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**The Massachusetts Veterinary Profession, 1882-1904:
A Case Study**

By

Philip M. Teigen and Sheryl A. Blair

Although veterinarians practiced in Massachusetts throughout the nineteenth-century, it was only near the end that they formed a politically effective and legally recognized profession. Three separate but related events marked that evolution. The first event was the founding of the Harvard School of Veterinary Medicine in 1882.¹ Established to serve important humanitarian, economic, and public health interests, this institution produced 127 veterinarians between 1886 and its closure in 1901.² The second event was the founding of the Massachusetts Veterinary Association in 1884. Comprised chiefly of Boston veterinarians, many of whom were graduates of the Harvard School of Veterinary Medicine, it led the campaign for legal recognition of the profession.³ The third and culminating event for Massachusetts

¹ An effort in the 1850s to establish a veterinary school in Boston failed. See Louis A. Merrillat and Delwin M. Campbell, *Veterinary Military History of the United States* (Chicago, 1935), pp. 139-140.

² *Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College, 1882-1883*, (1983). Unable to find an effective method of financing itself and damaged by mismanagement, the School closed at the end of the 1900-1901 school year.

³ L.K. Bullis, "Massachusetts Veterinary Association, 1884-1959," *Veterinarian*, 4 (1959): 12-21.

veterinarians came on April 16, 1903, the passage of “An Act to Provide for Establishing a Board of Registration in Veterinary Medicine.” It went into effect in January of 1904 and the first veterinarians were certified soon thereafter.⁴

The end of the formative years of the Massachusetts veterinary profession is a fruitful time to investigate its membership. How many veterinarians practiced in Massachusetts? How many graduated from veterinary schools? What schools did they attend and where? How old were the veterinarians? And where did they practice? Using the *1904 Register of Veterinarians*, these questions can be answered and the character of the Commonwealth’s veterinary profession analyzed.⁵

In 1904, 364 veterinarians were registered as required by the 1903 Act. Of these, 228 claimed graduation from a veterinary school or successful examination by colleges of veterinary surgeons in England or Scotland. The remaining 136 were registered under the “grandfather” clause. They proved that they had practiced veterinary medicine in Massachusetts for at least three years prior to the passage of the Registration Act. The 228 veterinarians who had degrees or diplomas received them from eighteen different schools. The Harvard School of Veterinary Medicine graduated seventy-nine, the most of any one institution. Located on Village Street in Boston, near the city stables, railroad terminals, and the South Boston Bay docks, it produced 127 veterinarians between 1886 and its closing in 1901. The seventy-nine Harvard graduates still practicing in Massachusetts in 1904 comprised sixty-two percent of that ill-fated school’s graduates.⁶

⁴ *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts in the Year 1903*, (Boston, 1903), Chapter 249. Key elements of this legislation were 1) the appointment of a board of registration; 2) the certification of veterinarians who were graduates of recognized veterinary colleges or who had practiced in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for three years preceding the passage of the Act; 3) the establishment of a system of examinations to certify veterinarians who wished to practice in Massachusetts after the passage of the Act; 4) the maintenance of a public register of certified veterinarians; and 5) the declaration that practicing veterinary medicine without certification was illegal.

⁵ The Board of Registration compiles the records of registered veterinarians.

⁶ Although graduates of Harvard School of Veterinary Medicine contributed much to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Commonwealth gave no financial support to the School itself.

The second and third largest suppliers of graduated veterinarians were Canadian veterinary colleges. The Ontario Veterinary College provided thirty-four of the 228 degreed registrants. Located in Toronto from its establishment in 1862 until 1919, and in Guelph from 1919 to the present, it graduated almost 1600 veterinarians during the nineteenth-century. This total far surpassed any other veterinary college in the United States or Canada.⁷ The Montreal Veterinary College, a fierce rival of the Ontario school, graduated thirty-one of the 228 registrants with degrees or diplomas.⁸ Founded in 1866, the Montreal Veterinary College was a small institution, granting only 268 diplomas and degrees in its thirty-seven-year history. That so many of its graduates practiced in Massachusetts is not surprising in view of the large interchange of population between Quebec and Massachusetts.⁹ In addition, the reputation of its Dean, Duncan McEachran, and its instructors, among them Sir William Osler, also attracted students. The relationship between the Montreal Veterinary College and Massachusetts was reciprocal as several of the Commonwealth's veterinarians served as outside examiners for the former institution.

⁷ F. E. Gattinger, *A Century of Challenge: A History of the Ontario Veterinary College* (Guelph: Ontario, 1962), p. 155.

