸ Five women graduated from Cornell's veterinary program prior to the Class of 1935.

⁹ Helen Goldhaft '33, the sister of Tevis Goldhaft '35, a classmate of Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt.

¹⁰ The ASPCA, which had an animal hospital in lower Manhattan at the time.

¹¹ Dr. Clarence P. Zepp '19, a prominent small animal practitioner, had a clinic on West 53rd St. in New York City. See interview with one of Dr. Zepp's associates, Dr. Joseph J. Merenda '34, elsewhere in this collection.

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Yes.

Dr. Smith:

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt, you came along a few years later, and you went to Cornell's Agricultural College for one year.

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

Just one year. I wasn't sure if I was going to get in the veterinary school at Cornell¹² so I applied to Pennsylvania and was accepted. I graduated in 1940 [from Penn]. I went to work in a small animal hospital in Deal, New Jersey.¹³ I was married and the war was on, and I got a job in Maryland until I was called up to the service. I was deferred and deferred and deferred until the end of the war, then I came to Kingston and opened a practice.¹⁴ [My brother and I] worked side-by-side for many years.

Dr. Smith:

Your brother went from New York City after a couple of years, to where?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

He went to Dutchess County and then he went to Gardiner where he had previously worked, and took over from the man who had been there.¹⁵

Dr. Smith:

[Turning to Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt] You had a large class that started in 1931.

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

I think about 50 graduated.¹⁶ Many of them were Jewish¹⁷ and they were darn good students. Many of them went back to New York City after graduation and started small animal practices.

Dr. Smith:

Was the education for small animal work equal to the education that you got at Cornell for large animal work?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Well, no, basically it was dairy and poultry. No, no.

¹² He had an interview for admission to Cornell's veterinary program, but was not informed if he would be accepted. In the meantime, he learned of his acceptance to the University of Pennsylvania and committed to that program. Personal communication, 2009.

¹³ A small borough in Monmouth County, east of Trenton, N.J.

¹⁴ City in Ulster County about 60 miles south of Albany.

¹⁵ Community south of New Paltz.

¹⁶ The Announcement for the College lists 59 senior students in the Class of 1935.

¹⁷ According to Dr. Tevis Goldhaft '35, there were 17 Jewish students who entered as freshmen in the Class of 1935.

Dr. Smith:

Dr. Stevenson;¹⁸ did he teach you [small animal medicine]?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Yes.

Dr. Smith:

How about Dr. Milks?¹⁹

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Both of them. That was pretty much [the extent of our small animal education]. They were both good men. But, no, [the educational program] was basically for farm animals.

Dr. Smith:

When you went to New York and worked for the Humane Society, what types of animals did you see and what did you do for those dogs and cats?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

You weren't supposed to spay animals because the Humane Society had a deal set up so if you spayed an animal they were supposed to have a license.

An office visit in those days was three dollars if they had the money! If they didn't have the money, nothing.

Dr. Smith:

Do you remember your professors, Dr. Hopkins, for example?²⁰

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

He was my first professor. He was an anatomy professor. Wonderful man.

Dr. Smith:

Did Dr. Sunderville teach you anatomy?²¹

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Yes, Sunderville, Milks. I had all the basic professors. The college was built for farm animals. What I liked best—having been from a dairy farm—were cows. I was very interested in that, and enjoyed doing it.

Dr. Smith:

Who was your dean?

¹⁸ Hadley Carruthers Stevenson '20, assistant professor of material medica and small animal diseases.

¹⁹ Howard Jay Milks '04, professor of therapeutics and director of the small animal clinic.

²⁰ Grant Sherman Hopkins, BS, DSc, DVM '1900, professor of anatomy and anatomical methods.

²¹ Earl Sunderville '08, assistant professor of veterinary anatomy.

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:
Dr. Hagan.²²

Dr. Smith:

He was a young man in bacteriology then. How do you remember Dr. Hagan? Did he and his wife have you over to their home?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Yes, on a Sunday night. They invited three or four students—seniors—at a time.

Dr. Smith:

I'll ask this question of both of you. How do you compare the Cornell education and the education at the University of Pennsylvania? Were there differences or similarities that you remember?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

In those days, the small animal [instruction] was far superior at Pennsylvania to what it was at Cornell. I haven't been back in sixty years, but basically Cornell has come up tremendously.

Dr. Smith:

Gilbert, would you agree that the small animal teaching was very good at Penn?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

It was very good. I think there was more emphasis on small animal at Pennsylvania than at Cornell, but the type of treatment was comparable.

The vaccinations that we have today have done so much to eliminate the diseases that we had in small animals, [for example,] distemper. It's just unbelievable. You very seldom—that I know of—hear of distemper any more. At that time, it was deadly, deadly. Vaccines have come a long way.

Dr. Smith:

How big was your class at Penn?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

We graduated about forty.²³ I believe we also started with forty. We lost some, then picked up some from other classes. If you failed a subject, you were dropped back. If you failed a couple of subjects, that was the end of it.

Dr. Smith:

Did you have any women in your class?

²² William Arthur Hagan, DVM, MS, professor of bacteriology and dean of the college (1932-59).

