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98 Down, 2 to Go

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98 Down, 2 to Go!

This is a regularly appearing column, highlighting sequential events in our veterinary school's ninety-eight-year history. It is provided for your continuing education, as we approach our centennial which occurs in 1984.

History has a tendency to highlight dramatic incidents or eloquent statements and it often overlooks the less spectacular facts involved in the culmination of a particular event. For example, the American cowboy is an important contributor to the development of the West. In literature, song, and motion pictures he is depicted as a romantic figure when in reality he led a rather dreary, harsh life. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was presented in such eloquent prose that we sometimes lose sight of the fact that it marked a very tragic period in this country's history.

In a way, this type of situation is true of the origin of the School of Veterinary Medicine. Most writings about the school speak of the role played by Dr. Benjamin Rush, an eminent physician and a faculty member of the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania. In 1807, Dr. Rush, at the invitation of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, spoke to a class of medical students on "The Duty and Advantages of Studying the Diseases of Domestic Animals and the Remedies Proper to Remove Them." Dr. Rush spoke of his desire to see "the veterinary science taught in our university," and of the advantages of physicians becoming more knowledgeable about animal diseases. He elaborated, in moving terms, about man's obligation to care for the animals that served him and about the need to develop a concept of "one medicine." From a philosophical and medical standpoint his comments presented a strong case for the development of veterinary medicine in the young country, but they actually had little to do with the eventual establishment of a veterinary department at the University of Pennsylvania. This is not to diminish the importance of Rush's remarks, but rather to place this piece of history in its proper perspective with regard to the creation of a veterinary school.

Dr. Rush's oration took place in 1807. A period of seventy-seven years was to elapse before the trustees of the University saw fit to create the veterinary department and it is doubtful whether, in making this decision, they were influenced by Dr. Rush's comments. In fact, the prime mover in bringing the trustees to a moment of decision was a farm manager named Horace Smith.

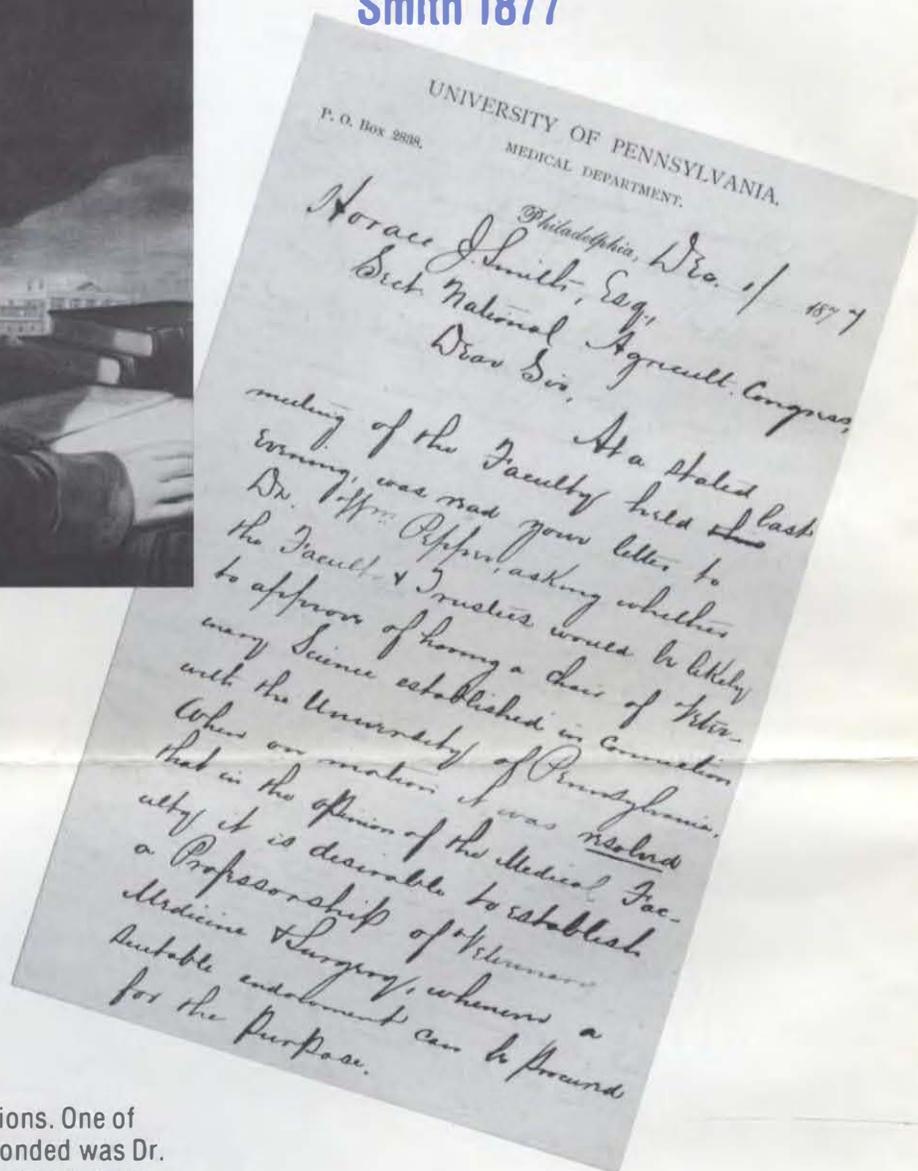
As befits the situation, Mr. Smith was an alumnus of the University and a Quaker by persuasion. After graduation, he developed what was apparently a good business dealing in the importation of china and glass. The Civil War provoked a business failure, and Mr. Smith enlisted in the Sanitary Commission, an organization that provided nursing service in field hospitals. The war experience drained his health and he turned to farming as a therapeutic measure. In the 1870s Mr. Smith was manager of a large horse farm in what is now West Philadelphia. His distress at the lack of competent veterinary service convinced him that the establishment of an educational system was needed for aspiring veterinarians. With this goal in mind, he began a voluminous correspondence with friends, politicians, physicians,



