

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Monuments to Veterinary Medicine, Part III

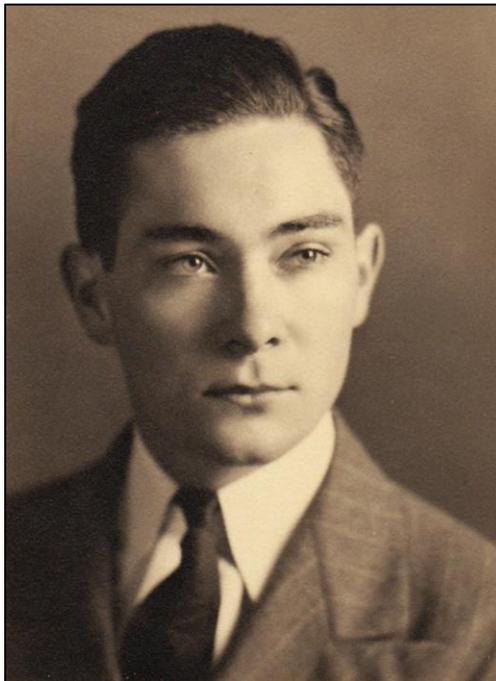
By Dr. Donald F. Smith

July 14, 2014

I didn't anticipate that speaking to veterinarians who had gone through college during the Great Depression would be particularly shocking to me because I had heard my father talk about farm life during that time. But the men who graduated during the 1930s were a little older than my Dad, and they were college students at the time. As it turned out, I wasn't as prepared as I had imagined to hear about a time when living was tough and working toward a college education made it even tougher.

(See **An Enduring Legacy**. <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/11807>)

The previous article in this series featured four Jewish veterinary students who entered Cornell in the middle years of the Depression, graduating in 1938 and 1939. The present article features four Cornell students from the same period, and the brother of one of the graduates who attended the University of Pennsylvania.



Dr. John P. Ayres, 1939, Graduation Photo
(© New York State Veterinary College, Cornell University)

At 98, **Dr. John Ayres** is one of only two surviving Cornell veterinarians, not just from his class (1939), but from the decade. A deeply religious man, my 2007 interview was a testament to his passion for fairness and social justice. He spoke of his mother's reassuring words: "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," he recalled over and over having been inspired by her wisdom and encouragement.

Some of Dr. Ayres' stories read like proverbs. Though he lived only 40 miles from Ithaca, he told me that Christmas was his loneliest time because he stayed at Cornell for the holidays. His classmates went home and left their part time jobs, allowing him to take their place and earn some extra money. "My pockets were empty at the beginning of the Christmas season," but by the time his fellow students returned in January he told me, "my pockets would be filled." When he graduated, he returned home and presented his mother with \$300 that he had saved from the 40-, 45- and 50-cents-per-hour jobs.

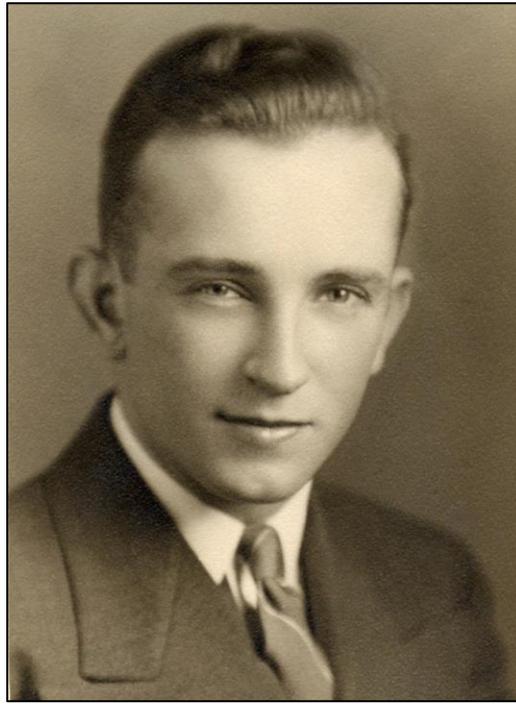


Dr. Mark R. Crandall, 1939, Graduation Photo
(© New York State Veterinary College, Cornell University)

Dr. Mark Crandall '39 also struggled financially. His older brother had graduated with his veterinary degree several years earlier, but as the Depression deepened, there were no resources to send the remaining children to college. His father did have a team of horses, however, and Mark started a business hauling wood. He also grew vegetables, and at the end of the summer he took his \$65 savings and boarded a bus for Syracuse where he completed his undergraduate qualifications for veterinary college.

