

South Carolina's Veterinary School - What Went Wrong?

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Like many aspiring veterinary students, I first began investigating the intricate process of applying to veterinary school as a high school student. However, as a South Carolina resident, I quickly realized that, sadly, no such institution existed in my home state. This was extremely disappointing and confusing to me. As a lifelong resident of the state and future third-generation Clemson University graduate, I was well aware that my state's land-grant institution had a strong agricultural program. Why wasn't there a vet school? Had there ever been one?

At Clemson's freshman orientation, the pre-veterinary advisor's response to queries on whether South Carolina would ever have its own veterinary program was very brief – that South Carolina does not need such a program as there are several contract seats available at schools in other states. This was of course very disappointing news for a freshman vet school hopeful. While studying at Clemson I did hear some rumors that South Carolina had once started a veterinary school. However, at that time I was unable to locate any concrete evidence.

Even after my later acceptance and enrollment at an out-of-state veterinary school, I remained curious about South Carolina's veterinary past. Upon further research into the emergence of veterinary education in this country, it quickly became clear that not all the early veterinary school ventures survived. The causes for their failures varied, some leaving few traces behind.¹ Encouraged, I resumed my investigation and finally found the documentation of South Carolina's own short-lived veterinary program. Unexpectedly, however, it was not located at Clemson University. To my complete astonishment, veterinary training originally took place at the University of South

Carolina (USC), a non-agricultural school that also happens to be Clemson University's blood-rival institution!²

Most individuals from a state with two large public universities are familiar with how intense and deeply felt rivalries between supporters of those institutions can become; it is especially evident when one sees the two sides facing off in games of football or basketball. However, the original face-off between these two institutions had nothing to do with an athletic field. Instead, the events leading to the actual formation of Clemson Agricultural College and the resultant near-complete destruction of USC were the source of these early bad feelings. Sadly, a permanent casualty of this conflict was USC's nascent veterinary program, one of the unfortunate victims of an impressive political battle at the close of the 19th century.³

The original South Carolina College in Columbia, SC was chartered in 1801 and opened its doors to students on January 10, 1805.⁴ Over the years, it survived several reorganizations as well as the American Civil War. At two different points, the school called itself a "University". What has been referred to as the "2nd University" of South Carolina officially opened to students in 1888, and it is this short era (1888-1890) that is of interest here. John McLaren (J.M.) McBryde was largely responsible for the impressive improvement of the school that occurred during this time. In 1882 the school's president resigned and McBryde was appointed chairman in the interim. His excellent management of the school during that interval, however, led to him being unanimously elected president in 1883. McBryde was a native of South Carolina and a professor of agriculture and horticulture. As president, he

strove to build a strong agricultural program for the state.³ When the 2nd University was officially reorganized in May 1888, the University's Board of Trustees also elected individuals to fill the teaching positions. One of these faculty members was Dr. William Benjamin (W.B.) Niles, DVM, a professor for the Agricultural and Mechanical College's veterinary department. Niles was an 1885 graduate from the Iowa Agricultural College, now Iowa State University. Another individual hired was Dr. B. Meade Bolton, MD, Professor of Physiology, Hygiene, and Bacteriology.^{5,6} According to USC's course catalog for the 1888-1889 school year, there were two classes (years) of coursework provided by the veterinary department. The first year concentrated on anatomy, including pathological anatomy, and physiology. The second year featured lectures on action and usage of medicines, surgery, and obstetrics. Most importantly, students received practical instruction at the Veterinary Infirmary as cases became available (except on Sundays, of course!). These courses were part of what would be considered an undergraduate program today. Additionally, USC also supplied a Graduate Course that allowed further laboratory research and study in veterinary medicine.⁷ However, instead of a PhD, a DVM degree was awarded. It seems that only one student signed up for this extended study - Thomas Jefferson Kinard of Abbeville, SC. Kinard successfully completed his studies and was awarded his DVM degree as part of the Class of 1891.^{2,8,9}

One big motivation for the historically liberal arts USC to work so diligently in building up its agricultural program was that it wished to take advantage of the funds provided by the Morrill Act of 1862 and the Hatch Act of 1887.² By becoming the institution that provided the state's residents with agricultural education and maintaining the experimental station, the university would receive these federal funds.³

