

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# Andrew Smith and the Ontario Veterinary College

By Dr. Donald F. Smith

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Andrew Smith's Toronto Veterinary College heads the list of the most successful private veterinary colleges in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It surpasses the two Chicago colleges and Kansas City Veterinary College in number of graduates<sup>1</sup> and, though quality is hard to measure, Toronto also had its share of high-impact graduates. Most importantly, when Andrew Smith affiliated his college with the University of Toronto in 1897, he in essence guaranteed its future transition from a for-profit equine college to one that would be sustained once the horse disappeared from the urban scene. Its successor, the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph, Canada, is a well recognized center of excellence for veterinary education and research on the North American continent.

Like Duncan McNab McEachran, whose illustrious career was the subject of a recent story published here on April 4th,<sup>2</sup> Andrew Smith was an 1861 graduate from the Royal Dick College in Edinburgh, Scotland. Smith and McEachran vied for the lead veterinary position that was established by the Board of Agriculture of Upper Canada (Upper and Lower Canada would be renamed Ontario and Quebec after Confederation in 1867). With the increasing value of livestock, the need to safeguard against disease and also to develop a school to train veterinarians, the principal of the Edinburgh College chose the more dignified and less headstrong Smith over his rival. Both men were academically sound, but Smith, "whose interest in education was with the veterinary art, not the science of veterinary medicine," was the more practical."<sup>3</sup> McEachran, an early proponent of the germ theory of disease, was a strong advocate for the science of veterinary medicine and, "perhaps long before it was practical, for higher entrance requirements, for a three-year course, and for a close affiliation with the medical faculty and with research scientists."<sup>4</sup>

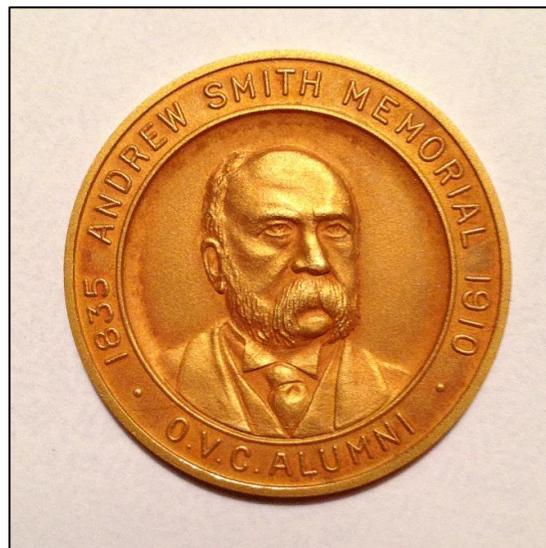
Smith versus McEachran embodied the age-old antinomy<sup>5</sup> that persists in veterinary medicine to this day in the form of art versus science, practice versus theory, pragmatic versus principled. Feeling that Smith would be better qualified to manage the people and resources for a new college, he was chosen over McEachran and began practicing equine medicine in leased Toronto buildings in January 1862.<sup>6</sup>

Smith's first veterinary lectures were delivered the following month and were open to the public. By 1864, the lectures had developed into a course which consisted of two six-month sessions over two years, similar to the British model. To complement the infirmary that he ran for equine clients, he added anatomic dissection facilities to aid student learning. His first three

graduates in 1866 were allowed to place “V.S.” after their names, distinguishing them as *veterinary surgeons* from farriers and others with no formal training.<sup>7</sup>

