

John Hendrick Whitlock

September 10, 1913 — May 22, 1994

John Whitlock served the Veterinary College for fifty years (1944-94) in the role of parasitologist extraordinaire. He liked to quote Asa Chandler who compared a parasitologist to an orchid. “He requires long and careful nurturing, he develops slowly, and he is himself a parasite in that he is dependent on many other sciences for material aid. But when he comes to flower, he is a rare and beautiful object, scientifically speaking, and is usually slow in going to seed. He may not always smell like an orchid, but that might be a blessing in some circles/7

He also served the University as a Faculty Trustee (1971-76), a role of which he was very proud. He declared that the Board had treated both the University and himself with kindness and wisdom and upon his retirement, made over to the Board the choicest of his collection of verbal brickbats “The Academic Cynic’s Anthology”. One of his personal favorites came from Burns’, ‘To a Louse”.

Oh wad some Powr the giftie gie us To see oursels as others see us! It wad frae monie a blunder free us, An’ foolish notion:”

Laudable as this plea might be, it does present a grave temptation to the chroniclers of this complex and, by design, controversial genius.

John Whitlock received a D.V.M. degree from Iowa State University in 1934 and a Master of Science degree in Zoology from Kansas State University in 1935. His dual interests in the relative confines of veterinary medicine and the broad vistas of zoology characterized his academic life where his many writings (over a hundred journal articles and at least three textbooks) covered topics as narrow as “The administration of phenothiazine to sheep” and as expansive as “Parasitology, ecology and biometry” contained in four pages of the *British Veterinary Journal!* Throughout his career, he was unconcerned about fashion in science and pursued with equal vigor diverse topics which interested him, ‘Inherited eye defects in the guinea pig,’ “Feeder lamb loss in Genesee County”. He studiously committed to paper facts which he felt would be of value to other disciplines. His notation on new uses for oesophageal intubation for baby lambs (1954) was “rediscovered” in the 1970s and has become the universal method of administering emergency treatment to hypothermic lambs.

John Whitlock was a scientific prophet well before his time and he thoroughly enjoyed relating his works to homely origins. Thus his early (1958) study on the inheritance of resistance to trichostrongyloidosis in sheep was based on observations made in Ellis Hollow and involved a ram named, characteristically, “Violet”. This too was a landmark study in genetic resistance to intestinal worms.

Throughout it all, he enjoyed the company of distinguished scientists. He shared his parasitological studies with J.R. Georgi, J.V. Evans, L.Z. Saunders, P. Kennedy, S.J. Roberts, H.D. Crofton, J.O. Slocombe and his biometric calculations with M.R. Lynn, L.H. Ratcliffe, H.M. Taylor, W.T. Federer and D.S. Robson—he even diverted some of his efforts into those lesser parasites, the bacteria, in a paper with Julius Fabricant on the use of *Clostridium welchii* anaeroculture for the prevention of overeating disease in sheep. Given the catholic nature of his interests and published works, it is hardly surprising that one of John's later papers (1978) reflected his own career and interests "How to Live and Die with Ecologists".

In the Veterinary College of the times where teaching was didactic, authoritative and highly structured, John's instructional efforts were unorthodox, unusual and sometimes rambling. In lectures, he was somewhat less than organized in his approach and expansive in his content—none of your "Give us the facts, diagnosis and treatment", but rather a sporadic and ecological approach to the world of parasitism and certainly not confined to domesticated animals. Students in the practicum had their questions answered with a question in rebuttal. While generations of students flinched under this unusual tack, the Class of '53 invited John Whitlock to address their 25th class reunion as the professor who, in their experience, had taken an unusual and expansive ecological approach to the world of veterinary parasitology.

There was a cultivated Jekyll and Hyde aspect to John Whitlock's life—from humble beginnings on the Canadian prairie to Cornell Trustee. John kept his origins to himself and quietly enjoyed the contrast. In his extracurricular roles, he was an autocratic, outspoken Speaker of the University Assembly declaring that "the American University is a prototypic, organized anarchy where decision-making is a random activity". As a leader in the restructuring of Cornell to include a greater measure of student input, John was fond of quoting the *New York Times*, "Restructuring the self-governance of the University achieves, the same order of stewardship as the rearrangement of deck chairs on the Titanic".

In contrast, John Whitlock was a quiet and private supporter of many of the evolving and not necessarily popular movements of his time; student governance; women's rights and access of minorities to higher education. He declared during the troubles of the sixties "There is a weird modern idea that the University has somehow escaped standing in loco parentis to the students." He never subscribed to this "weird modern idea" and quietly pressed for many issues advantageous to our students; better nutrition, access to athletic facilities and better commonroom facilities. Most importantly, perhaps, he championed individual students whom he perceived were at a temporary disadvantage in our academic community. His support was not limited to well-intentioned advice but best

estimates suggest that a score of now veterinarians received from him financial support in time of dire need. This allowed them to finish on time and in good order. It is not surprising that his tangible legacy to the University is The Cornell Women in Science Fund to provide financial assistance to help women students improve the quality of their lives while at Cornell.

During his student days, John was an active thespian and a devotee of classical music. He was a competent double bass player and performed in the Cornell Symphony under Karel Husa. Later in life he was an ardent fisher and power boat captain. He was supported in it all by Pauline, his wife, and they reared two successful sons, Ward and John, in a rambling old house, formerly an inn, across the Ellis Hollow valley from his self-designed sheep barns. John was one of the founders of the Ellis Hollow Community Center, and supervised the rehabilitation of the old school house at the corner of Ellis Hollow and Turkey Hill Roads, the first home of the Center. For years he was the stentorian auctioneer at the Ellis Hollow Country Fair. John and Pauline liked big cars. They acquired President Day's used Lincoln Continental, which John proudly parked behind the postmortem room of Moore Lab. The Lincoln suffered a large dent when an ailing horse staggered over and fell on the prized car, much to the amusement of envious colleagues.

Following his retirement, Dr. Whitlock continued to bring his beagle, //Pelly,,/ to the Small Animal Clinic for weekly baths and routine health care. Receptionists and technicians became his friends and he enjoyed immensely meeting veterinary students and was moved by their attentive interactions with him. He told and retold familiar stories about his life in the profession, his favorites being hoary Cornell veterinary chestnuts. Often he shared candy with his listeners and he would leave, Pelly on lead, with a promise to revisit next week.

John Whitlock strolled through life, nattily dressed, possessed of a keen mind and a fine sense of humor. Mostly he chose to be outrageous rather than ordinary. He enjoyed wrestling with the large and small issues of ecology and university governance and left notable contributions thereto. A self-styled "academic cynic" he was, in fact a bellicose romantic engaged in a life-long courtship of Cornell and its contents. He had a notable weakness for the underdog and provided intangible and tangible support for same, an aspect of his life which he carefully downplayed but which will be a major legacy. He walked with intellectual kings and enjoyed the jaunt. His oldest friend and mentor at Cornell, a man of sparse words summarized it all. "John was smart and had some wild ideas." A worthy definition and epitaph for any academic. John Whitlock was indeed smart and many of his original ideas and ideals have already come to fruition.

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