

A Biography of
Henry E. Grossman, DVM
Class of 1938, College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University
Author: Dr. Donald F. Smith, *Austin O. Hooey Dean Emeritus*

©New York State Veterinary College Graduation Photograph



Henry E. Grossman, 1938

Beloved Veterinarian

Henry Grossman loved veterinary practice, and his clients and their pets loved him. For almost 60 years, he operated the Kings County Veterinary Hospital in Brooklyn, one of the first facilities of its kind in New York City. He served with distinction in numerous leadership capacities at the city, state and national levels, and received multiple honors from colleagues.

Henry endured difficult challenges in his youth. When his mother was left without support after his father's untimely death, he and his older brother were accommodated at New York's Hebrew Orphan Asylum. Henry was then sent by himself to a foster home on a Connecticut tobacco farm. Reunited with his family after his mother remarried, he returned to New York and completed high school. At the urging of a prominent city veterinarian, Dr. Frank Bloom, Henry applied to Cornell and entered the veterinary college in 1931.

Seventeen Jewish students were admitted into the freshman veterinary class that year. The several-fold increase in Jews—this proportion (approximately 20%) would be sustained throughout the decade—was intended to dissuade those who were lobbying to start another veterinary college on Long Island.¹

Though tuition was free at Cornell, living expenses were challenging for students with meager resources, and Henry took a leave after his sophomore year. He resumed his veterinary studies in 1935 – He returned to Ithaca married – and graduated three years later. Henry and his wife, Florence, enjoyed their years together in Ithaca while she worked and he studied.

Dr. Grossman returned to New York City after graduation and started a small animal practice in his mother-in-law's home on a quiet street in Brooklyn. "*We cleared out a few rooms in*

¹ Some New York City Jews contemplated starting a new veterinary college on Long Island to accommodate the growing number of Jews (and perhaps others) who were unable to gain admission at Cornell. (Tevis Goldhaft '35, personal communications 2007- 2009).

the house and it became a veterinary hospital; however, because of the location on a side street, people were not aware of the clinic,” recalls Mrs. Grossman.²

Business was very poor and Henry considered abandoning practice altogether to join the federal government as a meat inspector. Though that would have provided a stable income, his wife convinced him that they could have a future in private practice if they could just find a more suitable location for their clinic. They located a building at a busy intersection of Flatbush Avenue and rented the third floor, converting it into a small veterinary clinic.

Because visual attraction was the principal form of advertising at that time, they put up a neon sign of a Scottish Terrier to symbolize President Roosevelt’s popular dog, Fala. With the increased visibility of the clinic, the business grew quickly and the hospital expanded onto the second, and later the ground, floors. Ever wanting to improve his credentials and learning opportunities, Dr. Grossman purchased the entire building and applied successfully to become a member of the American Animal Hospital Association.

Mrs. Grossman worked alongside her husband in both clinical and professional activities. She restrained animals, prepared surgical packs and often managed the hospital’s business. She also joined Henry at meetings of city and state veterinarians and served in leadership positions for the veterinary auxiliary.

Dr. Grossman served on the executive board of the New York City Veterinary Medical Association for ten years. While its president in 1953, he inaugurated a postgraduate program that inspired national seminar courses. In 1962 the Metropolitan Veterinary Practitioners' Society honored him for meritorious service.

He also accepted increasingly important roles in the New York State Veterinary Medical Society, rising to the position of president in 1966. While chairman of the public relations committee, he authored a leaflet on Air Force veterinarians, and another on the principles of professional conduct. He was the first to receive his state society's Distinguished Life Membership Award.

Always loyal to Cornell University, Dr. Grossman was designated as a *Research Partner* of the Cornell Research Laboratory for Diseases of Dogs.³ He was also a consultant to the Brooklyn Chronic Disease Hospital and the Veterans Administration Hospital.

In 1998, illness forced Dr. Grossman to retire from practice, and he died on October 6, 2000. Florence, who graciously established a scholarship at Cornell in Henry’s honor, lived for many years independently in Manhattan in proximity to her four daughters. She died on January 19, 2010.

² Personal communication, 2007.

³ Now called the *James A. Baker Institute for Animal Health*.

