Chapter 1

Prologue to the First Century

"THE NECESSITY for well educated veterinarians has become more and more apparent with the increase in the number and value of farm stock in the state. In the judgment of the trustees of the university, the time has come for the establishment of a well-equipped veterinary department, supplied with the necessary teaching force and all the facilities for giving a thorough veterinary education..."

When Dr. Norton S. Townshend, Professor of Agriculture at The Ohio State University, wrote the above in his Annual Report in the fall of 1885 he was recording a victory that had been over ten years in the making. Veterinary education at OSU, long a secondary discipline despite its recognized importance, was about to come into its own and Townshend could take quiet pride in its new status. Because, in large measure, the achievement was his.

This book is the story of that achievement and of the succeeding century. It is a chronicle, in text and pictures, of the growth of the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine from its embryonic beginnings to its present position as one of the nation’s leading centers of veterinary medical education. And the story, too, of the people, faculty and students alike, who have shared the decades of challenge and progress.

To be precise, this history can be said to have begun in 1862. That was the year Congress passed the Federal Land Grant Act, better known as the Morrill Act after its author, Congressman and later Senator Justin Smith Morrill. The Act turned over to the states large sections of public land on the condition that proceeds from sale of the land be used to establish colleges which would promote "the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life." The major emphasis was to be on agricultural and mechanical arts "without excluding other scientific and classical studies."

Ohio took advantage of the Morrill Act, but not with any great alacrity. Nearly two years passed before the state accepted the land grant and another two before lawmakers approved legislation providing for the establishment of a college. Even then, nothing happened; the first act was never implemented and it wasn’t until 1870 that a second act was passed to “establish and maintain an Agricultural and Mechanical College in Ohio.”

This legislation didn’t get lost. Ohio sold over six hundred thousand acres of land, realizing, in a depressed market, fifty-four cents an acre for a total of $342,450. Another $300,000 was contributed by Franklin County, which successfully outbid other counties to secure the location of the new institution. A 330-acre farm was purchased, construction began on the first building, University Hall, and Ohio A & M began to take shape. Three years later, on September 17, 1873, the doors were opened...
to the first students. By law, all persons over 14 years of age were eligible for admission, subject to the rules, with each county to have "its just proportion, according to its population."

From the first, veterinary science was part of the curriculum; it was, in fact, the first of all the health sciences to be taught at the new college. Although professional veterinary medicine was still in its infancy, there was a growing recognition of its importance and advocates of scientific veterinary education insisted that it be included among the "agricultural arts" offered by Ohio A & M.

Chief among these advocates was Dr. Norton S. Townsend. A medical doctor and highly respected state leader, Townsend was first and foremost a pioneer in the field of scientific agriculture. As early as 1854, he joined with educators from Oberlin and Cleveland in an effort to establish an agricultural college, and while the project was short-lived, it helped focus public attention on the need for this specialized education. When Ohio finally took advantage of the Land Grant Act, Townsend was named a trustee of Ohio A & M and later became its first professor of agriculture.

As both a founder and faculty member, Townsend used his considerable influence to press the case for veterinary education. Addressing an Ohio Agricultural Convention during the college's formative years in the early 1870s, he stressed the "necessity of a thorough course of veterinary instruction in the Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State" and added perceptibly that "the end of veterinary knowledge is not the cure of disease, but the maintenance of stock in the highest conditions of health and profit... The treatment of disease is only incidental to this."

Townsend was convinced that veterinary science had to be an essential component of scientific agricultural education. And so were other architects of the fledgling A & M college. In an 1871 report, the Board of Trustees noted the importance of including "a thorough knowledge of animal anatomy and physiology with a medical and surgical treatment of diseases of our domestic animals by which it is hoped the great loss now and annually sustained may be very much lessened."

In this early report, the trustees were talking about the need for a professorship of veterinary science. But while the spirit was willing, resources were limited. Money was in
Dr. Norton S. Townshend in his study, 1883. A medical doctor and pioneer in scientific agriculture, Townshend was the most influential of Ohio's early advocates of veterinary medical education.