⁸ While an independent school between 1866 and 1889, the Montreal Veterinary College granted diplomas; after it became a Faculty of McGill University it granted degrees.

⁹ Yolande Lavoie, *L'emigration des Quebecois aux Etats-Unis de 1840 a 1930* (Quebec, 1979).

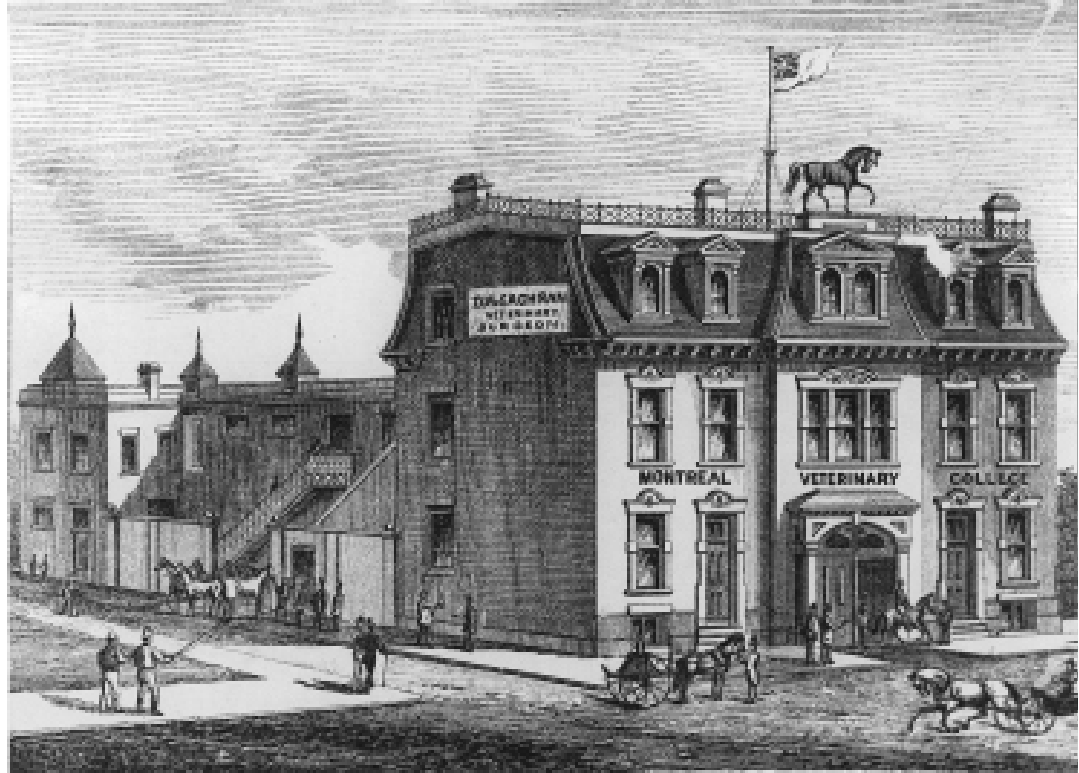


Figure 1. The Montreal Veterinary College (MVC) in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. There were close reciprocal ties between the MVC - later the McGill University Faculty of Comparative Medicine and Veterinary Science - and several Commonwealth veterinarians, such as Frank S. Billings and Williamson Bryden, made donations to the MVC, publicized its work, and served as examiners of its students.

The fourth largest supplier of Massachusetts veterinarians was the American Veterinary College of New York. It provided twenty-eight of the degreed registrants. Between 1876 and 1899, when it merged with the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons, it produced 628 veterinarians. The close proximity of the American Veterinary College to Massachusetts and the reputation of its founder, Alexandre Liautard, attracted Massachusetts students, especially before the Harvard School of Veterinary Medicine was established in 1882. Twelve other institutions provided credentials for the other fifty-six registrants who graduated from veterinary schools.¹⁰

One third of the Massachusetts registrants were trained outside of the United States. Sixty-seven were trained in Canada and nine in the United Kingdom. That so many of them were trained abroad is not surprising because professional veterinary education began late in the United States. It was only after the Civil War had ended that Alexandre Liautard (a French immigrant) established the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons. The Ontario Veterinary College was established on a larger scale than any other North American veterinary college. Besides the veterinarians trained in Canada, a small but steady flow of European veterinarians immigrated to the United States.¹¹

In the nineteenth century students went to veterinary college at a young age, sometimes after only completing high school and often without even a high school diploma. A few obtained bachelors' degrees before going to veterinary school and there was even an occasional holder of a medical degree among veterinary students, but it was not until the twentieth century that a bachelors' degree was a prerequisite for admission to veterinary school. As a result, the veterinary graduates in

¹⁰ These twelve institutions included the following: the New York College Veterinary Surgeons (13), the Chicago Veterinary College (11), the University of Pennsylvania (10), the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, London (8), the National Veterinary College, Washington, D.C. (3), the New York-American (2), Columbia University (2), Université de Laval, Quebec (2), the U.S. College of Veterinary Surgeons, Washington, D.C. (2), McKillip Veterinary College, Chicago (1), the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Edinburgh (1), and the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Veterinary College (1).