Interview

[Listen to the Interview](#)

Subject: Henry E. Grossman, DVM
Interviewee: Florence Grossman
Interviewer: Donald Smith, DVM
Interview Date: November 6, 2007
Interview Location: New York, N.Y.



Photograph provided by Mrs. Grossman 2007

Henry and Florence Grossman, AVMA, Atlantic City, 1950



Photograph by Donald F. Smith

Mrs. Florence Grossman, 11/6/07

Interviewer's Note:

Even during my early years at Cornell while working as a large animal surgeon, I was familiar with Dr. Henry Grossman. When his name was mentioned, I would imagine a successful New York City veterinarian, influential in the state's professional association, and one of the leaders of the veterinary profession. By the time I became dean in 1997, Dr. Grossman was nearing the end of his career and I never had the opportunity to get to know him personally. I became acquainted with his wife, Florence, in the years following her Henry's death in 2000. However, it was not until I had the privilege of this interview in November 2007 that I began to more fully appreciate the impact and influence of this visionary veterinarian. Like many of his Jewish colleagues for whom Cornell was not always the very accommodating place to study and live, Dr. Grossman eschewed any negative feelings that might have been justified, and became an ardent supporter of his alma mater. One of their daughters, Nancy (a graduate of the human ecology program at Cornell), participated in this interview. Mrs. Grossman died on January 19, 2010. (Dr. Donald F. Smith)

Dr. Donald Smith:

My name is Donald Smith. We're at the home of Mrs. Florence Grossman. Her husband, Dr. Henry Grossman, graduated from Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine in 1938. I'm here with Mrs. Grossman and one of her daughters, Nancy,¹ and I would like her to describe some of the characteristics of her husband, who died in 2000², but who is fondly remembered by you, Mrs. Grossman.

Could you start by describing how he became a veterinarian? What in his childhood led to his interest in veterinary medicine, and how did he become a veterinary student?

Mrs. Florence Grossman:

He really became a veterinary student because of a fluke. His brother graduated from Cornell in 1927 and one of his brother's pals at school was a man named Frank Bloom.³ Frank Bloom had studied veterinary medicine and opened a small animal practice. My husband had been going to the Ag School at Cornell and Frank Bloom suggested to my brother-in-law that, perhaps Henry would be interested in veterinary medicine.

Henry looked into it and decided he would give it a try. He applied to the veterinary college and was accepted. He started at Cornell in 1931. He was a student and then dropped out for a few years because of financial conditions at home. That was the time of the Depression and money was not available to continue his education. However, after a couple of years of being away from college, he returned and got his degree in 1938.

Henry always wanted to have his own practice. At that time, we were married. My mother had a tremendous home and he decided that that would be the place to start. We cleared out a few rooms in the house and it became a veterinary hospital. However, the

¹ Nancy G. Grossman, CHE '67

² Dr. Grossman died October 6, 2000.

³ Frank Bloom '30

house was located on a side street, and there was absolutely no way for the public to know that a veterinarian was there.

Because there was no money coming in from the practice, he thought that maybe he ought to work for the Bureau of Animal Industry.⁴ That idea didn't appeal to me at all, and I said, "*No, that's not the way to go*".

So he rented the third story in a business building on the corner in Brooklyn where Flatbush, Foster and Bedford Avenues all meet⁵. At that time, you were allowed to advertise, so he had a neon sign made in the shape of a Scottie. Scotties were very popular then because President Roosevelt had his little Fala, and he was given a lot of publicity.⁶ So this sign was made in the shape of a Scottie and it said "Dog and Cat Hospital". It was quite something to see—very different from every other sign on Flatbush Avenue, which is a very busy thoroughfare.

He practiced on the third floor. At that time money was very scarce. My mother lost her home, so my husband and I moved into the hospital with our first child⁷ and we lived there for a while. The waiting room became our living room after the office hours were over. My daughter really became very fond of the animals in the hospital. She would get up in the morning, climb out of her crib and play with the animals. To this day, she still is an animal-lover.

When the second floor became available, we moved downstairs and occupied both floors (for the hospital and living quarters). Soon after that, I was pregnant with my second child. It was time to move on out of the hospital and we rented a home not too far from the office.

