

New Bolton Center Recollections By Robert R. Marshak, D.V.M.

Soon after the University acquired New Bolton Center, a fourth year veterinary student, a city-bred kid beginning his rotation in the Poultry Diagnostic Service, raced up to the manor house* where Dr. George Sperling was savoring his morning coffee and announced breathlessly that there's a rabbit with a sick chicken in the diagnostic lab. It seems this was the student's first encounter with the Amish, but it was also one of his few encounters with a sick farm animal of any species.

When I arrived at the Veterinary School forty-six years ago, students were openly cynical about their clinical training at New Bolton Center. The large animal rotation was regarded as a kind of country club rest and recreational experience in lovely southern Chester County, with room and board in the gracious, historic manor house. There were few faculty, teaching facilities were primitive, and primary access to ailing farm animals had been relinquished to preceptors in private practice, or in the case of horses, to the Equine Clinic on the School's Philadelphia campus. An agreement with local practitioners prohibited farm calls by faculty and students. Cases were accepted solely as referrals, an arrangement that failed abysmally to meet the School's minimal teaching and research needs. If there was a saving grace, it resided in the person of Dr. William Boucher, the Center's Medical Service Chief, a brilliant diagnostician whose ability to mine pedagogical riches from the sparsely available case material was legendary. Regularly inviting students to his home, Bill dispensed knowledge, wisdom, and tough love while his wife, Doris, dispensed motherly love and delicious home-baked cakes and cookies.

My first awareness of New Bolton Center was on a workday evening in 1956, when Dean Mark Allam phoned to invite me to take a brief respite from dairy cattle practice in Vermont to be interviewed for a faculty position in medicine, and especially to visit the School's large animal campus, a unique facility, according to Mark, located in the heart of Pennsylvania dairy farm country. This was pretty heady stuff for a small-town cow doctor, and I swallowed the bait.

I deplaned from an ancient DC-3 in Philadelphia on a blistering August afternoon.

Sensing my distress, Mark guided me to an airport bar for what turned out to be a memorable series of dry martinis. I recollect a feeling of cortical release as we drove into Philadelphia for what Mark described as a preliminary tour of the School's

City campus, meaning a quick look at the Old Quad Building on 39th and Woodland. It occurred to me afterwards that my positive first impression of the antediluvian, poorly maintained Quad was more than a momentary lapse in judgment. Mark Allam was a spellbinding charmer, and of course the martinis contributed their bit to my sanguinity.

Early next morning, after an old-fashioned Philadelphia breakfast – my first taste of scrapple – we set out to visit New Bolton Center. During a leisurely drive with many detours, Mark described his hair-raising ride to Kennett Square with University President Harold Stassen, whose Quixotic quest for the nation's highest office was to make him the subject of frequent ridicule. After a perfunctory examination of the 220-acre Higgin's estate on West Street Road, Stassen approved its purchase for the School's large animal campus. The year was 1952.

At Longwood Gardens, a few miles east of New Bolton Center, Mark and I had our first substantive discussion about the condition of the School and about the state of veterinary medical education in general. As we talked on, with a growing sense of excitement, I began to grasp the dimensions of Mark's vision for the future. I found myself succumbing to the belief that Penn's Veterinary School, despite its impoverished condition, could indeed become a national leader. The timing was propitious. After WW2 and Sputnik the federal government had committed to vastly increased funding for biomedical education and research. The venue was favorable. The School was linked administratively, academically, and geographically to a leading academic health center, and a cadre of young, gifted, adventurous, intensely loyal faculty, who shared the dean's vision and energy, was on board. There was a chance at Penn – I could almost taste it – to move veterinary education, especially clinical education, out of its traditionally vocational mode, and to catch-up with our colleagues in human medicine. It seemed a cause worthy of any sacrifice, and I remember thinking that if the medicine position were offered, I would seize it regardless of salary.

Three months later, I moved my family to Wallingford, Pennsylvania, a suburban community approximately equidistant from Penn's main campus and New Bolton Center. My halcyon days in Vermont had ended as I was propelled abruptly into the unfamiliar, competitive, turbulent, fascinating, intellectually exciting, often frustrating, and sometimes heart-breaking world of academe.

