John Bentinck-Smith was born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts, as one of the four children of William and Marion (Jordan) Bentinck-Smith. He attended Harvard University and graduated with an A.B. degree in Biology in 1941. He was one of the first who, with a basic interest in further studies in comparative biological sciences, recognized the significant opportunities veterinary medicine had to offer. While at that time significant experience in the husbandry of farm animals was normally a prerequisite for admission, John was admitted to the first year class of the New York State Veterinary College at Cornell in the Fall of 1941, even though his animal husbandry experience consisted solely of that received from “living in a household with the family cat, raising Gordon Setters, and a brief adventure with twelve rabbits!” Thus, even at this early age, the faculty recognized the academic potential that John brought to the College and the profession.

As was the case for almost all veterinarians graduating during World War II, John entered the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps as a 1st Lieutenant immediately after graduation and was honorably discharged in 1946 with the rank of Captain. Thereafter, he spent two years in small animal practice at the Angell Memorial Animal Hospital of Boston and Springfield followed by six months at the Bronx Zoo as a Research Fellow of the New York Zoological Society in Comparative Pathology.

In the fall of 1949, Dr. Bentinck-Smith returned to his veterinary roots, being appointed Assistant Professor of Pathology at the New York State Veterinary College. His duties included determining both the gross and histologic pathology of animals that had either died in the veterinary clinic or were sent to the autopsy room by veterinarians in practice outside the college. At the end of his first year on the faculty, John found his true academic niche when he and Dr. Charles Rickard, then a recently appointed Assistant Professor of Clinical Pathology, changed academic roles. From then until the end of his academic career, John was actively involved in teaching, clinical service and research in clinical pathology. He is widely recognized as one of the “founding fathers” of this clinical discipline in veterinary medicine.

Dr. Bentinck-Smith was promoted to full Professor in 1958 and remained at the College until 1981 when he retired and was awarded the title of “Professor of Clinical Pathology Emeritus.” During his tenure at Cornell, he spent one sabbatical year at the Royal Veterinary College, Stockholm, Sweden in 1955-56, another at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in 1966-67, and a third at the University of Edinborough, Scotland in 1973-74. For the
last several years of his career, Dr. Bentinck-Smith was also the Chief of the Clinical Pathology Section of the Department of Clinical Sciences and the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.

From the start of his career, Dr. Bentinck-Smith found the academic atmosphere stimulating. His research interests involved studies to ascertain normal electrolyte physiology as well as abnormalities in electrolyte metabolism occurring during disease processes in domestic animals. He also described the microbiological basis of several dermatologic and other diseases of domestic animals. For many years, with Ms. Louise Barr as his only technician, Dr. Bentinck-Smith directed the clinical pathology laboratory of the College, providing superb support for the clinical pathology needs of clinicians in the large and small animal clinics as well as the ambulatory service. John was known to have said that he enjoyed the academic atmosphere because: “I have good colleagues working with me.” There is no question that the success of many of his colleagues was due, in large part, to the encouragement and support that Professor Bentinck-Smith provided to them!

During his time at Cornell, Professor Bentinck-Smith made significant contributions to research and to improvements in clinical medicine; however, his primary interest and devotion was teaching. This he did essentially full time, not only in the didactic teaching program but by involving his students in the day to day activities in the clinical pathology laboratory, e.g., analyzing the myriad blood, tissue, culture and other specimens submitted by clinicians from both inside and outside the college. This “hands-on” experience provided superb training to over two thousand Cornell veterinary students taught by Dr. Bentinck-Smith. He was quoted as saying: “I never object to teaching people, if they are anxious to learn.” The enthusiasm that he showed for his work was infectious, assuring that all of his students were anxious to learn. He demanded much from his students, but was always present to provide the necessary assistance to assure that each student met those demands.

After retiring from Cornell, John accepted a position as the first Professor of Clinical Pathology at the newly opened College of Veterinary Medicine at Mississippi State University in Starkville, Mississippi, retiring from that position in 1990.

Outside of his academic career, John had several interests. He loved sailing, a sport he was involved in since childhood. He recounted a racing experience during his youth when that of another participant in the race, John F. Kennedy, rammed his boat. With a wry smile, John reported that Kennedy paid for the damages! During the summer of 1957, John was sailing on Cayuga Lake with a veterinary student as his first mate. A thunderstorm arose suddenly capsizing John’s 24 four foot racing sloop! Fortunately, both survived and the boat was recovered.
He was also interested in woodworking. For many years he had the desire to construct a ‘classic’ sailboat from raw materials. After retirement from Mississippi State University, he took a course in small boat building on Cape Cod and built, from scratch, a gaff-rigged sailing sloop, the envy of Cayuga sailors that, unfortunately, he had the opportunity to sail only a few times. The joy of completing the task was sufficient for John.

In 1961, John married Marjory (Ellis) Bentinck-Smith, a Tompkins County 4-H Extension Agent. They shared a loving 43 years together, and raised four children. He was extremely devoted to his family and he and Marge had many friends. He was always anxious to chat amiably with friends and colleagues, but never about himself. Despite his myriad accomplishments, he was a very humble and private person and very few, if any, of his acquaintances were aware of his accomplishments as clinician, researcher, teacher, husband, father, and friend.

Dr. Bentinck-Smith is survived by his children: Laura, Alan, Roger, and James; two grandchildren, Tyler and Davis Bentinck-Smith; and a sister, Joan Bentinck-Smith. His wife, Marjory, died on June 21, 2005, one month after her husband.

Leland E. Carmichael, Francis A. Kallfelz