When the street floor became available, Henry decided we should buy the building. Which we did. He hired an architect who laid out the plans for the hospital according to my husband's directions and that was the beginning of the small animal practice.

It was a very interesting practice and the only one in the neighborhood at that time. My husband just loved every minute of being a veterinary practitioner. We also decided at that time that we should have some help in the hospital so he always had at least one veterinarian working for him. He took in a partner (who was a Cornell Veterinary College graduate) and everything worked well. The partnership lasted ten years, then the doctor decided he would either have the practice for himself or he would leave, which he did.⁸

⁴ Bureau of Animal Industry, part of the United States Department of Agriculture was responsible for meat inspection.

⁵ The hospital was located at 1300 Flatbush Ave, Brooklyn, NY.

⁶ President Roosevelt's Scottish Terrier, Fala, was a popular icon in the 1940s.

⁷ Lyn

⁸ Mrs. Grossman added later: "Instead of creating a 60/40 partnership, as all the other established veterinarians seemed to be doing when they took in a partner, Henry created a 50/50 partnership so his colleague would feel like a real partner. Everything seemed to work well through the initial ten-year agreement. After the initial agreement was over, however, the partner told Henry he would either have the

As I said, we certainly took advantage of having professional help. It gave us time to do a lot of traveling—we traveled all over the world. Henry always kept in touch with the hospital, and that was the way things went until he became ill and had to give up practice in 1998.

But in all the years that my husband was working, he really loved practicing. He enjoyed the clients, who also liked him. Henry was very outgoing and always had good relationships with our clients, who were really very loyal to him and stayed with us for many, many years.

I must say it's been a wonderful experience for me. I also enjoyed everything about veterinary medicine and often helped my husband in the office. It was a pleasurable experience. I guess I always liked animals myself so it was very easy for me to fit into this role.

Dr. Smith:

Describe what you would do by holding animals and helping him during those early years.

Mrs. Grossman:

I cleaned cages if I had to. I helped restrain the animals. I sometimes assisted in surgery, not actually doing anything, but I did make the surgical packs and I made sure that everything was in them for the particular procedures. He did lots of spays and lots of neutering of cats, and I can remember holding those cats just a certain way so that he could do whatever he had to do.

I acted as a receptionist many times. I did the payrolls, paid the bills, did all the things that I could do to help ease the responsibilities. I really enjoyed spending time in the hospital and, of course, I always enjoyed spending time with my husband.

Unfortunately, he became ill and had to give up practice. When we closed the practice, neighbors who didn't even have animals came over to us and said how much they enjoyed having a hospital there and wished us luck. It was a very sad occasion when we had to evacuate the building because we wanted to sell it at that point. There was no point in keeping it.

My husband practiced for sixty years and was very active, not only in the practice, but at the university (Cornell). We always went up to the conferences in January,⁹ although we hated the weather—it was always so cold. But it was great seeing classmates of his and other veterinarians that we used to see through the ages.

entire practice for himself or he would leave. He wanted my husband out. Henry was devastated. Only 58-years-old, he didn't want to give up his practice. Fortunately, since Henry owned the building, his partner couldn't force him out. The partner left, taking clients' lists and office staff with him, and opened up a practice nearby. Ironically, he stopped practicing many years before Henry.

⁹ Annual continuing education programs for veterinarians were held at Cornell University. The Annual Conference for Veterinarians was held at Cornell in January of each year.

Henry was very active in the City Association,¹⁰ and the State Society.¹¹ He was chairman of one of the programs for the centennial meeting of the State Society in New York City. He loved doing all those extra things.

Henry instigated the practice of having postgraduate courses in New York City. He arranged to have the classes at the New York University Medical Center. And he had people come from various schools throughout the country to give lectures, as well as professors from Cornell. I think this was one of the highlights of his being a professional.¹²

My husband authored a couple of leaflets, one on public relations and another which was titled, “*So They Have Veterinarians in the Armed Forces?*” Many thousands of these pamphlets were distributed through the country. He also spoke at the high schools in the city about the profession. They were always happy to have him and the students always responded very well with all kinds of questions.¹³

Dr. Smith:

Tell us about your friendship with Dr. Zimmerman and Mrs. Zimmerman.¹⁴

Mrs. Grossman:

Well, there were of course certain men in the profession whom we became very friendly with. One of them was Irving Zimmerman who practiced in Manhattan, and his wife, Pearl. I don't think she had anything to do with the practice, but she certainly was a good cheerleader for him. He was a very quiet man, but he accomplished a great deal in his quiet manner. We often had dinner with the Zimmermans and even traveled together.

