

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Common Names Only 70 Years Ago, They Are Now Unrecognized Veterinary Colleges

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
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Most veterinarians are familiar with the obituary section of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (JAVMA). Each issue contains the names and usually a synopsis of the lives and professional activities of recently-deceased veterinarians. Behind each name is a life of service, and in many cases an intriguing array of activities associated with the profession as well as a glimpse into their personal and family lives.

Most describe the lives of men who died in their 80s and 90s, and often wartime service is part of their obituary. Their colleges are also listed and year of graduation, as in this sampling from the September 1st issue of the Journal: TEX '44, GA '51, ISU '50, OKL '54, AUB '56. These are colleges we all recognize.

But the obituaries of veterinarians who died in the early post WWII era also cite colleges that include a hodge-podge of unfamiliar names, institutions that were active in the early decades of the 20th century but long forgotten by the profession. How many of us remember that Harvard had a veterinary college, for example? Or that Chicago had two large ones? Or that New York City had five?

Here is a sampling of the colleges where deceased veterinarians received their degrees in a randomly-picked 1946 issue of the JAVMA. In this particular volume (July), about half of the veterinarians graduated from colleges that still exist today: Ontario Veterinary College (5), Ohio State University (2), Iowa State College (2),¹ University of Pennsylvania (1), and Washington State University (1). The disproportionately large number of Ontario graduates—this particular cohort had graduated in 1888, 1892, 1895, 1901 and 1906 and all lived in border states (Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Ohio)—reflects the fact that large numbers of US students received their veterinary education from Andrew Smith's private college in Canada before the province of Ontario mandated that it become part of the University of Toronto in 1908.

The names of other colleges are less familiar: four graduates of the Chicago Veterinary College, two from St. Joseph's Veterinary College in Missouri, two from Kansas City Veterinary College, two from Harvard Veterinary College, and one each from McKillip Veterinary College in Chicago and Grand Rapids Veterinary College in Michigan.

Two deceased men did not have colleges listed after their names, and that leads me to wonder if they did not even receive a veterinary degree. That was quite common in the early days of the profession and several founding members of the AVMA (then called the United States Veterinary Medical Association) were self-educated or did not receive sufficient education to attain the appropriate credential appropriate from the institution they attended.²

Before the mid 1920s, veterinary medical education was usually attained from private colleges in the major cities of the northeast and Midwest. Though they were unregulated, and sometimes described by as for-profit diploma mills, some (like the Chicago Veterinary College and Kansas City Veterinary College) provided a reputable educational experience.

A few of the early colleges were affiliated with major medical schools (Harvard,³ New York University,⁴ and George Washington University,⁵ for example), but these usually had lower enrollments, were not as financially stable, and they didn't survive. The University of Pennsylvania was the exception, but is the only medical school-affiliated program to survive past the early 1920s.

¹Now Iowa State University.

²One of Cornell's founding veterinary faculty (Professor Walter Williams) was in that category though he was a respected and valued faculty member throughout his distinguished 25-year career at Cornell. He had substantial education at the Montreal Veterinary College but never completed his degree requirements.

³Smith, Donald F., Harvard's School of Veterinary Medicine. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 21, 2013

⁴Smith, Donald F., New York City's Five Veterinary College. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. July 18, 2013

⁵Smith, Donald F., When Washington, D.C. Had Two Veterinary Colleges. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 22, 2013.

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TOPIC:

Veterinary Colleges in the United States

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.