Rush 1807

VS

Smith 1877



and leaders in agricultural organizations. One of those with whom he actively corresponded was Dr. James Law, Professor of Veterinary Science in the Agricultural College at Cornell University, and later first dean of the veterinary school at that institution. Most of Mr. Smith's correspondents were enthusiastic about the idea of establishing a veterinary school. Encouraged by this, Mr. Smith wrote to Dr. William Pepper, then Provost of the University, inquiring as to whether the trustees and medical faculty "would be likely to approve of having a chair of veterinary science established in connection with the University of Pennsylvania." On the evening of November 30, 1877 the medical faculty responded favorably to this idea, and on January 1, 1878 the trustees resolved that it would be "desirable to establish a Professorship of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery whenever a suitable endowment can be procured for this purpose." Mr. Smith's efforts had been successful!

The problem, then, was money and Mr. Smith turned his attention to raising funds, including the initiation of a subscription campaign. In this he was

not so successful, but in 1882, Mr. Joshua B. Lippincott, a member of the trustees and president of a large publishing firm, announced that he was contributing \$10,000 "for the purpose of establishing a Veterinary Department under the control of the University of Pennsylvania." Shortly after this, Mr. Joseph Gillingham, a trustee and owner of a large cattle farm, announced that he, too, would contribute \$10,000 for this purpose.

With this money in hand the trustees approved construction of a building and began to search for a faculty. The original building stood on a triangular plot of ground bound by Pine Street (now Hamilton Walk), 36th Street, and Guardian Avenue (no longer in existence). This site is now occupied by the Medical Laboratories Building. It was opened to receive students on October 2, 1884 and was built at a cost of \$16,900. (More about this in the next issue of *Bellwether*.)

Let us retain Dr. Benjamin Rush's eloquent and imaginative statement as a part of our heritage, but let us also remember that it was the persistence of Mr. Horace Smith that finally ignited the spark that was needed to establish our school!