However, not everyone in South Carolina was pleased that the state's agricultural programs were located at USC. Starting in 1885, several years before the reorganization of the university, politically powerful individuals were criticizing the school. Ben Tillman, a successful farmer, felt that having the agricultural program at USC barred the "common man" and "poor farmer" from being able to pursue the education they needed at

a school that catered to the "elite." Such a place would not appeal to "ordinary" citizens of the state. He had been convinced of the superiority of a separate agricultural college. He considered the agricultural annex at USC a fraud.^{2,3} "[It] has trustees with elastic ideas, and it has an elastic name. It is agricultural and mechanical when money is to be received; it is classical and literary when money is to be spent."¹⁰

The Hon. Thomas Green Clemson, Tillman's close friend, felt the same way as Tillman did about USC. The son-in-law of US Senator John C. Calhoun, Clemson believed strongly in the benefits of using scientific progress to improve agriculture – so much so that in 1883 he drafted his will to include provisions for the creation of a land-grant institution after his death. Specifically, his will provided funds for a scientific institution to be built upon his land in Fort Hill, SC that would be left to the state of South Carolina when he died.^{2,3}

Thomas Green Clemson died in April 1888. Now armed with funds for an independent agricultural school, Tillman was finally able to move beyond simple vocal opposition and set into motion his plan of crushing the Agricultural and Mechanical College of USC. Although the reorganized University had rapidly improved under McBryde's leadership and most of its often criticized failings had been successfully addressed, it was too late. Clemson's will was upheld by the courts and Tillman set about campaigning for the state to accept the bequest. By November the bill was signed and plans to establish the new specialized agricultural school, Clemson Agricultural College, were developed. The new trustees became custodians of the funds derived from the Morrill and Hatch Acts, transferring the funds away from USC. However, Tillman did not stop at just the removal of USC's agricultural department. By 1890 he had become Governor of the state, a position from which he was able to have legislation passed causing the division and near obliteration of the University of South Carolina itself. While he did spare the school from ultimate destruction, it was to no longer be a university. "South Carolina College" was restricted to instruction in the liberal arts. With whole departments disbanded and the graduate programs gone, most of the now unneeded equipment was sold or later transferred to the new school.^{3,4}

Clemson Agricultural College was built, and in 1893 opened its doors for its first class session.² It was not until 1895, though, that Dr. W.E.A. Wyman was appointed as the first “assistant professor of agriculture” and instructor in veterinary sciences. Wyman had received his VS from New York College of Veterinary Surgeons and was an authority on horse lameness.¹¹ However, preliminary news of this hire caused some commentary in the gossip section of at least one medical journal. “The Board of Trustees of the Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina are said to have appointed a veterinarian on the staff at a salary of \$800 per year. Surely this is not a munificent salary for a veterinarian skilled to fill such a position properly.”¹² It was likely both this apparently low salary and the lingering bad associations with the forceful takedown of USC that caused some individuals to be wary of accepting a position at the new school. Wyman stayed on the Clemson faculty as veterinarian until 1897.²

In 1898 Dr. G.E. Nesom was appointed as the new veterinarian. During his tenure the school’s veterinary program expanded, and the courses in the 1901 catalog included ten veterinary courses. These included subjects such as the horse, anatomy and histology, veterinary physiology, pathology and pharmacy, veterinary surgery and horseshoeing, sporadic animal diseases, contagious animal diseases and meat inspection, and veterinary clinics.² If they chose, students could also pursue post-graduate and special work “... designed for a preparatory course to entrance into a regular veterinary college... the course taken here will shorten the time for graduation from the leading veterinary colleges, whether the student desires to become a veterinary practitioner, government meat inspector, or army veterinarian.”¹³ Evidently several Clemson students pursued this course and went on to graduate as veterinarians from other institutions.²

In 1904 Dr. Louis Amos Klein, VMD was the next individual to assume the faculty position of a veterinarian. A University of Pennsylvania graduate, he remained until 1907, when he returned to Pennsylvania. He became the Dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine in 1909.^{2,14}

Clemson Agricultural College was developing a balanced veterinary curriculum and attracting top-notch faculty members. Why then did Clemson University not create at this time an official DVM program of its own? Evidently, it was because that type of professional program was not in accordance with the overall philosophy of the institution. The essential goal for Clemson’s early veterinary courses was to teach students from the animal husbandry department with the intent to make every farmer his own veterinarian. In the early part of the 20th century, attendance at a veterinary school was not a requirement to take the licensing exam to practice veterinary medicine. Therefore, any student that actually did want to pursue the career would not be limited from becoming a non-graduate licensed veterinarian or furthering their training at an existing veterinary school. This approach to education does seem to be very much in the spirit of what Thomas Green Clemson and Ben Tillman were advocating for the farmer - better crop methods and livestock care.^{2, 15} In fact that same attitude is still reflected today in some non-veterinarian individuals around this country that chafe at limits placed on them by veterinary practice acts.¹⁶

