

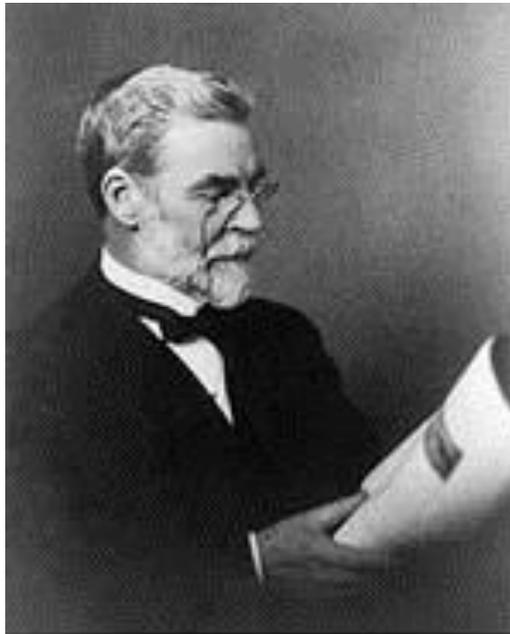
## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# Triumph and Tragedy: The Story of Law and Liautard

By Dr. Donald F. Smith

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James Law is a household name in veterinary medicine. The first veterinary professor in an American university (Cornell), Law was the most famous educator of his generation. He counted among his students Daniel Salmon, the first director of the Bureau of Animal Industry and the person credited with the discovery of *Salmonella*, Leonard Pearson, the transformational early dean at the University of Pennsylvania, and Theobald Smith, one of most important comparative pathologists of his generation.<sup>1</sup>



*Professor James Law, Cornell University*  
@ Cornell University

The rigor of Law's educational paradigm was unmatched in the United States. He chose to accept only those students with the highest academic standards and expose them to a rigorous curriculum, rather than take on larger numbers of students with lower qualifications. It took him two and one-half decades of teaching and serving the nation's public health interests before he was able to obtain enough state support to actually open a veterinary college at Cornell, recruit other faculty, and start admitting full classes of students.<sup>2</sup> By that time

veterinary colleges had already been established at other major universities, including Iowa State University and the University of Pennsylvania.

While Law was working in upstate New York in the small town of Ithaca, Alexandre Liautard (who was also an MD) was equally influential but in a different way. Liautard's New York City veterinary practice was chosen as the site for the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons which began clinical instruction in 1864. Like his academic colleague, Liautard was a credible scientist and rigorous educator, though the three New York City colleges that he led at different times in his career were not part of comprehensive universities.

Nor did Liautard have the diplomatic skills of Law, for he seemed always to be at the center of one conflict or another. When his acerbic tongue was not criticizing his peers across the country and in Canada for low academic standards, he was writing scathing editorials in the *American Veterinary Journal* which he had established.<sup>3</sup>



*Alexandre Liautard, MD, VS*

*Founder American College of Veterinary Surgeons, New York City*

From: Bell, Roscoe R. "A. Liautard." *American Veterinary Review*. 25: 245, 249-250, 1901 July

In one of his most memorable achievements, Liautard served as catalyst for the organization of a group of east coast veterinarians in the Astor House in New York City in the summer of 1863. From this humble beginning of the United States Veterinary Medical Association, the AVMA was formed 35 years later.

More than any other 19th century veterinarians, Law and Liautard lay the groundwork for veterinary medicine as we know it today. One can only wonder how the profession would have developed if James Law had acceded to Liautard's urging that he leave rural Ithaca and move his state-supported college to New York City, where he could have developed strengths in the

beginning field of pet medicine and expand the academic and clinical relationships in the medical and comparative medical communities.

As it was, the last of the New York City veterinary colleges that Liautard spent much of his professional life leading and nurturing closed in 1922.<sup>4</sup> Like the other major academic and medical cities of Boston, Chicago, Washington, and Toronto, where veterinary medicine had been prominent for decades, the most populous city of America has not had an academic veterinary presence since.<sup>5</sup>

This was one of the most defining events in our profession's history and a tragedy of incalculable proportions for both animal and human medicine.<sup>6,7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Of these three, only Salmon received his DVM under Law. Smith and Pearson received their undergraduate degrees at Cornell where they were greatly influenced by the teaching and mentoring of Law. Smith became a physician and Pearson received his VMD from the University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup> The veterinary college was actually the first state-supported contract college at Cornell, preceding the College of Forestry (which later moved elsewhere) and the College of Agriculture.

<sup>3</sup> *The American Veterinary Review* was the forerunner of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.

<sup>4</sup> Peneyra, Samantha, New York City's Five Veterinary Colleges. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. July 18, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> The Animal Medical Center, which moved to the Upper East Side in the early 1960s, developed significant clinical and research programs, but it never educated students for the DVM or PhD degrees.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, Donald F. Prologue. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 8, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, Donald F. Veterinary Medicine in the Post Land Grant Era. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 18, 2013.

#### KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine  
Alexandre Liautard  
James Law  
Cornell University  
Iowa State University  
University of Pennsylvania  
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#### TOPIC:

Veterinary Colleges in the United States

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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.