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Nostalgia
The Daring Dean

The first dean of the Department of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania was a rather imposing figure with an equally imposing name. He was Rush Shippen Huidekoper, described as a man of "magnificent physical proportions" and an ancestry tracing back to the first families of the land. His forbearers included the famous physician, Dr. Benjamin Rush; the first mayor of Philadelphia, Edward Shippen; and Dr. William Shippen, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and one of the founders of the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania. When he became dean, Dr. Huidekoper brought with him an impressive list of titles: Professor of Internal Pathology (pro tempore of Anatomy); Dean of the Veterinary Faculty; Doctor of Medicine; Veterinary Surgeon, Alfort, France; Major and Surgeon, First Brigade, N.G. of Philadelphia; Fellow of the College of Physicians, Philadelphia; Member of the U.S. Veterinary Medical Association; Ex-Coroner Physician of Philadelphia, etc., etc., etc.

Dr. Huidekoper was the key in sustaining the Veterinary Department during its early years. Obviously a man of considerable energy, he was well-informed about methods of education, having studied at veterinary schools in France. At times, he dipped into his own pocket to support the struggling school of which he was very proud.

Huidekoper—The Headsy Horsman
Despite the great amount of time devoted to teaching, administration, and providing leadership for the new department, Huidekoper also found time to engage in some rather un-dean-like activities. He was an excellent horseman, a member of the venerable Rose Tree Hunt Club, and the owner of a flea-bitten mare named Pandora, known far and wide as one of the best hunters on the eastern seaboard. Among other accomplishments, Pandora was famous for jumping toll gates, which were then common on many of the main roads. There is no doubt that Dr. Huidekoper was also a daring horseman. At one time, Huidekoper resided and maintained an active veterinary practice in Media, PA. Legend has it that Huidekoper would ride Pandora to make professional calls, step-by-step, over a high open railroad trestle. It is suspected that such feats were not standard equestrian procedures.

When Pandora died, Dean Huidekoper arranged a lavish dinner in her memory at the staid Philadelphia Club, and invited some of the town's most distinguished citizens. Following the sumptuous dinner, Dr. Huidekoper regaled the guests with stories of his famous mare and closed the monologue by informing them that they had just partaken of Pandora! It was reported that numerous guests beat a hasty retreat from the banquet room.

Sheer Poetry in Motion
At the time that Dr. Huidekoper was dean, a study was being conducted on motion in animals. This was being carried out by Edward Muybridge and was supported, in part, by the University. For his work, Muybridge had constructed a wooden shack on the site now occupied by the Maloney Building of the University Hospital. A part of Muybridge's studies involved taking a great series of still photographs of animals in motion and projecting them on a machine known as a zoopraxiscope, which gave the illusion of motion. (This machine was a forerunner of the movie projector.) In one of these pictures, Muybridge captured a nude Huidekoper riding Pandora. For many years, two such photographs graced the mantel at the Rose Tree Hunt Club. Dr. Huidekoper resigned as dean in 1880. He died in 1901. In a eulogy he was described as "a physician, surgeon, veterinarian, sportsman, soldier, citizen, author, writer, clubman, journalist, society man" and a "prince of good fellows."

Many graduates of the Veterinary School will associate the name Huidekoper with the once grassy plot within the quadrangle of the school, often referred to as "Huidekoper Field," or less reverently, "fecal field." Nonetheless, the spiritedness and force of character which Huidekoper possessed, made him a personality in this veterinary school's history that is difficult to disrespect or forget.