One of the married students in his class, Mark's wife worked in the local hospital while he worked in the cafeteria as a page boy cleaning tables. He often studied while washing food

trays. “I could put my textbook up on the table and read and work at the same time. I did that the whole four years.” Some weeks he’d earn ten dollars and some weeks it might be a *little more*.

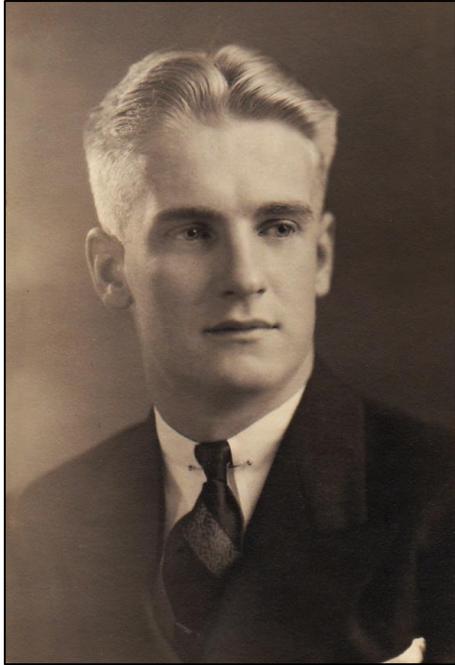


Dr. Carleton W. Potter, 1940, Graduation Photo
(© New York State Veterinary College, Cornell University)

While it was not unusual to have a sibling attend veterinary college, few Cornell graduates in the 1930s had fathers who preceded them. **Dr. Carleton Potter '40** was an exception. He was born in June 1918, just a month after his father received his DVM degree. The elder Potter's general practice not only inspired his son to follow in his footsteps, but the family dairy farm added to the breadth of Carleton's pre-veterinary experience.

For almost 60 years, Dr. Potter practiced in his home town in Cortland County, within a half hour's drive to Ithaca. Like many veterinarians of the era, his practice was 90% large animals, mostly dairy cattle. In later years he built a clinic for small animal work, but hired associates for that part of the practice.

One of the most interesting interviews I conducted was with two brothers, **Drs. Clifford and Gilbert Hoppenstedt**. The oldest of three children from the Hudson Valley region of New York, Clifford's health was failing as he sat next to his brother and told me about entering veterinary college in 1931. With the Hoppenstedt brothers, I not only got the double value of hearing two stories of in the same living room, but I was able to hear of the different experiences between Clifford's veterinary education at a land grant college (Cornell) and Gilbert's at a private medical school-affiliated school (University of Pennsylvania).



Dr. Clifford H. Hoppenstedt, 1935, Graduation Photo
(© New York State Veterinary College, Cornell University)



Dr. Gilbert F. Hoppenstedt, 1940 (U Penn)
(Photograph by Donald F. Smith, 2/9/09)

Several months after my 2009 interview, I attended Clifford's funeral and listened to tribute after tribute from former clients and friends (many were both), and also from veterinarians whom he had mentored along the way. His was one of many end-of-life tributes I had the privilege to witness. Often, through tear-filled eyes, I reflect on how deeply blessed I have been to have heard, usually in their own words, real stories of ordinary and dedicated people who have done common things uncommonly well, people who paved the way for my generation and the ones that follow.

KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine
Cornell University
Mark Crandall
John Ayres
Clifford Hoppenstedt
Gilbert Hoppenstedt
Carleton Potter
Cornell University
Great Depression

TOPIC:

Oral History

LEADING QUESTION:

How did Depression-era veterinary students earn money to attend college?

META-SUMMARY:

A description of oral interviews with five veterinarians who graduated during the 1930s.

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.