

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

The 28 Veterinary Colleges in the United States, Part I

By Dr. Donald F. Smith

May 2, 2013

Eighty-six percent of the veterinarians in the United States graduated from 28 land-grant and private veterinary colleges, some of which date back to the late 19th century.¹ As mentioned in the posting of April 18th,² there were many short-lived veterinary colleges in the early days of the profession. The colleges that remain were established in roughly three waves over the past 150 years.

I often get asked whether Cornell or Iowa State had the first veterinary college in the United States.³ Cornell University began instruction in veterinary medicine in the small town of Ithaca, New York, in October 1868. Two veterinary students were in the initial university class, including Daniel Salmon, who would go on to become one of the most famous veterinarians of the 19th century.⁴ However, Iowa State University in Ames established the first true veterinary college in 1879 and was well underway before Cornell hired a full cadre of faculty and began instruction as a state-supported college almost 30 years later (1896).

Seven other land-grant universities began veterinary instruction in the last two decades of the 19th century and the first few years of the 20th. Six were located in the towns and small cities of Pullman (WA), College Station (TX), Fort Collins (CO), Manhattan (KS), East Lansing (MI) and Auburn (AL), and one was established in a major city (Ohio State University in Columbus).

The only non land-grant veterinary school was established at the University of Pennsylvania in the city of Philadelphia in 1889 and to this day it remains the only veterinary school or college in one of the ten largest cities in the country.

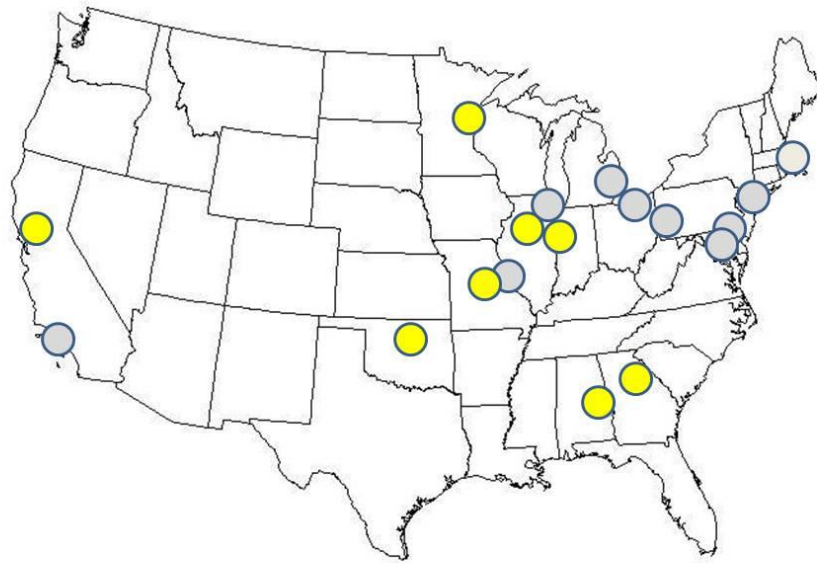
No other veterinary colleges were added until the end of World War II when large numbers of returning GIs were hungry for education and many pursued professional careers. Seven veterinary colleges emerged within just four years, from 1944 to 1948. Like the first wave of land-grant institutions, this group (also land-grant) was located mostly in small towns in the Midwest and South: Athens (GA), Stillwater (OK), Champaign-Urbana (IL) and Columbia (MO). The large metropolitan area of St. Paul was the site of the college at the University of Minnesota, and the second western veterinary college was established in Davis, California. In 1957 Purdue University opened a veterinary college in West Lafayette, Indiana.