Despite the School's impecunious circumstances relative to other schools of veterinary medicine – I recall pleading for a supply of University stationary from the dean's fiercely territorial administrative assistant – I never doubted that the ideas and initiatives I had discussed with Mark and a few faculty colleagues were more than illusory musings.

A huge food animal industry was potentially at risk and we were the Commonwealth's only veterinary school. Moreover, an affordable food supply, food safety, and diseases transmissible from animals to man were issues of concern to consumers and to public health officials. Hence, to justify increased State support it was imperative to begin at once to develop or expand services and research pro-



grams that consumers, farm organizations, the profession, and the executive and legislative branches of state government would recognize as necessary and beneficial.

To gain name recognition, to make known the School's goals and achievements, and to befriend important individuals, particularly those in leadership positions, Mark Allam became a regular presence in Harrisburg and at dinners and meetings of farm and breed organizations, farm shows, the Pennsylvania Grange, and at Republican and Democratic fundraising affairs. I marveled at his ability each year to ingest at least thrice his weight in chicken, roast beef, mashed potatoes, green peas, ice cream, and apple pie, without seeming to gain an ounce. His charm, energy, and enthusiasm, and the ability to recall names and faces were extraordinary. His efforts brought the School, and particularly New Bolton Center, the recognition and respect that would help to secure its future.

* Now known as Allam House

came up. My years as an intern and resident put me in touch with clinicians like John Alexander, Bob Kenney, Dick McFeely, Dick Bartholomew, Elaine Hammel, Bill Donawick and a life long friend, Al Merritt (I can still see his head bobbing up and down in rounds when he agreed on something). Students like Jill Beech, Midge Leitch, Mary Bell, Cathy Kohn, Steve Soule, Doug Antczak, Scott Palmer, Harry Werner and Jack Bloom – the list of their names goes on and on, as well as their many accomplishments. Living in the little house next to Harnwell Pond and being exposed to New Bolton Center for three years was simply wonderful.

From that point my direction was into private practice, just down the road from New Bolton Center for seven years, and then back to

NBC. My nearly thirteen years (1980 to 1993) at New Bolton Center were great. I got to work with referring veterinarians like Drs. Ernest Stearly, Ed Mersky and Jim Borthwick – they sure made it easy because they were always kind enough to “cover up” all my mistakes.

It was great fun working with Rob Sigafos, who is the most creative farrier I’ve been around. I suspect between the two of us we tried just about every combination of design and materials to stick on horses’ feet that one could imagine. Rob is a household name in horse shoeing, even in the Republic of Texas! But I must admit that my most easily brought up set of visuals is Charlie Raker snapping his surgical gloves, Jack Anderson working at a coal forge, Rob Sigafos covered up in soot and

glue, and the legendary Jill Beech’s office. The good news is that when I visited last summer (2001) she had the same “stick’um” note on her microscope (often wondered if the light source had ever been turned on) that was there when I came to Texas in 1993. Lots of things have changed in the three decades since I first went there, but some things rightfully stay the same.

The name “New Bolton Center” in the horse world stands for excellence in teaching and innovation, and remains the court of last resort for many. In our world it is analogous to names like “Secretariat”, the New York Yankees, the Mayo Clinic and (of course) Texas. Happy Birthday, New Bolton Center, from a very grateful son.

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Mark Allam was also quick to appreciate New Bolton Center’s advantage over other veterinary schools in geographic proximity to concentrations of quality horse breeding and racing operations in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and other mid-Atlantic states. He understood that excellent medical care would motivate horse owners to contribute generously to equine research and to the development of New Bolton’s physical facilities. It was, therefore, extremely fortunate that Dr. Charles Raker, and his colleagues, most notably Dr. Jacques Jenny, had already established Penn’s reputation in the equine field.

Dr. Raker achieved renown as an equine surgeon during ten years as Head of the large animal service in Philadelphia. Students of that era will remember the Old Quad Hospital with its carnival-like atmosphere: trucks, trailers, vans unloading horses, cows, swine; grooms and students exercising horses and dogs around sodden, pitted Huidekoper Field. The gloomy stables were survivors of a time when the City’s commerce moved no faster than a trot. The high box stalls with their noble occupants were bedded deep with straw, and iron posts topped with brass balls bestowed an apt touch of elegance. Just west of the antiquated operating theater the clinic hall with its worn red brick floor, soak stalls and casting mats served as the main teaching and treatment area.