Another friend of ours, Stanley Penny, was a great friend¹⁵. He practiced in Brooklyn and subsequently moved to Arizona: I am still friendly and in contact with his wife, Kay.

We had many friends in the profession. In fact, most of our social life was spent with veterinarians. We used to get together at each other's homes, have dinner parties. When I lived on Long Island, I always had a summer party and had fifty people, all veterinarians and their wives from Brooklyn, New York, and Long Island. We always had a wonderful day at my home and it was just a great experience.

¹⁰ Veterinary Medical Association of New York City.

¹¹ New York State Veterinary Medical Society (NYSVMS).

¹² Besides being active in the State and City Societies, Henry was also active in the American Veterinary Medical Association. We attended many AVMA meetings around the country, taking our four girls with us. Additionally, my husband was proud of being one of the founders of the Cornell Research Laboratory for Diseases of Dogs (this is now the James A. Baker Institute).

¹³ He received a Certificate of Appreciation from the President of the United States (Nixon) for service contributed to the nation.

¹⁴ Irving Zimmerman '35, and his wife, Pearl. Dr. Zimmerman was a classmate of Dr. Grossman when they started veterinary college together in 1931.

¹⁵ Stanley Penny '35, and his wife, Catherine; also a classmate in 1931.

Dr. Smith:

Your husband was the president of the New York State Veterinary Medical Society and that meant a great deal to you and to him.

Mrs. Grossman:

Yes, my husband was president of the New York State Society¹⁶, the New York City Association. He worked on many committees for the NYSVMS, including program chairman and public relations. He did a lot of planning for the meetings as site chairman.

When the State Society had a meeting in the City, he was in charge of the television program. I remember him being worried about pigs coming from New Jersey. He was concerned about them being here on time for the doctors to operate on them with the television going so that the procedures were available to everybody who came to the meeting. He always had something doing for the women, who always had a good relationship with each other. They had great dinner-dances.

I took part in the women's auxiliary, which of course did a little fund-raising for the students. I was president of the City Auxiliary and the State Auxiliary¹⁷ as well. And I must say being president of the State Auxiliary was rather exciting because I had to have conversation and correspondence with people throughout the state. That gave me knowledge of how people worked in other places beside New York City. It was very illuminating to hear how they conducted their lives and helped their husbands in their practices.

When I was president of the Auxiliary, I used to go to Ithaca for the meetings once a year and it was a great privilege to meet some of his faculty who were still active, as well as the wives of the doctors. When I was first married, my husband was a junior, so I spent a year in Ithaca—freezing—going down town to Ithaca to work, and then walking up that hill to go home, sometimes for lunch and then after the day was over. We had a very nice little apartment and I was certainly happy there.¹⁸

I can remember being at Cornell that year when I was working. Thanksgiving was coming and the University had a tremendous Thanksgiving dinner for all the students who couldn't go home. It was given in Willard Straight.¹⁹ That was quite an experience, seeing all those foreign students and others who came from a great distance and couldn't make it home for the weekend.

It was the same thing during the Christmas holidays. Of course, I had to be there for my job, so we spent our Christmas on campus. It was always pleasant for me to be in a college town. I think it's a very invigorating experience to live in a college town. There's so much to do and it's nice to see all the students scurrying about their business on campus.

¹⁶ President of the New York State Veterinary Medical Society, 1966.

¹⁷ President of the Auxiliary to the NYSVMS, 1964.

¹⁸ Located on Lake Street, near the campus.

¹⁹ Willard Straight Union, a building for student functions on central Cornell campus.

Dr. Smith:
You met Mrs. Hagan.²⁰

Mrs. Grossman:

Yes, at that time we were there, Dean Hagan and his wife was very active in the student body. She was a tremendous woman—she did a lot of good—and everybody was very fond of her. At that time there were only 35 students in the class, and so throughout the year they invited the students to their home, but not at the same time.

