

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Dr. Louis A. Merillat (1868-1956), Veterinarian of the Half-Century

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
February 9, 2015

Lost from the memories of most living veterinarians is the man who some considered the most influential veterinarian of the first half of the 20th century. At least, that's how the *Chicago Tribune* referred to him when reporting an interview with him in July 1950, when he was 82.



Dr. Louis A. Merillat
(Photo provided by AVMA)

“I’ve worked for two things during my life,” he told the Tribune, “better education in veterinary medicine and better working conditions for the educated man.”¹

The son of a horseman, Merillat was born in Wooster, Ohio, and attended the Ontario Veterinary College because it was much less expensive to live in Toronto than in New York City. He then moved to Chicago to learn more about equine medicine from Matthew McKillip. Though a physician and not a veterinarian, McKillip had one of the most successful equine practices in the country and he would later start a three-year veterinary college that carried his name.

Merillat became an instructor at McKillip (1893-1900; 1913-19) and also the Chicago Veterinary College (1900-13).² As was common among instructors in private colleges at the time, Merillat maintained a vibrant equine practice during the heyday of the urban horse. Working and teaching out of the McKillip College facilities as well as his own practice at 1827 S. Wabash Street, he developed new surgical operations and anesthetic techniques. His expertise attracted the attention of some of the most prominent stables of the city, including several with show teams of draft horses.

During WWI he was a veterinarian for the 41st Division and later became chief veterinarian for the First Army. According to the Tribune,

He supervised the care and treatment of tens of thousands of horses crippled in the battles of the Vosges mountains, the Marne, Chateau-Thierry, St. Mihiel, and the Argonne.

An internationally traveled man at this point, he returned to France and spent six months studying at the Alfort National Veterinary College that dates back to the mid-18th century.

By the time he returned home from France, “the automobile had wiped out my practice,” he said, so he turned to writing. He authored a major book on equine surgery and became editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. He also authored a two-volume book on military veterinary history. Always having been active in organized veterinary medicine, he served as president of AVMA in 1924-25.

Near the end of his life, at the 60th anniversary of his Ontario Veterinary College graduation in 1948, he was toasted as the “outstanding veterinarian in America.”



Grave marker at Arlington National Cemetery
(Photo provided by John Evans as shown in [Find a Grave](#))

Merillat died on Feb 25, 1956, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.³

¹ Merrick, Mary Lee. [Dr. Merillat is Honored as Veterinarian](#). *Chicago Tribune*, April 2, 1950. This citation applies to quotations and information throughout this story.

² *The AVMA: 150 Years of Education, Science and Service*. (Schaumburg, Illinois, American Veterinary Medical Association, 2012) 69.

³ Dr. L.A. Merillat, *Can J Comp Med Vet Sci*. May 1956; 20(5): 185–186. Available from: PubMed Central, US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1614274/?page=1>

KEYWORDS:

Louis A. Merillat
Ontario Veterinary College
Matthew McKillip
Alfort National Veterinary College
Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association
AVMA
Arlington National Cemetery

TOPIC:

History of Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

Who was considered by some to be the most influential veterinarian of the first half of the 20th century?

META-SUMMARY:

Dr. Louis A. Merillat, renowned veterinarian of the first half of the 20th century, was a practitioner, an educator, an editor, and served as president of AVMA in 1924-25.

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.