Over this sprawling, tumultuous scene, Charlie Raker presided with a steady, determined hand. He moved between the OR, stable, office, lecture hall, and conference room at a near gallop; popping in one door and out another: operating, teaching, consulting, writing, conferencing – a study in disciplined

motion. His stamina was matched by an exceptional surgical talent and keen intellect. He had a strong aversion to anything false or pretentious.

In that extraordinary decade of the Raker Era, the scope, quality, and success rate of equine surgery at Penn improved remarkably, and the Old Quad began to attract top quality horses. The waiting list for elective surgery grew alarmingly long, overwhelming the Old Quad’s facilities and personnel. So in 1964, when the new large animal hospital at New Bolton Center finally opened its doors, Charlie Raker was the obvious choice to take charge of the equine service.

With facilities and personnel now appropriately matched, equine surgery soon reached the high standard of human and canine surgery as an academic discipline and, in the process, Penn earned its reputation as the best place in the world to bring an equine patient for surgical care. The rate and magnitude of the change in the sweep and sophistication of horse surgery can probably be appreciated only by those privileged to have worked in close association with Charles Raker and Jacques Jenny and their small circle of disciples, Bill Donawick, Loren Evans, Bill Moyer, and David Nunamaker, to name a few.

In my collection of memorabilia there is a photograph I particularly treasure. I am standing between Charlie Raker and Bill Boucher, beloved colleagues, major contributors to the Veterinary School’s great leap forward.

I first met Bill at a dinner party at the dean’s house in Media during my initial visit as a candidate for a faculty position. If hired, I would be Bill’s boss, a circumstance that didn’t seem to thrill him. Bill’s Boss. Could there be a more perfect oxymoron?

At the time, I assumed that anyone who



disagreed with my strongly held views on veterinary medical education must, a priori, be at least a closet anti-intellectual. I figured that our paths were destined to diverge in unpleasant ways, especially because I planned to locate my office, for starters, in Philadelphia instead of New Bolton Center where Bill was an assistant professor assigned to Field Service. Eventually, I

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Personal Snapshots of the Early Years By Richard A. McFeely, V'61

As a teenager working on a Bucks County dairy farm I was taken to visit the original Bolton Farm. My chief memory was of horse stalls in the old barn that were completely screened from insects. This was part of a research project on equine infectious anemia and although I didn't realize it at the time, it helped to whet my appetite for veterinary medical research.

My first trip to New Bolton Center was in the fall of 1957 as a freshman student. As part of Dr. Tom DeMott's class in animal husbandry we were actually going out to see some real chickens instead of learning the various breeds from photographs. Up to that point recognition was based on what the birds were doing in the photograph rather than what they looked like. Fifty years later I still remember that white Wyandotts had two standing and one pecking. We learned how to bleed chickens that afternoon. It was the first and last time I ever did it.

As senior students, we spent two six week blocks at the Center. We lived dormitory style in what was to become the VIP suite of the Allam House. Dr Boucher commuted daily

from his home in Media and woe be it to the student who wasn't hard at patient care when he walked into the barn in the morning. My group of eight was made up primarily of veterans who were slightly less intimidated by the "Big B" than some of our classmates. We soon learned that we could linger over coffee if we posted a lookout in the dormitory with a view of the main gate. When Dr Boucher's Rambler appeared at the entrance, the alarm was sounded and a short dash across the lawn assured us of being "in place" on time.

During these NBC blocks, two students were assigned to weekend duty. While during the week faculty, staff and students, ate lunch together in the lower dining room, no service was available on the weekends. However, food was left in a refrigerator and could be cooked on a hot plate. Most chose to revert to more primitive times and many a steak was cooked over the open fire in the huge fireplace in the log room. Beverages were kept cool in the large copper kettle, which hangs in one end of the room. While memory tells me that it was filled with sodas and lemonade, I could be mistaken

about this. I remember that lunches were usually soup and a sandwich and the cost was \$0.35.

There was also an unlimited supply of peanut butter and jelly,

When I returned to NBC on a full-time basis as a post-doc in the mid 60's, things had changed. The hospital was in full swing and there was now a dormitory and a proper cafeteria. In an attempt at self-improvement, the younger interns, residents, graduate students and post-docs met periodically to discuss a predetermined subject, often with a senior faculty discussion leader. As noble as these efforts were, not infrequently the discussion turned to a complaint session. The group called itself the Mushroom Club because we claimed to be kept in the dark and fed nothing but horse manure.