Almost immediately, Smith’s for-profit college was successful. There being virtually no academic prerequisites, would-be veterinarians enrolled in huge numbers. The curriculum wasn’t just for Canadians, as hundreds and hundreds of US citizens flocked across the border to be trained by Smith, returning to the US to practice. In doing so, they circumvented James Law’s program at Cornell University, from which only four veterinarians graduated between 1868 and 1896. McEachran, who had been a close personal friend of Smith, taught with him for a couple of years before parting ways and opening a rival college in Montreal. Smith successfully withstood pressure for a more rigorous curriculum for over 40 years, when he finally announced that the course would be extended to three years in 1906. Two years later, the college (now the Ontario Veterinary College) became a provincial institution and he retired. For almost half a century, Andrew Smith ran the college in a way that reflected his personal views of admission, curriculum, and practice. He graduated over 3,300 students during his career, more than any other of his contemporaries in veterinary education. By comparison, McEachran had just over 300 in about the same time period, and James Law (Cornell) fewer than two hundred.<sup>8</sup>

In a permanent tribute to Smith’s legacy, the memorial medal in his honor recognized proficiency in both theory and practice of veterinary medicine.



*The Andrew Smith Memorial Medal has been awarded, since 1930, to the student of the graduating class deemed most proficient in the theory and practice of veterinary medicine.<sup>9</sup>*

(Photo by the author).

It is easy to be a critic of Andrew Smith’s unwillingness to embrace a more scientific aspect of veterinary medicine, and I have certainly been among that group at various times in my career. However, as I have studied the history of veterinary medicine, I have become more

understanding of the reality of antinomy, whether it be land grant versus private college, research versus service or, as in the case of Andrew Smith, the practitioner versus the scientist.

Sure, I would have liked Smith to have been more willing to add a greater degree of rigor to his admission standards and curricular offerings. However, the sheer numbers of his graduates and the positions that some of them attained in academia and practice cannot be scornfully swept aside. Whom among us cannot celebrate the accomplishments of E.A.A. Grange (V.S. 1873), who became Principal of the Veterinary Department of the Detroit College of Medicine, and later dean of the Ontario Veterinary College; or renowned veterinary anatomist, Septimus Sisson (V.S. 1891); or the three sons of the legendary Edward Thomas Hagyard, who graduated from Toronto between 1875 and 1888 and continued the legacy of what would become the incomparable Hagyard Equine Medical Institute in Lexington, Kentucky?

Smith's Ontario Veterinary College was relocated 50 miles west to the rural town of Guelph in 1922, where partnerships with Agriculture and, later, Home Economics were established. Degrees were conferred through the University of Toronto until 1964 when the University of Guelph was formally inaugurated as a degree-granting institution.

The veterinary profession in North America derived a great deal of its influence and excellence from the three Edinburgh-educated Scots who arrived in Canada and the US in the 1860s, and Andrew Smith deserves an equal part of the legacy with his two more scholarly peers.

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, Donald F. Common Names Only 70 Years Ago, They Are Now Unrecognized Veterinary College. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. October 31, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, Donald F. A New DVM/MD Program is established in Montreal, Quebec. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 4, 2014.

<sup>3</sup>Gattinger, F. Eugene. *A Century of Challenge. The History of the Ontario Veterinary College*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 18.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Antinomy is the concept of juxtaposing two equally-valid concepts that are mutually exclusive and usually considered irreconcilable.

<sup>6</sup>Evans, A.M. SMITH, ANDREW. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 13, (University of Toronto/Universite Laval, 2003). Available online at [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/smith\\_andrew\\_13E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/smith_andrew_13E.html).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Gattinger, *A Century of Challenge. The History of the Ontario Veterinary College*, 156. (At the time of the OVC's centennial in 1862, it had accrued over 6,020 veterinary graduates, compared to the combined total of 9,358 graduates from the veterinary colleges at the Ohio State University, Iowa State University, the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University.)

<sup>9</sup>Gattinger, *A Century of Challenge. The History of the Ontario Veterinary College*, Appendix E.

#### KEYWORDS:

Toronto Veterinary College  
Ontario Veterinary College  
Andrew Smith  
Duncan McEachran

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James Law  
Edinburgh Veterinary College  
University of Guelph  
E.A.A. Grange  
Edward Hagyard  
Septimus Sisson

TOPICS:

Foreign Veterinary Colleges

LEADING QUESTION:

What North American Veterinary College has had the most graduates, by far!!

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.