

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

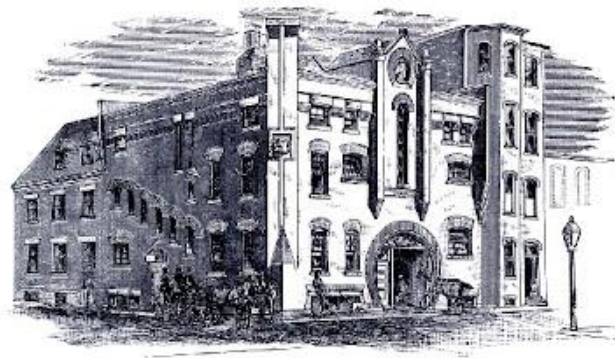
Harvard's School of Veterinary Medicine

By Dr. Donald F. Smith, with Dr. Howard H. Erickson
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The *New York Times* called Harvard Veterinary School the “leading school of the science in the country and the one to which the present development of veterinary medicine in the United States is largely due.” The date was Dec. 2, 1900, and the *Times* was mourning the anticipated closure due to lack of funding. Harvard’s veterinary school and clinics closed the following year.

Established in 1882 to serve humanitarian as well as economic and public health interests,¹ Harvard maintained the Village Street Hospital for the treatment and observation of sick animals. The hospital had an entrance door large enough to accommodate a circus elephant. According to the *Times*, more small and large animal patients were admitted to Harvard at that time than to any other veterinary college in the United States.² The school also maintained a free clinic on Piedmont Street, both for charity and to expand the teaching resources of the school.

Though it was originally aligned with Harvard’s Bussey Institute which had an undergraduate school of agriculture and horticulture, the veterinary school had a focus on comparative medicine, and many of the faculty came from either the medical school or the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. When the school fell on financial hard times, it was placed under the administration of the medical school, though it received no financial support from either the university or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.



Harvard School of Veterinary Medicine, circa 1883
(Image from Countway Library of Medicine,
Alliance of the Boston Medical Library and Harvard Medical School)

There were fewer than 130 veterinary graduates during the 20-year history of the school and over half practiced in Massachusetts alongside Americans who had attended veterinary colleges in Toronto, Montreal and New York City.³

Two Harvard graduates are well known for their major contributions to veterinary education and science. One was Richard P. Lyman, Jr. (MDV 1894). The son of the School's dean, the younger Lyman was in clinical practice for 17 years and also taught at the Kansas City Veterinary School before becoming the founding dean of Michigan State's College of Veterinary Medicine in 1910.



*Langdon Frothingham,
Harvard veterinary graduate (MDV, 1889)*

The other was Langdon Frothingham (MDV 1889). His initial job was at the University of Nebraska where he was director of the pathobiology laboratory. He was also the university's first football coach, and the only undefeated (2-0) and unscored-upon coach in the history of Nebraska football.

Nebraska football notwithstanding, Frothingham's more notable achievement occurred in Dresden, Germany between 1892 and 1894 when he worked with Heinrich Johne. They co-discovered the infectious disease that caused chronic diarrhea and weight loss in cattle, originally thought to be intestinal tuberculosis. A new organism was discovered by the two scientists and the disease was renamed "pseudotuberculous enteritis," known today as Johne's Disease.

Returning to the United States in 1895, Frothingham worked briefly at Yale, then as instructor in pathology at Harvard. His brilliant research in veterinary pathology, including important

articles on rabies, spanned three decades until he retired in 1928 from Harvard's medical school, where he had been reassigned after the veterinary school closed. The late E.L. Stubbs, veterinary pathologist and historian, wrote that Frothingham "reigned alone during the 19th century as a veterinary pathologist in the United States" and was a "leading authority on animal pathology in Boston medical circles."⁴

One can only speculate how much greater our veterinary profession would be today if Harvard's veterinary school was still in existence, and integrated within the Boston medical community as it was over a century ago.

¹ Tiegen, Philip M and Sheryl A. Blair, The Massachusetts Veterinary profession, 1882-1904: A Case Study. Historical Journal of Massachusetts, Winter 1977. 63-73.

² This is not likely to be accurate because the McKillip Veterinary College in Chicago was famous for its large caseload which was reported to have exceeded 27,500 in 1899 (Ref. J.F. Smithcors, The Veterinarian in American 1625-1975, American Veterinary Publications, Inc. 1975. p134).

³ Besides Harvard, the majority of Americans practicing in Massachusetts were graduates of Canadian colleges, either Andrew Smith's Ontario Veterinary College in Toronto or the Montreal Veterinary College where Duncan McEachern was principal; or the American Veterinary College in New York City where Alexandre Liautard was principal.

⁴ E.L.Stubbs, Biographical Sketch: Langdon Frothingham (1866-1935). Vet Path 1966 2:565.

KEYWORDS:

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.

Dr. Smith thanks Professor Howard H. Erickson, Professor Emeritus, Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine, for his support, especially with reference to the contributions of Dr. Langdon Frothingham.