In the late 1960's the Section of Clinical Reproduction had acquired a Holsteiner stallion named Herkules as a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Philip Hofmann. Dean Allam had also convinced Mr. Hofmann to provide a stable for Herkules. It soon became evident that an addition to the stable including a clinic hall, labora-

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would come to know that Bill simply distrusted people whom he thought aspired to administrative positions, to exercise control over others.

I can't exactly say when I began to appreciate that Bill's presence was a formidable asset, and that just beneath the surface of his stern, independent, somewhat intimidating demeanor was a truly kindred spirit. I discovered that we shared many ideas about clinical education, and that Bill was inflexibly attached to first principles. Because he was so deeply respected, his unstinting support, for what at the time was perceived by some as my radical agenda, helped to assure its acceptance and ultimate success. For a School and profession in transition, Bill served as a bridge between two eras. A clinician whose exceptional diagnostic skills were based in the main on accurate history taking and thorough physical examination, he nevertheless wholeheartedly embraced and promoted the shift to a more science-based curriculum, and he shared my passion for developing clinical specialties and for training more veterinarian-scientists.

As one of the School's most revered teachers, Bill transformed the outlook, and sometimes the lives, of many who came under his influence. In his celebrated Saturday morning Grand Rounds, which regularly attracted stu-

dents from all four classes, the discourse was intense and exciting. With everyone focused on the patient, Bill's rounds had a compelling real life quality that students loved. Student presenters knew that nothing but the best was expected of them, that Bill sought imaginative ideas as well as practical knowledge. And though he never allowed himself to ridicule the weaker among them, he was quick to show his distaste for the slothful or the bogus. On occasion, when a student or clinician he disliked tripped-up in rounds, something akin to a smile would brighten his countenance like a blue light in a refrigerator.

One of our fondest dreams for New Bolton Center, so distant from Penn's main campus, and sometimes succumbing to a them-against-us field station mentality, was a greater basic science presence. Bill shared my conviction that clinicians would benefit from a richer intellectual environment and would welcome ready access to the latest techniques and equipment, and to opportunities for collaboration so readily available to their clinical colleagues in our Philadelphia. I had hoped that the Comparative Retrovirus Research Unit, where Dr. Jorge Ferrer, a brilliant tumor immunologist, and his colleagues were unraveling the mysteries of the bovine leukemia virus system, would provide a

model for such collaboration. For many reasons this never quite worked out, but I am heartened, as I know Bill would have been, by the presence at New Bolton of a thriving Center for Animal Transgenesis and Germ Cell Research, directed by Dr. Hans Schöler, and also by the numbers of clinical faculty – Dean Richardson, Tom Parsons and Ray Sweeney are good examples – whose rigorous scientific training has established them as productive independent investigators.

Throughout our years together as faculty colleagues, Bill had remained self-sufficient, proudly independent. So when he called it quits, suffering from steadily worsening Parkinson's, I wondered how well he would endure the sudden silence of retirement. He rejected my plea to continue his famous bull sessions with students and to accept a modest stipend. He wouldn't hear of it, nor would he state clearly his reasons for refusing. But reading between the lines, I'm sure he believed that the School wouldn't be getting its money's worth. He refused to compromise his rigorous standards, however slightly, despite the certain knowledge that, as his disease progressed, his financial circumstances would worsen.

This imperfect tribute to Bill calls to mind a remark he made to me after we had attended

tory, office and breeding shed was essential. Mr. Hofmann again came through with the funds. In order to save money, Dean Allam appointed me to design the facility, put it out for bids and oversee the project. As it had to be a union shop doing the construction, the building was built from plans drawn on a poster board with a magic marker by a local asphalt paving contractor who also happened to employ a couple of carpenters. Thanks to the dedication and common sense of all the contractors and subs who worked on the project, it came in on time, on budget and, most importantly, it functioned as intended – surely a first in my experience with a University construction project. I can't imagine a



Dr. Robert Eckroade.

dean getting away with that today.

