

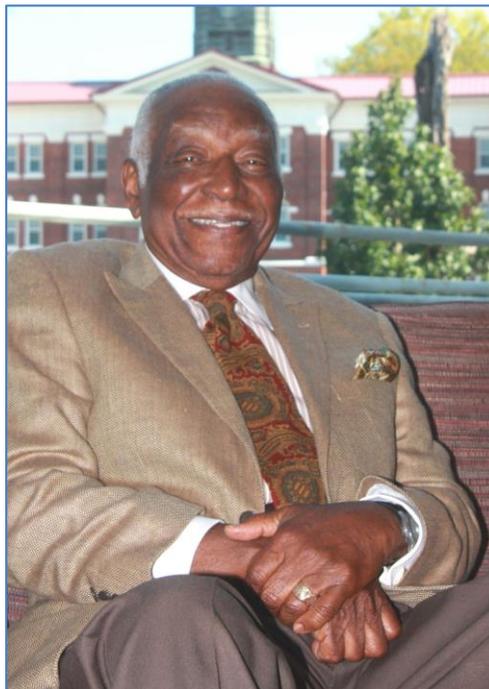
Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Tuskegee and Cornell's Shared Legacy in Graduate Education

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
August 20, 2013

While visiting Tuskegee University last September to present a paper on One Health, I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Eugene W. Adams, one of the college's pioneers and most distinguished faculty. Dr. Adams had received his DVM from Kansas State University in 1944 and joined the fledgling veterinary school at Tuskegee as instructor seven years later. He later became associate dean for academic affairs, a position he held until 1983¹. One of his most memorable accomplishments was authoring the history of the veterinary school in a book called, "The Legacy", published in 1995.²

Now in his 90s, Dr. Adams proudly told me how he had traveled to Cornell University for graduate work in the late 1950s and had received his PhD in pathology in 1961.³ He was followed a short time later by two colleagues, Dr. W. C. Bowie, who received his PhD in physiology in 1960 and by Dr. R. C. Williams (PhD, anatomy, 1961). All three men became leaders of the college with Dr. Bowie serving as dean for 18 years.



Eugene W. Adams, Professor Emeritus, Tuskegee University
(Photo by the author, 2012)

In the early 1930s Frederick Douglass Patterson, who was to become one of the nation's most important academic leaders of higher education, completed graduate studies at Cornell in poultry pathology. He was the first faculty member at Tuskegee to receive a PhD and soon thereafter became the third president of the university. He founded the veterinary college in 1945, and was the lead architect in establishing the United Negro College Fund (1946) as well as the Tuskegee airmen program during World War II. I often refer to him as one of the ten most important veterinarians in US history and perhaps the most important American-born academic veterinarian.⁴

Dr. Adams credits the warm relationship between Cornell's Dean William A. Hagan and Tuskegee's Dean T. S. Williams for making it possible for Tuskegee faculty to attend Cornell in the 1950s for graduate training, and for paving the way for others to follow in the 1960s and 1970s.

Hagan and Williams had much in common, both having received their DVM degrees from Kansas State University. Hagan had also been chair of the AVMA's first institutional review team that eventually recommended the full accreditation of Tuskegee in 1954.

Dr. Adams recalled his days at Cornell fondly. He studied for his PhD alongside future Cornell professors Drs. John King and Dan Tapper, and never recalls hearing a racial slur or a negative comment from anyone at the university. That was unlike some other universities at the time, and he attributes Cornell's welcoming atmosphere to the leadership of Dean Hagan. Dr. Adams also received a research stipend from the college that equaled his fellowship from Tuskegee. Together, those provided him with a salary equivalent to what he had as a full faculty member before his educational leave.

During his first year in Ithaca, Dr. Adams rented a room on Linden Avenue. When his family joined him later, they stayed in Cascadilla Hall on the edge of campus.

Several veterinary colleges, notably Kansas State, Iowa State, Michigan State and the University of Pennsylvania as well as Cornell, were instrumental in enrolling African-American students into their DVM programs prior to the opening of Tuskegee in 1945. However, the Tuskegee-Cornell partnership for PhD education in the early years of the institution stands alone and highlights the role that committed leadership --- in this case, Deans Williams and Hagan --- played in establishing and advancing the reputation of the new college.

¹ Dr. Adams then became vice provost until he retired in 1989.

² Adams, Eugene W. *The Legacy. A History of The Tuskegee School of Veterinary Medicine*. The Media Center Press, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama. 1995.

³ Adams, Eugene W. (DVM, PhD, retired faculty member at Tuskegee University), interview with Donald F. Smith (Cornell University) 2012 Sept 21.

⁴ James Law (born in Scotland) and Alexandre Liautard (born in France), are in my view the most transformational veterinarians in US history.

KEYWORDS:

Tuskegee University
History of Veterinary Medicine
African-American Veterinarians
Eugene W. Adams
W.C. Bowie
Frederick Douglass Patterson
William A. Hagan
T.S. Williams
Cornell University

TOPIC:

African American Veterinarians

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.