



Robert W. Kirk

May 20, 1922 – January 19, 2011

Robert W. Kirk was born on May 20, 1922. A native of Stamford, Connecticut, he came to Cornell in 1943 intent on becoming a large animal veterinarian. He attended the New York State Veterinary College (now the College of Veterinary Medicine) during World War II when the classes were accelerated to compress the normally four-year DVM curriculum into approximately three years.

Following graduation in 1946, Dr. Kirk worked in a mixed animal practice in Brattleboro, Vermont before moving to New York City where he spent two years at the hospital for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He then returned to Connecticut, where he was again in general practice before joining the Air Force Veterinary Corps as a first lieutenant. During his service, he inspected packing houses, cattle and dairies in Maine and attained the rank of captain.

Upon the retirement of Professor Hadley Stevenson '20, Dr. Kirk was recruited in 1952 to join surgeon Dr. Ellis Leonard '34 in ushering in a new age of pet health care at Cornell. It was also the era when vaccines against scourges like canine distemper were being developed by Dr. James Baker and his colleagues at the new viral disease laboratory.

Dr. Kirk was both professor and practitioner. He insisted on the highest quality of medicine but always with a view to practicality and service. He also strengthened the ties between veterinary research and clinical practice. The quintessential professional, his white coat and bow tie were his sartorial trademark. He was promoted to professor in 1957.

Dr. Kirk was a prolific speaker not only in North America but throughout the world. When he retired in 1985, he was one of the most decorated and widely-known small animal veterinarians in the world. Among his many accomplishments was his famous book, *Current Veterinary Therapy*, which he edited by himself through its first ten editions. This series of books has sold more than a quarter of a million copies and has been translated into many languages. He also co-

authored "Small Animal Dermatology", "Handbook of Veterinary Procedures and Emergency Treatment," and "First Aid for Pets."

Dr. Kirk was a superb teacher of both veterinary students and postgraduate trainees (interns and residents) and they populated some of the most important university hospitals and private practices in the country. He also served on numerous Ph.D. and MS committees. His various administrative positions at Cornell included head of the Teaching Hospital, director of Small Animal Medicine and Surgery, and department chair.

Dr. Kirk was a founder, past president, and diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM), a founding diplomat and past president of the American College of Veterinary Dermatology (ACVD), and an honorary diplomat and past president of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners. Dr. Kirk served on the AVMA Council on Education from 1972-1983 and was a member of the board of directors of The Seeing Eye Foundation for 21 years. During his time with the foundation, he helped establish two dog facilities and a veterinary hospital.

Among his many career honors, Dr. Kirk was the recipient of the American Animal Hospital Association's Veterinarian of the Year Award (1964), the AVMA Gaines Award (1966) and the Mark L. Morris Sr. Lifetime Achievement Award. He was named New York State Veterinary Medical Society's Veterinarian of the Year in 1971. He was the 1984 recipient of the AAHA Northeast Service Award and was honored that same year by the American Academy of Veterinary Dermatology for contributions to that field.

The ACVIM established and honored him as the first recipient of the Robert W. Kirk Distinguished Service Award in 1988. In 1991, Dr. Kirk received an ACVD Award for Excellence. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons conferred the status of honorary associate on him in 1993. The Seeing Eye dedicated the Robert W. Kirk Canine Health Library in 1997 in honor of his work. Kirk was a member of *Phi Kappa Phi*, *Sigma Xi*, *Gamma Chi Epsilon*, *Phi Zeta*, and *Alpha Psi*.

In retirement, Dr. Kirk was appointed by the governor to a six-year term on the New York State Life Care Communities Council, overseeing and regulating retirement communities in the state.

Dr. Kirk was preceded in death by his wife of 57 years, Helen Margaret Grandish Kirk. Mrs. Kirk handled many publication production tasks amounting to thousands of hours for the eleven editions of *Current Veterinary Therapy*, and all editions of his numerous other books. They traveled together to meetings all over the United States, as well as Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. Dr. Kirk is survived by three daughters: Kathryn J., Barbara A. and Janet M.

Donald F. Smith, Chairperson; Ronald R. Riis, Danny W. Scott