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Dr. Olive Kendrick Britt

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Dr. Olive Kendrick Britt

First female intern-resident in Penn Vet's large animal clinic, 1959



"Her reputation preceded her, and many people wanted to be in the presence of a legend."



The late Dr. Olive Kendrick Britt broke ground as a woman in equine medicine and surgery—a field she didn't even enter until her forties. Growing up on a ranch, she deferred her dream of becoming a veterinarian for many years. After graduating from the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine at age 42, she was accepted in 1959 as the first female intern-resident at Penn Vet's large animal clinic. Only one veterinary school graduate was accepted annually to the competitive position.

Britt's story is inextricably linked to that of the late Dr. Charles Raker, a founding father of New Bolton Center, where he served as Chief of Large Animal Surgery for nearly 30 years and championed female veterinarians.

Raker went to bat for Britt—first during the internship admission process and later on, with clients reluctant to see a woman vet.

In the book *Women in Veterinary Medicine: Profiles of Success* by Drs. Sue Drum and H. Ellen Whiteley (Iowa State University Press), Britt noted, "Although I had many fine teachers, Dr. Charles W. Raker [V'42] is the man most responsible for my success. He fashioned in me the knowledge and confidence to become an accomplished equine practitioner."

Accomplished, indeed: Britt would go on to become the first female equine practitioner in Virginia and the first woman appointed to the Virginia Board of Veterinary Medicine. With Dr. Milton Kingsbury, she established the Woodside Equine Clinic and cared for the legendary racehorse Secretariat.

Like Raker, Britt nurtured aspiring veterinarians, including Dr. Laura Gay Senk. An accomplished equestrian, Senk was riding in a Richmond horse show in the late 1960s when she met Britt and Kingsbury.

"They were the veterinarians for the show," recalled Senk, speaking by phone from her home on Long Island. "I followed them around at the show, and they were gracious enough to allow me to come to their clinic and stay to observe and learn on many occasions."

"Dr. Britt was very methodical and thorough. She explained everything clearly to the client and took time to explain things to me," she continued.

Senk ultimately enrolled in vet school at Georgia, where she became good friends with classmate Dr. Corinne Sweeney—future Associate Dean of New Bolton Center. One day, Britt returned to speak at her vet school alma mater. "They held her lecture in our main lecture hall, which was quite large. When I opened the door and walked in, it was standing room only," Senk said. "Her reputation preceded her, and many people wanted to be in the presence of a legend. I felt very appreciative and honored that I had the opportunity to work with her."