

James Andrew Baker

December 16, 1910 — April 14, 1975

Rich is the man who sees things newly, as if eyes had never before looked upon the earth. Richer is he who learns to look through the eyes of men who have gone before, and adds to their vision the freshness of his own insight.

K. L. Patton

James A. Baker, founder and late director of the Veterinary Virus Research Institute and the Cornell Research Laboratory for Diseases of Dogs, died suddenly on April 14, 1975. With his passing, not only veterinary virology but the many owners and fanciers of dogs who benefited from his advice have lost one of their most distinguished and dynamic personalities. It is impossible to abbreviate a life so full of vigor into a simple statement, for those who knew him as a fellow scientist, educator, or adviser could not fail to recognize his genius. He was, like many men ahead of their time, not without controversy but nevertheless universally respected for his accomplishments. His creation and pursuance of novel ideas have guided the course of infectious disease research in the veterinary field for more than two decades. He was never bound by traditional thinking—he was an innovator and stimulator. The force that drove him was legendary.

Drew, as he was known to his intimates, received his undergraduate education and the M.S. degree at Louisiana State University. In 1938 he received the Ph.D. degree from Cornell, where he worked under the tutelage of the late Dean William Hagan. His research was unique for the times, employing for the first time animals (platyfish) free from bacteria and other microorganisms for infectious disease study. The term *axenic* (“without strangers”) was introduced into the biological literature by Baker; a decade later germ-free animals became recognized as essential to many aspects of infectious disease research. After graduating from the New York State Veterinary College in 1940, the first Ph.D.-D.V.M. graduate, “Fish” Baker joined the Rockefeller Institute at Princeton, New Jersey, where he became greatly influenced by the thinking and attitudes of such distinguished scientists as Peyton Rous and Carl Ten Broek. During World War II he served with the U.S. Army on Grosse He, where he succeeded in developing attenuated viral vaccines against two of the most feared diseases of domestic animals—rinderpest and hog cholera. At the time of his death, he was still attempting to perfect immunization methods against the latter disease—in Mexico, for the disease has been declared eradicated in the United States. To preserve the United States free of hog cholera, Dr. Baker believed it necessary to maintain a vaccination belt to the south of the United States, where the disease is still common.

In 1947 Drew Baker returned to Cornell at the invitation of Dean Hagan to become a professor of bacteriology. At that time virology was not a major subject in veterinary schools, but Baker recognized its importance and the need for research as well as teaching. By the force of his unique personality he gained financial support to found in 1950 the Veterinary Virus Research Institute (VVRI) and the Cornell Research Laboratory for Diseases of Dogs. He became director of the institute in that year, a position he held until his death. Several important personalities assisted Drew Baker both in gaining initial support for the institute and in bringing to his attention important disease problems occurring in the field. The help and counsel of John and Spencer Olin, Colonel and Mrs. Lee Garnet Day, Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge, Mrs. Walter Teagle, Mr. Robert Woodruff, the Richard King Mellons, and others who gave encouragement in the early days continued to influence Dr. Baker in his attempt to improve animal health through field and laboratory research.

Over the succeeding twenty-five years, with resources derived largely from private subscription, the institute expanded and flourished under his leadership to become one of the leading veterinary research institutes of the world. Work concentrated primarily on the canine and bovine species, and many of the advances in veterinary virology had their origins in the VVRI, including the development of modern combined distemper-hepatitis vaccines; heterotypic vaccination concepts, using measles virus for distemper; discoveries involving canine adenoviruses and canine herpesvirus, bovine viral diarrhea and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis, and bovine chlamydial infections; discovery of canine brucellosis; identification of viruses and bacteria associated with respiratory illness in dogs and cattle; relationships between nutrition and disease; and the role of colostral protection. All of these areas required the development of new technologies.

Under Drew Baker's guidance the VVRI grew to its present state, a modern and well-equipped laboratory complex dedicated to solving disease problems arising from the field as well as to basic biomedical research. Dr. Baker always planned for the future. His greatest pride was in the fulfillment of his ideals through the scientific and humane accomplishments of his colleagues and students, six of whom became deans of veterinary colleges here and abroad. He demanded hard work from his staff but always gave generously of his time, advice, and enthusiasm for novel ideas. He never used the accomplishments of his students or colleagues for his own benefit, for he took greater satisfaction from their accomplishments—a trait derived, he said, from Dr. Ten Broek. Dr. Baker's eminence in infectious disease research was marked by many awards, including the Borden Award and the Gaines Award for his studies on cattle and dogs, respectively. Many students and scientists from various parts of the

world received training at the VVRI and were always welcomed and treated with his characteristically generous “southern hospitality.”

Drew Baker was known to members of the veterinary profession throughout the world, both in the United Kingdom and in Central and South America, where he presented talks at congresses and special symposia, and in the lesser traveled areas such as West Africa, where he received in 1965 a commendation from the president of the Republic of Mali for his efforts in establishing in that country a modern research and vaccine-production laboratory. He was due to retire in December of this year, and it is particularly sad that he was not spared to see the celebration in September marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the institute he built and to which he devoted the major portion of his life.

As most who knew him recognize, Dr. Baker’s wife, Dudley, played a key role throughout the institute’s development. Her encyclopedic knowledge and interest in the laboratory, its history, and the people who helped in its inception and growth and her tireless devotion both to the scientific accomplishments and to the people who have worked and studied at the institute are recorded both in mind and in the many reports and articles she has written and edited over the past twenty-five years. We join Dudley, whose interest in the institute and Cornell went far beyond those of “wife of the director,” and their son, Andrew, in mourning the loss of this man who literally became a legend in his own lifetime.

A. O. Betts, L. E. Carmichael