They were collectors of puzzles. After dinner we spent the whole evening working on the puzzles and it was a wonderful experience. I can remember to this day, they had a puzzle of their own that they performed and we begged them to tell us how they solved that puzzle. At the end of the evening, they told us and it was really quite simple. Everybody was sitting around in a circle and I can remember Mrs. Hagan having a cane and pointing at everybody and then, suddenly, she would say, “The magic circle is now open”, and we would have conversation. At one point, she would say, “The magic circle is now closed”, and Dean Hagan would go into another room.

She would select a person from the circle and then, when Dean Hagan would come back, he always chose the right person that she had picked out. We couldn't figure out how they did that. At the end of the evening, they told us that it was the person who spoke the last that was the one who was the magic person. That was a lot of fun. The Dean and his wife were very helpful to the students and they were very gracious and really held in awe. We all thought they were something very special.

Dr. Smith:

Could you tell us about your husband growing up? He was separated from his siblings growing up and then he also had a dog.

Mrs. Grossman:

My husband grew up in a family with, of course, his mother and father, and three brothers, and their Pekingese dog named Lee Chee.

Unfortunately, my husband's father died at a very early age and so my mother-in-law couldn't manage to have all of the children at home because she had no means of support. So the two older ones went to the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and my husband went to a foster farm in Connecticut. The baby stayed with my mother-in-law.

The foster home was a tobacco farm and Henry's job was picking the worms off the tobacco leaves. He really enjoyed being with that family and spoke very highly of them.

Ms. Nancy Grossman:

Henry was three when his father passed away and he was in the foster home until he was seven, at which point his mother had resettled with a new husband and was able to bring all three children home.

²⁰ Wife of William A. Hagan, dean 1932-59.

Mrs. Grossman:

Henry spoke very highly of his step-father, who introduced the family to developing film. And he set up a dark room in a basement and all the boys became very interested in photography. My husband always developed his own film.

Dr. Smith:

I have one other question. There is a scholarship at Cornell for veterinary students in your husband's name. How do you regard that?

Mrs. Grossman:

Well, when my husband passed away, he had such affection for the university and the Veterinary School and I just felt that I had to do something in his memory because I thought he deserved that, and so I set up a scholarship. Well, it really isn't a scholarship fund—it's really an endowment fund and the purpose of it is not to give any money to the smartest person, because the smart ones always seem to be able to get assistance on their own.

When we were up at Cornell, it was tough going. I had a little job but it didn't really earn much. I had to send money home and there wasn't very much money coming from my husband's family. His mother and step-father were gone, so every penny that I made went to our expenses.

I thought it would be helpful to people who really needed something to help them pay off their rent, or loan, or whatever. If they needed money for food, there would be something there. And I must say it's worked out very well. Every year, somebody applies for the endowment fund and whoever the College sees fit is given the money. There was no obligation to return it. It was just something to tide them over for whatever purpose. And I have really received wonderful letters of appreciation from different people at the school and it always makes me feel really great to know that I'm able to help somebody.

Nancy:

Now, it's my understanding that my father was especially thankful to Cornell, not only because it enabled him to become a veterinarian and to live the very comfortable life that he led, and to associate with the wonderful people with whom he associated, but that when he originally was at Cornell and in the vet school and ran out of money, his mother having passed away, he went to talk to the dean and said that he could not afford to continue in school, and the dean without hesitation told him not to worry—that he would be helped out financially. Eventually, my father did decide that he would take some time off to earn money and not depend on the school, but he was very thankful to the school for offering and for helping him when he really needed help.

Mrs. Grossman:

Actually, he was very proud of the fact that he asked for \$800, which was a tremendous amount of money at that time. And they never asked him for somebody to be a co-guarantor. He always thought it wonderful that they would just trust him. So that was another reason that I'm happy that I could set up the endowment fund.

Dr. Smith:

Well, your husband and his practice are very well-known in the State of New York and one of the reasons I wanted to have you do this interview was because he was such a major force for veterinary medicine here in New York City and across the State.

I really want to thank you for doing this interview and I very much appreciate your willingness to open up your life and his life for future generations at Cornell University. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Grossman:

You're welcome. It has been a pleasure.