As August of 1977 approached, several of us decided to have a 25th Anniversary party and invite our neighbors and local merchants and trades people who had served us so well during our first quarter century. A chicken barbecue was planned. Dr. Bob Eckroade, poultry pathologist, was placed in charge of the food with the caveat that we could not use chickens from his laboratory. Barry Haines and his maintenance crew built the barbecue pit, Bill Garmon constructed the three racks used in cooking the birds and Leroy Bruce and others made up the invitation list. Courtney Michener who supplied our fertilizer agreed to bring his barber-shop quartet and provide

entertainment. A 4' by 8' cake was made and decorated with many scenes from around the Center. All was proceeding well until about an hour before the party was to begin. At that point a sudden storm blew up and the heavens opened up. Despite efforts to circle the fire with hay wagons and draping tarps, the fire was extinguished. Water accumulated in the parking lot outside the cafeteria that was knee deep at one point. In my 39 years at the University, I have never seen as much rain before or since. However, we finished the chicken in the ovens, the cake somehow got moved undercover and everyone got fed in good order. As we finished dinner, the sun came out, the water receded, the music played and the singers sang. The party was considered to be a great success. The legacy of that day – the barbecue pit – remains as an important center of social activities, although it now has a permanent roof. No one knows exactly how many chickens have been cooked over that pit but it certainly exceeds 10,000 and the number continues to grow.

some particularly interesting case presentations at the Medical School. Reflecting on their complexity and on what he regarded as the then relatively primitive state of large animal practice, he said something like, I spend all of my days pursuing a goal that is always receding. And so indeed he did, this wholly civilized, good, and scrupulous man.

The transformation of New Bolton Center from impoverished country club to world leader in a mere five decades did not come easily. Costly mistakes were made along the way, insufficient funding was a chronic problem, and tough decisions sometimes had unpleasant unforeseen consequences.

My decision to abandon the private practitioner preceptor program in favor of an independent school-based Field Service was made when it was clearly evident that the referral system, at approximately one case per week, would never provide sufficient animals for teaching or research. Moreover, the system surrendered control of the students' clinical training – a fundamental faculty responsibility – to practitioners with no supervision or oversight. The decision did not go down well with a few local practitioners who, in a stormy meeting, denounced the School administration as an enemy of private enterprise who aimed to run

them out of business. One practitioner actually lobbied in Harrisburg to deny us our small, but critically important, State appropriation. When after many months things quieted down, it was apparent that no local veterinarian lacked in clientele. Indeed, new practitioners moved into the area, enjoying the advantages of New Bolton Center's many accessible resources.

There were other painful episodes, as when Dr. Robert Kenney, a man of immense integrity and one of the nation's most distinguished specialists in theriogenology – that ghastly arcane word for the veterinary equivalent of obstetrics/gynecology – having invested heavily in the training and subsequent appointment to the staff of two recent graduates for the purpose of establishing academically important programs in bovine embryo transfer and in equine reproductive management, was stunned, as I was, when they abruptly resigned from the School to set-up local private practices, taking our clientele with them. To this day, my gorge rises when I recall this disloyal, venal behavior.

As the land mass of the New Bolton campus increased to more than 687 acres through the acquisition of adjacent farmland, and as new clinical and research facilities and Centers were added, there was exponential growth in the numbers of professors, instructors, lecturers,

residents, interns, visiting academics, nurses, groomers, and technicians. In such a diverse and complex community, with many egos competing for position, resources, cases, and space, some level of discord was inevitable. Mostly it was short-lived and manageable, staunchly by a shared commitment to the School's mission and a generally pervasive feeling of respect and admiration for one's colleagues. Occasionally, quarrels erupted and metastasized, damaging programs and individuals, and even interfering with efforts to recruit candidates for open positions. Though there are countless examples throughout human history, the harm and pain that one or two malevolent individuals can inflict upon an institution or community continues to astonish me.

But as I grow old and look back at my thirty-seven years at Penn, good memories, like a soothing balm, far outweigh the bad. If I were free to choose a legacy, it would be the extraordinary colleagues – most with reputations that far exceed mine – I had a hand in recruiting, mentoring, advancing, retaining, and sometimes losing to fine sister institutions. To name them all, to tell their wonderfully unique stories, would require more than a single issue of *Bellwether*, and I would be terrified to inadvertently exclude even one deserving individual.