¹¹ For example, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (London) 1903 *Register of Veterinary Surgeons* lists eight-five members in the United States. Most were immigrants.

the nineteenth century were younger than those graduates of the twentieth century. This was so much the case that leading veterinary schools, including Harvard, Ontario, and Montreal did not confer degrees on their students until they were twenty or twenty-one years old, even though the students had completed their coursework and passed their examinations.¹² Those admitted under the grandfather clause were probably older, many having learned veterinary medicine before professional education was available to them. Yet the presence of so many young veterinarians added a youthful cast to the profession at the end of the nineteenth century and provided much of the energy and political activism which led to their legal recognition in 1903.

The 364 veterinarians registered in 1904 were unevenly distributed across the Commonwealth's fourteen counties and its rural and urban areas. Middlesex County had the most with seventy-eight, followed by Suffolk County (Boston) with seventy-five, Worcester County with forty-three, and Essex County with thirty-six. These four counties accounted for sixty-five percent of the registrants. They were also the four most densely populated counties – ranging from 12,930 persons per square mile in Boston to 736 in Essex County – and hence the most nearly urbanized. Moreover, forty percent of the Commonwealth's veterinarians practiced in its ten largest cities: Boston had sixty-nine, Worcester fourteen, Cambridge and Springfield thirteen each, Lowell nine, Somerville and Fall River eight each, Lynn seven, New Bedford three, and Lawrence two. In short, the Massachusetts veterinary profession at the end of the nineteenth century was as much an urban profession as a rural one. There is evidence for this generalization as well. The Massachusetts Veterinary Association was organized in Boston in 1884, and its activities and membership were centered there throughout the rest of the century. In addition, the Harvard School of Veterinary of Medicine was located in the center of Boston.

The reason veterinarians were concentrated in the most populated parts of Massachusetts was that their practices centered upon horses, which were distributed in proportion to the human population. The preoccupation with horses by veterinarians is shown by the records of the two veterinary hospitals connected with the Harvard School of

¹² *Harvard University Catalogue, 1883-1884* (1883), p. 217; *Ontario Veterinary College, Annual Announcement, 1888-1889* (1888), p. 5; *Annual Calendar of McGill College and University, Session 1890-1891* (1890), p. 122.

Veterinary Medicine, the Village Street Hospital and the Charity Hospital. Between the 1889-1890 and 1895-1896 school years, fifty-eight percent of the 17,380 cases in the former were horses and thirty-six percent dogs. At the Charity hospital during the years from 1896-1900, forty-two percent of the 14,432 cases were horses, forty-one percent dogs and nearly seventeen percent cats. The Charity, which served the poor and did not charge fees, would naturally have fewer horses and more dogs than did the Village Street Hospital because it served a clientele which had less chance of owning and maintaining horses.¹³

For image presented in original journal printing, please visit:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/boston_public_library/5476526110/

Figure 2. State Street, The Old State House, Boston, 1885. The heavy concentration of horses in Boston, which peaked at more than 560 horses per square mile in 1910, second only to Baltimore, permitted the establishment of the Harvard School of Veterinary Medicine in 1883 and the development of a critical mass of veterinarians who lobbied successfully for the registration and regulation of the profession in Massachusetts. Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department.

¹³ In comparison, between the years from 1875 and 1898, the American Veterinary Hospital in New York handled 56,879 cases, eighty-six percent of which were horses, eleven percent dogs, and three percent an unspecified miscellany. Statistics were compiled from the *Annual Reports of the Hospital*, published with American Veterinary College's *Annual Announcement*.