Another influential advocate of veterinary medical education was OSU President William H. Scott, who strongly supported efforts to establish a separate chair of veterinary science at the University.
The impressive beginning of OSU's physical plant, University Hall, as it appeared in 1887. Courses in veterinary medicine were taught in “Old Main” for some fifteen years after the founding of Ohio A & M.
short supply; there was no annual funding by
the state legislature nor would there be for
another twenty years. And there also was a
shortage of trained veterinarians to fill such a
position. Self-taught "animal doctors" and other
amateurs still dominated the scene and educated
professionals were few and far between.

Confronted by this lack of both treasure
and talent, the trustees did the best they could.
They attached veterinary medicine to a
Department of Zoology and Veterinary Science
under the direction of a zoologist, Professor
Albert H. Tuttle, with provision for teaching
courses dealing with animal disease in Dr.
Townshend's Department of Agriculture and
Botany. This solution assured veterinary
education a place in the first curriculum, but it
entered as a house divided.

It was not an ideal arrangement and three
years later, in their 1874 Annual Report (the first
after the opening of the College), the trustees
reiterated the need for something better:

"That the State of Ohio is also loser of
an untold but very large number of our
domestic animals is undoubtedly true. This
is a matter most intimately connected with
the great agricultural interests of the
country...The Trustees of our College fully
recognize the importance of (veterinary
science) and considering it eminently proper
and appropriate for an agricultural college,
have been anxious to attach to it such a
department...(but) our limited means have
prevented us from obtaining the necessary
outfit and appliances..."

In time, some of the latter needs were
met, adequately if not impressively, and around
1876, trustees put veterinary education under one
roof, transferring it to what now became the
Department of Agriculture, Botany, and
Veterinary Science. It was an important first step
toward independent status, but a veterinary
department and professorship were still almost a
decade away.

Nonetheless, veterinary education
flourished at what became in 1878 The Ohio
State University. Dr. Arthur F. Schalk, writing
in his 1956 History of the College of Veterinary
Medicine, records that "considerable interest was
exhibited in veterinary medicine" in the twelve
year period from 1873 to 1885, adding that:

"The agricultural students, who came from
the farms, were deeply concerned about the
losses from disease in their herds and
flocks...they naturally wanted to learn as much as possible about livestock health and disease. Hence, it is not at all unusual to learn that large numbers of those students elected to pursue all of the veterinary courses projected in the agricultural curricula; nor is it surprising to know that their numbers sometimes equaled or exceeded those who chose conventional agricultural courses."

Throughout this period, the mainstays of veterinary education were Dr. Townshend and Professor Tuttle. Working with limited resources and confined to equally limited space in University Hall and an adjacent one-room brick building for all lectures, dissections and laboratory work, they persevered in the teaching of veterinary science. And that teaching was as comprehensive as they could make it. Describing the course of study in 1883, Dr. Townshend wrote:

"The work of the third year is spent on the general topic of veterinary science. The range of instruction can be learned from the topics named below: general principles, causes, symptoms, elements of disease; classifications of diseases, principles of treatment, and remedial agents, particular diseases and operations. These are carefully studied and, so far as opportunity can be obtained, diseases are treated and operations made under inspection of the class."

For the period and resources available, it was an impressive effort. But neither Townshend nor Tuttle was a trained veterinarian and, to their credit, they recognized their limitations. Both knew that veterinary medicine at OSU would come of age only when it achieved independence as a discipline and its own professional faculty. So, through the same years that they sustained veterinary education, both men lobbied persistently for this crucial change in status.

It took quite awhile. But in 1885, the trustees of OSU finally committed to a new look for veterinary education, including "a well-equipped veterinary department" and "the necessary teaching force." Concluding his own Annual Report for that year, Dr. Townshend could report with satisfaction (and doubtless relief) that:

"The assistance has been secured of Professor H.J. Detmers, V.S., who was formerly in the service of the medical division of the agricultural department at Washington, D.C. and late of Champaign, Illinois. Professor Detmers has already entered upon his duties..."

The formative years were over and the Detmers Decade had begun.