²³ Thirty-four students graduated from U Penn with VMD in 1940 (source: Martin, John E., *A Legacy and A Promise*, 1984).

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

Yes. We started with a couple of females and they dropped out. Then we picked up a couple of females from previous classes. I think we graduated three in our class.

Dr. Smith:

Dr. Duebler was the first woman to graduate from Penn in 1938.²⁴

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

Oh, I remember her very well. I didn't remember much about her in school but I have heard considerable about her since I've graduated, and articles that she wrote. She is very well thought of. She had a good mind and worked hard. I've lost touch, but [she was] a very good person.

Dr. Smith:

There were a very large number of Jewish students in your brother's class at Cornell. According to Dr. Goldhaft, there were 17 who started in 1931. [Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt], did you have a lot of Jewish students in your class at Penn that started in 1936?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

I think we had seven or eight. In my memory, there was never any problem at all. The Jewish students stayed by themselves, and studied by themselves. They had their own fraternity²⁵ but there was never any problem that I remember.

Now, of course, before our graduation [in 1940], the European World War II was on, and I suppose the Jewish question did arise more. But I didn't remember any problem with it. They were all pretty intelligent and worked hard. Most of them went into small animal practice in the cities afterwards.

Dr. Smith:

Were some of them from New York City as well, or were most from Philadelphia?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

I would say New York City, and New York State.

Dr. Smith:

You had to pay tuition at Penn.²⁶

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

Yes.

²⁴ M. Josephine Deubler, VMD, '38, PhD (1917-2009).

²⁵ As at Cornell at the time, Jewish students were not permitted to become members of either of the two fraternities, Alpha Psi and Omega Tau Sigma. Sigma Iota Zeta was the Jewish fraternity at Cornell at that time.

²⁶ University of Pennsylvania was not a land grant college. Cornell, on the other hand, had that designation and was mandated to provide free tuition to New York State residents.

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

You paid tuition at Penn, but the lab fees that you had to pay at Cornell, they about balanced out.

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

[Tuition] was just a few hundred dollars [at Penn].

Dr. Smith:

And the lab fees at Cornell were comparable [to the tuition fees at Penn]? Is that what you mean?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Here's the difference. Cornell is a land grant college. It was basically for agriculture. We had some darn good men in the field, studying agriculture, who went to Cornell. The land grant college worked on behalf of the farmer.

Dr. Smith:

And that was different at the University of Pennsylvania?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

I would say, yes. We did not have the farms around Philadelphia like you had at Ithaca. You did have some work on some wealthy estates, and we had a large animal clinic, of course. There was quite a bit of horse work, equine. At that time, the milk companies, garbage disposals, a lot of them used horses so they took them into the clinic.

I lived at the school—I got my room free. One of my jobs was cleaning up the post mortem room.²⁷

We always had the rich and the poor. We both [my brother and me] worked at wealthy fraternities. That is the way it was done. You worked for lunch, waited table, washed dishes, then you got a free meal. That was just a common thing.

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

You see, students at Cornell in the veterinary college were classified as very poor students financially because they had a farm background and the farm income was low compared to the students in liberal arts or engineering.

Dr. Smith:

Where did you live in Ithaca?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

14 Howard Street.²⁸ I slept in the attic. I paid \$65 a quarter.

²⁷ Dr. Hoppenstedt also exercised the dogs in the hospital in partial return for the room. Personal communication, 2009.

Dr. Smith:

[Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt], where did you live at Penn?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

At the school, all four years. I had free room.

Dr. Smith:

Your parents wanted you to get an education.

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Absolutely.

Dr. Smith:

Could you talk a bit more about how they influenced you?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

I was very, very active in 4-H which was just starting. An agent came to our school when I was about eight-years-old. I got quite active in 4-H work and that helped influence my thinking of Cornell. I didn't know what I was doing. Young people worked and they never dreamed of going on to college.

Dr. Smith:

Why did you decide to go to the veterinary college instead of the agricultural college?

Dr. Clifford Hoppenstedt:

Well, we had two veterinarians who used to come to our farm. They were very presentable. They were always neatly-dressed and very much gentleman. I think their personality had a lot to do with it.

Dr. Smith:

Dr. [Gilbert] Hoppenstedt, were you influenced by your brother in your decision?

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

Oh yes, my brother influenced me a great deal. And I have to say, our parents were just dedicated to the proposition that we were going to have a better life than them, slaving on a farm. I just can't say enough good about them. They had that thought in mind. There was never any question [that they were going to send us to college]. I don't know how they did it. Well, as Kip told you, my mother kept boarders in the summertime: fifteen dollars a week, for room and board.

There was just no question that we were going to college. Kip waited tables, washed dishes, same as I did. We did what we could to help, but I have to say that my mother and father drove us on.

²⁸ This was in the home of Mrs. Veranus Moore, the wife of the late professor of veterinary pathology and second dean of the college (1908-1929). Dean Moore died February 11, 1931.

Dr. Smith:

You're proud to have been a veterinarian.

Dr. Gilbert Hoppenstedt:

Yes, absolutely.

Dr. Smith:

Thank you both for the interview. It's much appreciated.

Drs. Hoppenstedt:

It's a pleasure, quite an honor.