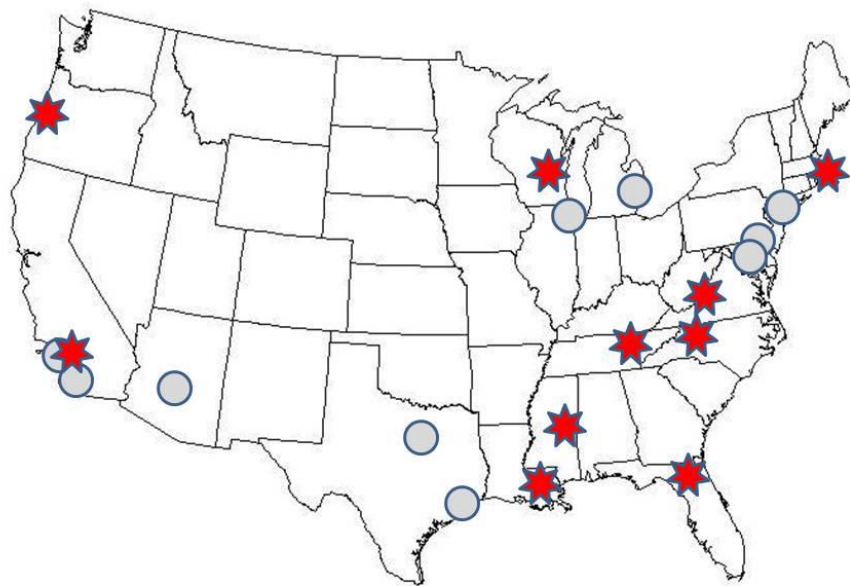
*Location of the ten veterinary colleges established between 1868 and 1916 (blue triangles).
Location of the ten largest cities in 1900 (gray circles).⁵*

To address the pressing desire of African-Americans to be able to pursue veterinary medicine in a largely segregated educational system, Tuskegee Institute opened a veterinary school in 1945, during the period when veterinarian Dr. Frederick Douglas Patterson served as the institute's president.⁶ Though not part of the initial land-grant system associated with the Morrill Act of 1862, Tuskegee is usually considered a land-grant college in the context of the so-called second Land Grant Act of 1890, which permitted students of color to receive an education in the former confederate states.

The third wave of veterinary colleges was founded in the late 1960s and 1970s. Eight were at land-grant institutions. Once again, the majority were in the Midwest and South: Madison (WI), Baton Rouge (LA), Starkville (MS), Knoxville (TN), Gainesville (FL), Raleigh (NC) and Blacksburg (VA). Oregon State University (Corvallis) was the only western school of this cohort. Tufts University, now located in North Grafton (MA), was the only private institution of these nine.



*Location of the eight veterinary colleges established between 1944 and 1957 (yellow circles).
Location of the ten largest cities in 1940 (gray circles).⁷*



*Location of the nine veterinary colleges established between the late 1960s and 1998 (red stars).
Location of the ten largest cities in 1980 (gray circles).⁸*

The most recent veterinary college in the U.S. is at a private institution, Western University of the Health Sciences, located in the southern California city of Pomona in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. This 28th college graduated its first class in 2007.

¹ AVMA member data. <https://www.avma.org/members/community/pages/default.aspx>. 2013 Apr 24.

² Veterinary Medicine in the Post Land Grant Era, posted April 18, 2013.

³ First veterinary college of the ones that survived to the present.

⁴ Daniel Elmer Salmon received his veterinary degree in 1872 and his DVM, which was roughly equivalent then to a PhD, in 1876. He was the first director of the Bureau of Animal Industry.

⁵ Modified from Smith DF. Lessons of History in Veterinary Medicine. *J Vet Med Educ* 2013;40(1):2-11. Reprinted with permission of the *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*, © 2013, Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges.

⁶ Dr. Patterson received his DVM from Iowa State University and his PhD from Cornell University.

⁷ Modified from Smith DF. Lessons of History in Veterinary Medicine. *J Vet Med Educ* 2013;40(1):2-11. Reprinted with permission of the *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*, © 2013, Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges.

⁸ *Ibid.*

KEYWORDS:

Land-grant Universities
History of Veterinary Medicine
Private Colleges of Veterinary Medicine
Tuskegee Institute
Tuskegee University
Frederick Douglass Patterson

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.