

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Middlesex Veterinary College: a Short-Lived Experiment in Meritocracy

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
October 24, 2013

In the last 85 years the veterinary college at Middlesex University was the only US veterinary institution that opened and then closed its doors, not surviving to the present. Established in 1938 in the Waltham suburb of Boston,¹ Middlesex was a private venture of Dr. John Hall Smith, a Boston surgeon.

Like Smith's medical school, which had opened a decade earlier, Middlesex Veterinary College accepted students based on merit, without regard to their religion or ethnic background. It is remembered to this day as a college for students who were not accepted into the land grant veterinary colleges because of prejudice or imposed quotas. The school closed in 1946 because of the disruption and lack of funding brought about by wartime, and because it failed to secure accreditation by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).²

I knew nothing about Middlesex until Frank Loew, former dean of what is now the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, assumed the deanship of Cornell's veterinary college in 1995. He shared with me his role as architect of an initiative that resulted in what he referred to as "adoption" of Middlesex veterinary graduates into the alumni body of Tufts. Frank saw it not just as an opportunity to give the graduates an academic home-of-sorts, but always the entrepreneur, he also saw it as a development opportunity for his own school.³

A few years ago, when I began to more seriously consider the history of the veterinary profession, I realized that I had never knowingly met nor spoken to a Middlesex alumnus, though at the time there were about 30 graduates listed in the AVMA directory. It was not until about one year ago that I fulfilled that wish when I had the honor of meeting Dr. Mortimer Kramer and his wife, Joyce, graciously arranged by their son, Jeff Kramer, a 1980 DVM graduate of Cornell.⁴

Though we talked about Middlesex for over an hour, the elder Kramer did not mention discrimination of Jewish students when they sought admission to other veterinary colleges. Nor did he voice the anger I had heard through stories of other alumni who expressed bitterness against the AVMA because they refused to grant accreditation despite what the college considered a good educational program.⁵

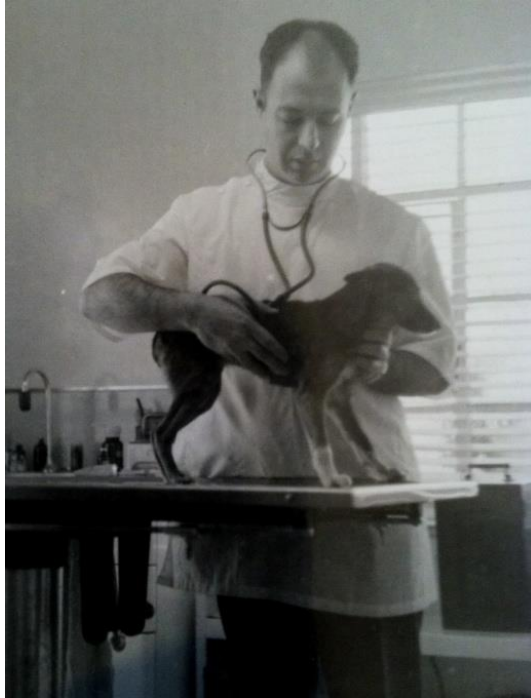


Mortimer Kramer, student at Middlesex Veterinary College, circa 1943
Photo provided by Jeff Kramer (2013)

Instead, Dr. Kramer discussed the quality of the Middlesex students and the rigor of his professors (some were distinguished scholars who had fled Nazi Germany) and his dean, a graduate of Harvard's Veterinary College. Dr. Kramer shared his pride at the accomplishments of many of his fellow alumni whether in practice, biomedical research, business, or the public health service.⁶

Kramer also spoke of his work with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Between 1946 and 1948, as part of the Marshall Plan, he worked to help post war Europe restore its agricultural infrastructure by transporting horses and livestock on "Victory ships" to devastated regions of Europe. Unable to obtain licensure to practice in this country, other graduates joined the Bureau of Animal Industry and from there were also able to be involved in this overseas humanitarian mission.⁷

Through connections made while in the UNRRA program, Dr. Kramer was able to secure a New York veterinary license and opened the Huntington Animal Hospital in 1952. He practiced for 35 years, during a transitional period in Huntington as the once rural community was becoming suburban. For many years, he treated both livestock and pets. He was an integral part of the community at a time when few veterinarians were in the area.⁸



Dr. Mortimer Kramer at his practice on Long Island, circa 1955

Photo provided by Jeff Kramer (2013)

Dr. Jeff Kramer moved back home from Virginia in 1983 and took over his father's practice four years later, expanding and modernizing to its current facility. The hospital lives on in its original structure, and has remained an important part of the Huntington community, continually expanding services to clients and patients.

Sadly, Dr. Kramer died in February of this year, two months after my visit. He was 91.

During their 55th reunion in 1995, one of the 1940 Middlesex veterinary graduates wrote to his classmates.⁹ "We felt like orphans of the storm-buffed winds of bigotry, lashed by the waves of intolerance and barred by geographic restriction [but] became better people for having lived and endured the Middlesex experience."

We may never know how many alumni, living or deceased, shared those feelings. What we do know is the AVMA's 1964 edict that gave full recognition to all practicing graduates of Middlesex Veterinary College finally validated the accomplishments of a group of veterinarians who added value and distinction to our profession.¹⁰



*Dr. Mortimer Kramer, graduation photo
Middlesex Veterinary College, 1945*
Photo provided by Jeff Kramer, DVM (2013)

¹ The original site for Middlesex University (1914) was Cambridge, but it was relocated to Waltham in 1928.

² Childers, Henry E. Anecdotal History, Middlesex University School of Veterinary Medicine. *Veterinary Heritage*. 2004 May; 27(1):1-5.

³ Loew, Franklin, '65, conversation with Donald F. Smith (Cornell University), 1996.

⁴ Kramer, Mortimer, DVM (Middlesex 1945), deceased, interview with Donald F. Smith (Cornell University), 2012 December 5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kramer, Jeff 80 (practitioner in Huntington, New York); email to Donald F. Smith (Cornell University). 2013 Oct 19.

⁹ Middlesex Veterinary College. In *Animals*, a publication of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Vol 107, Number 4, 6-10. 1974.

¹⁰ Childers, Ibid.

KEYWORDS:

Mortimer Kramer

Jeff Kramer

Middlesex Veterinary College

Anti-Semitism

Discrimination

American Veterinary Medical Association

Accreditation
Franklin Loew
Harvard Veterinary College
United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
World War II
Veterinary Colleges in the United States
History of Veterinary Medicine
John Hall Smith

TOPIC:

Veterinary Colleges in the United States

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.