

A Message from the Dean

The University is celebrating the 125th anniversary of women at Penn. In keeping with this, the present edition of *Bellwether* celebrates women at the School of Veterinary



Medicine, coupled with recognition of the 85th birthday of the School's first woman graduate, **Dr. Josephine Deubler, V'38.** Dr. Deubler's life

personifies the struggle of women to gain a footing in veterinary medicine, their acceptance into the profession, and the huge contributions women today bring to the care of all types of animals. Not only was Dr. Deubler the first woman to gain a V.M.D., she was the second veterinarian, male or female, to gain a Ph.D. at the School, doing so in 1943, and was the first woman to join the faculty.

These are illustrious accomplishments, but what makes them truly extraordinary is that Josephine's hearing was seriously impaired in her early childhood, the result of an infection. Today, Josephine would receive special assistance with her studies through the Americans with Disabilities Act. No one cut her a break when she enrolled at the School in 1934. She succeeded very much on her own and is a role model that all succeeding generations of Penn women can look to with enormous pride.

Dr. Deubler went on to make unique, and important contributions to the well being of companion animals throughout her long and distinguished career. We all love and revere her and wish her a very happy birthday on May 4th. It is the day of the Bucks County Dog Show, one of the largest and most prestigious outdoor dog shows in the U.S., a stature that is in no small measure due to Josephine, or Dr. Jo as she is affectionately known in the dog fancy, for she has organized and run the show for the past 34 years.

Since Dr. Deubler graduated 64 years ago, she has seen remarkable changes in the prevalence of women in veterinary medicine. Like human medicine, veterinary medicine was for decades the exclusive preserve of men, maintained that way by overt discrimination. Women have not had an easy time gaining acceptance in the profession as

the case of Aleen Cust, the first woman to become a veterinarian in Britain shamefully illustrates*. Aleen Cust was admitted to the liberal New Veterinary College in Edinburgh in 1896, enrolling under the alias I.A.Custance to protect her mother, a member of the aristocracy who was scandalized by Aleen's veterinary ambitions, from further embarrassment. She graduated in 1900 but the licensing body, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, found that it could license only "persons" and a woman did not fit that category**. So, as a non-person denied license to practice, Aleen Cust withdrew beyond the reaches of the Royal College, to the Galway in western Ireland, where she successfully cared for farm and companion animals and was much loved by her farming clientele. An exception was the local Catholic priest who was shocked that a woman should be engaged in gelding horses and urged his flock never to employ Ms. Cust.

Enlightenment came in 1919 when the British Parliament passed the Sex Disqualification Act, requiring the immediate registration of qualified women in the professions. But it still took the Royal College another 3 years to overcome its prejudice, admit Aleen Cust, and award her a license, 22 years after she qualified. Even then, many practitioners resisted having female students gain experience in their clinics and the Royal College went so far as to publish a statement saying that "in competition with men, women will always be under the most serious disadvantage." Resistance also came from farmers and trainers who did not believe that women were competent to minister care to livestock and horses.

The first American women to receive veterinary degrees were Elinor McGrath who graduated from the Chicago Veterinary College in 1910 and Florence Kimball who graduated in the same year from Cornell. But male chauvinism kept the numbers of women in the profession small. At Penn there was an informal quota for the number of women admitted per year. To their credit, the School administration recognized this injustice and abolished the practice in the 60s. In doing so, they led the way among veterinary schools in the United States to admit large numbers of women. It was a prudent move for the School then, which

*Aleen Cust, *Veterinary Surgeon, Britain's First Woman Vet.* Connie Ford, Bristol, Biopress, 1900

***Veterinary Medicine, An Illustrated History*, Dunlop and Williams, 1995

attracted many exceptionally talented women from throughout the country. They quickly headed the Dean's lists and won many of the School's most prestigious awards.

By 1978 there were equal numbers of men and women in the class, and by 1985, 70% of the class were women. This growth was part of a general acceptance of women in the professions for the numbers of women medical students increased from less than 9% in 1970 to 46% by 1999. The emergence of managed care in human medicine and the decreasing amount of time physicians can spend with patients has probably left veterinary medicine as a profession uniquely attractive to women. Their numbers have blossomed as the attitudes of society towards the care of animals have matured, as companion animal practice has expanded, and as the sophistication of veterinary clinical care has made great headway. The School pioneered the advancement of clinical care through the development of clinical specialization and residency training, creating an environment in which women could flourish. One result is that more women have trained for clinical specialty certification at Penn than at any school in the United States, and to this day the School has the largest number of women in residency training of any veterinary school in the world.

The School has also played a leading role in advancing the profession of veterinary nursing to the enormous benefit of veterinary clinical care. This is almost exclusively the domain of women, some extraordinary women. Presently, the School employs more veterinary nurses than any other veterinary institution in North America and is blessed with many who provide superlative animal care.

Women are now accepted in all fields of veterinary medicine including the clinical specialties, research, administration and academia. Moreover, the demand and respect for female clinicians is rapidly growing as old prejudices die and society increasingly recognizes the compassion and intellect women bring to the practice of healing. The ensuing pages introduce a number of our distinguished alumnae. We are enormously proud to share these stories and of the role Penn has played in advancing women in veterinary medicine.

Alan M. Kelly

The Gilbert S. Kahn Dean of Veterinary Medicine