The geographical distribution of human population, some domestic animals, and veterinarians were closely related at the turn of the century. The counties with the greatest number of horses – Middlesex, Suffolk, Worcester, and Essex – were the same counties with the greatest number of veterinarians. But on closer examination it is not the absolute number of horses that predicts the distribution of veterinarians but rather the density of horses, that is, the number of horses per square mile. The importance of the density of horse population to nineteenth-century veterinarians can be determined from non-quantitative sources as well. These sources include the case load of veterinarian hospitals noted above, the fact that virtually all nineteenth-century veterinary education was centered in the continent's largest cities, and the central role of the horse in the veterinary curriculum of the time. They also included the fact that such educators as Duncan McEachran, Principal of the Montreal Veterinary College, doubted that a rural community such as Ithaca, New York, could provide the clinical material that Cornell University needed to open a successful veterinary college.¹⁴

The strongest correlation is between registered veterinarians and human population. In the nineteenth century horses were essential to short-haul transportation (including the transshipment of goods from sea vessels to land, street railways, and personal transportation) and to the construction and maintenance of buildings, streets, and railroads. The Board of Health in Boston, for example, kept about 200 horses in the 1870s and early 1880s to carry out its responsibility to keep the city clean. The focus for these activities at the end of the nineteenth century was the burgeoning urban areas of the continent, especially those undergoing rapid industrialization and serving as seaports and/or rail centers. The demand for urban horses rose as cities boomed after the Civil War. In the United States between 1870 and 1900 the number of

¹⁴ *American Veterinary Review*, (1877-1878), I: p. 50. An economic study of the veterinary profession in the 1930s indicates that the dollar value of animals was the most important variable in accounting for the distribution of veterinarians. "Report of the Committee Education," *Journal of the American Veterinary Association* (1931), LXXIX: pp. 692-693. That might well have been the case for Massachusetts at the end of the century as well, but the U.S. Census did not begin to systematically record the dollar value of non-farm animals until 1910. Experts tended to think that non-farm horses were more valuable than farm horses. See the U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census, 1900* (Washington, D.C., 1902), p. clxxxvii.

non-farm horses almost doubled from 1.5 to 2.9 million.¹⁵ It was the growth in the density of urban horses and the increase in their value that permitted nineteenth-century veterinarians to become economically viable as practitioners and then to organize politically to such a degree as to obtain legal recognition and monopolistic control.¹⁶

The distribution of swine is also strongly correlated to the distribution of veterinarians. At first thought this appears puzzling because we know from the records of the Charity Hospital and the Village Street Hospital that Boston veterinarians did not treat swine. This was not because swine were absent from big cities; they were there in large numbers. Suffolk County had a denser population of swine than any other Massachusetts county.¹⁷ Consequently, the correlation between veterinarians and swine does not indicate a cause and effect relationship. A more likely explanation for this strong correlation is that veterinarians and swine were related to a third variable, namely human population, and not to each other. At the turn of the century, before the advent of effective animal control laws, swine were found in cities because they were an inexpensive source of food and effective disposers of garbage.

The Massachusetts veterinary profession at the turn of the century displayed four important characteristics. First, more than sixty percent of its members were formally trained or certified as veterinarians. This indicates that after forty years of formal veterinary education in the United States, the effects of self-education or apprenticeship were still evident, although waning. Veterinary education had improved since Andrew Smith opened the first veterinary school in North America in 1862, but it was not yet revolutionized as the twentieth century began. Second, many veterinarians were trained or certified abroad, most notably in Canada. Third, Massachusetts veterinarians were young, having an estimated age of between thirty and forty, possibly nearer thirty than forty. Finally, veterinary medicine was as much – if not more – an urban as a rural profession.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Horses, Mules, and Motor Vehicles* (Washington, D.C., 1925), p. 2.

¹⁶ During the last century, veterinary practices have not only diversified but also moved from an urban focus (horses) to a rural one (dairy and meat animals) and now to an urban and suburban one (companion animals).

¹⁷ Like most counts of domestic animals in cities, this is probably an undercount.



*Figure 3. Students at the Harvard School of Veterinary Medicine observing the application of a continuous heat cauterization to the rear leg of a horse, about 1892. Most graduates of this school practiced in Massachusetts. In addition, Harvard alumni led the political struggle to register and regulate the Commonwealth's veterinary profession. Langdon Frothingham, an 1889 graduate, chaired the registration Board from its inception in 1904 until his death in 1935. The Harvard students were not without a sense of humor, as indicated by the noose hanging at the back of the class. Reproduced from *Descriptive Circular of the School of Veterinary Medicine of Harvard University* (1892 or 1893). Courtesy of the Harvard University Archives.*

Shortly after the Massachusetts veterinarians were registered in 1904 their profession changed. In 1906, major changes in federal meat inspection laws attracted veterinarians to federal service as inspectors and supervisors rather than practitioners. Beginning about 1910, trucks and cars quickly replaced urban horses. After World War I, the U.S. Army mechanized and after 1920, agricultural mechanization reduced the number of rural horses, although more slowly than urban horse populations. These changes dramatically transformed the education and distribution of veterinarians, so much so that nineteenth-century veterinarians are hardly recognizable a century later.