

Amos Stults, V'35, Remembers Days of Yore

BY NANCY WEST

Just two years ago, **Amos Stults, V'35**, retired after a remarkable 70 years of service to animals both large and small from his veterinary practice in Hopewell, N.J. Now 96, he is Penn Vet's oldest living alumnus. His memories of becoming a veterinarian at the end of the Great Depression would, quite literally, fill a book. In fact, he still has the weathered leather-bound logbooks of his field calls to local farmers and other clientele dating to 1937.

Dr. Stults became interested in veterinary medicine as a high school student while working at the Walker Gordon Dairy Farm in Plainsboro, N.J. "During the summer, veterinary students came to the farm as part of their education," Dr. Stults recalled. "After watching them work on the cows, I thought, 'If they can do it, I can do it.'"

Memories of Penn

In 1931, he entered the School of Veterinary Medicine with only a high school diploma. "In those days, the School was desperate for students because of the Depression," he explained. "So if you showed any potential, they would accept you." Dr. Stults noted that only about half of the 54 students who started in his class graduated. His was the last class for which students were accepted without an undergraduate degree.

Tuition at that time was about \$250 per term, according to Dr. Stults, and most of the students had little or no money. Only one person in the class could afford a car. Most earned spending money by working in wait staff jobs provided through the University. These coveted jobs were passed down from one veterinary student to another each year. The entire veterinary school was housed in the city, with large animals brought into a large courtyard area, what now serves as the parking lot inside the Old Vet Quadrangle.

Starting Out

After graduation, Dr. Stults bought his Hopewell veterinary practice. As part of the deal, he got a broken-down car, a little bit of medical equipment and a two-car garage, half of which served as his veterinary hospital. The previous veterinarian had died about four months earlier and most



Dr. Amos Stults (left) with his son, Dr. Bud Stults

of the business had disappeared in the meantime, so Dr. Stults had to rebuild the practice from scratch. Concentrating on large animals, he rode with the town's hardware-store owner on delivery runs around the farming community, introducing himself to the local farmers.

"There were 9,000 cows in Hopewell Township then," he remembered. Despite that, times were tough. "My first

month in practice, I had three calls and collected a total of \$9.00. We charged \$3.00 for a road call and \$1.00 for an office visit. When a call came in the middle of the night to deliver a horse or cow, we were darned happy because we needed the money,” he said, referring to both himself and his late wife, Dorothy, who helped him run the practice and handled the bookkeeping until 2000, when she was nearly 90.

During his first year of practice, he earned about \$34. To survive those very lean early years, Dr. Stults became involved with the New Jersey state government’s program to eliminate bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis, bacterial diseases spread in milk. To be accepted into the program, he had to work the first three months for no pay. After that, he received \$10 a day plus \$2 car-expense money for testing anywhere from 150 to 300 cows each day.

“Through this work, my dad and other veterinarians helped to eliminate these diseases in cows as well as humans,” noted his son, **Amos “Bud” Stults, Jr., V’73**, who joined his father in practice after graduating from Penn Vet. “My dad did this at great personal cost. One spring, he contracted brucellosis and had recurrences every spring after that, usually ending up in the hospital for a week. This was common among large animal practitioners at the time.”

Dr. Stults Sr. also suffered his share of broken bones. “You had to watch out for flying feet. We had little anesthesia for large animals in those days, so it wasn’t surprising that they kicked me,” said Dr. Stults, whose nose was broken several times.

Even the anesthesia available for small animals was crude at best. “For dogs, we made a cone of newspaper, saturated a cotton swab with ether, put it in the cone and pushed it over the dog’s nose. When the dog passed out, we took it off and regulated how much he inhaled,” he explained.

Evolving with the Times

After World War II, Dr. Stults’s small animal practice grew. When gas rationing ended and people could travel more easily, more clients began to drive over from Princeton. Among his clientele were some notable people, including novelist Dashiell Hammett and the Lamberts of Lambert Pharmaceuticals, makers of Listerine®, who owned 14 great Danes and later, 12 Labrador retrievers.

“Our clients were all friends back then,” he said wistfully. “If you went to a farmer’s house and a calf was dying, you cried along with him. If they had a new baby, you celebrated with them. That sense of community has been lost over the years. It’s a different world today.”

Still, the practice Dr. Stults began in 1935 is thriving, with seven veterinarians on staff in a veterinary hospital that he designed and built himself about 30 years ago. The practice has evolved with the times and the local agricultural landscape, the primary focus shifting from large to small animals.

Giving Back

Over the years, Dr. Stults and the practice he founded have contributed to the education of Penn Vet students in various ways. In the 1940s and 1950s, senior students rode with Dr. Stults to learn what a large animal practitioner did. “It was considered a highlight of their education,” Bud Stults related.

These days, Hopewell Veterinary Hospital helps students by sponsoring an Opportunity Scholarship. “I have a lot of respect for **Dr. [Charles] Raker [V’42]**

and others who were at Penn when I studied there,” said Bud. “They provided me with a great opportunity, and life has been very good to us. That’s reason enough to give something back.”

“The Opportunity Scholarship program is very well run, and it’s rewarding to see how our financial support is directly helping a student,” noted **Dr. Ray Hostetter, V’69**, who has

been in partnership with the Stultses since graduating from Penn Vet.

Hopewell’s first scholarship recipient was **Dr. Kristina Willoughby, V’06**, and they look forward to beginning sponsorship of another student this year.

Looking back over his 70 years in veterinary medicine, Dr. Stults is astonished at the changes he has seen. “When I first started, you couldn’t fix an animal that had a heart problem or anything very serious. It’s a completely different ballgame today. With modern technology and other new developments, you can do so much more to help animals, and that’s a wonderful thing.”

“With modern technology and other new developments, you can do so much more to help animals, and that’s a wonderful thing.”