However, there might still have been a chance for the eventual creation of a veterinary school if there had not been the problem of Clemson’s geographical location in the far northwest corner of the state. As it was the agricultural institution, the animal disease diagnostic service was based there. Unfortunately, this was not ideal circumstances for the staff veterinarians experience difficulties traveling throughout the state to perform necropsies on those animals dying of unknown causes. By 1921, Clemson had agreed to let the laboratory be moved to Columbia, the centrally located state capitol city. As a consequence of this action, most of the DVMs employed at Clemson, including the state veterinarian, relocated to Columbia.^{2,17} One can only speculate what would have occurred if the agricultural program had remained at USC in Columbia from the outset. Columbia is a very urban area in the 21st century, and if USC had kept its veterinary program it would have faced definite challenges such as sustaining relevance amidst the decline of the horse. Clemson’s program did not seem to suffer as others did during the challenging post-WWI transition

period due to its particular focus on swine and bovine research and more rural location.^{2, 17}

In the present day, Clemson University produces competitive veterinary school applicants from its Animal and Veterinary Sciences Department based in the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Life Sciences (CAFLS). In recent years the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) alliance has enabled the University of Georgia to admit up to 17 new South Carolina students per year, granting in-state status for all four years. Additional provisions allow for another 5 seats at Mississippi State University and up to 4 at Tuskegee University.^{18,19} It seems that at this point in the early 21st century the state of South Carolina feels it does not need its own school and can meet its veterinary needs with its 30 or so yearly graduates produced at other institutions. While this circumstance results in unfortunate odds for aspiring veterinary students, in the long run this arrangement is probably a prudent one. Difficulties securing funding amidst statewide budget cuts, as well as the potential consequences of producing veterinarians in excess of the state's needs, are both serious issues to consider. However, lately there have been murmurings of a potential future regional alliance between South Carolina and Georgia as the University of Georgia seeks to make significant updates to its facility. If this proposal comes to fruition, South Carolina could have as many as 34 seats reserved for students. Recent attempts have been made to procure funding.²⁰ One potential source may be the funds earmarked for a "Clemson University Veterinary Institute."²¹ Time will tell if anything comes of these tentative arrangements.

Reviewing the history of early veterinary education in South Carolina makes one wonder what might have been had a political power struggle not taken place during its infancy. USC's veterinary program might have grown and flourished, potentially even weathering the hard times the profession as a whole faced in subsequent years. Many of the original key figures went on to achieve other great things that benefited the agriculture industry and the field of veterinary medicine.

John M. McBryde chose to leave his position as President of the crippled College of South Carolina.² On May 7, 1891 the Board of Visitors

at Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (later to become Virginia Polytechnic University) elected McBryde as President of their college and Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station. In the prior years, high faculty turnover and internal dissension had weakened that institution's program and standards. The board hoped that with a thorough reorganization of the school and new leadership the college could be rebuilt. As McBryde worked to fill positions at the Virginia school, he selected his former colleague Dr. W.B. Niles as Chair of Veterinary Science and Veterinarian of the Station. Dr. Niles did not accept the position "for personal reasons." His brother, Dr. Edwin P. Niles, DVM, also an Iowa State graduate, was later selected for the position. McBryde's hard work at this school probably laid the foundation for the strong agricultural program that exists at Virginia Tech to the present day.²²

After declining a second opportunity to head a university veterinary department, Dr. W.B. Niles instead chose to return to Iowa and a career in research. Eventually, he joined the research team of Dr. Marion Dorset, also working alongside his former colleague Dr. Bolton, and C.N. McBryde. McBryde, who had relocated to Iowa, was the son of President McBryde and had managed to finish his B.S. degree (Class of 1891) during USC's final year as a university. He later received his MD from Johns Hopkins University and his PhD from George Washington University. The Dorset, Niles, and McBryde team was responsible for developing the very first highly successful hog cholera vaccine. Their work was completed during the years 1905-1907. By 1907, the team had patented their vaccine, which set the US onto the path that resulted in the complete eradication of the disease in 1978.^{2, 23}

Finally, there is one last individual to revisit. As mentioned before, only one person managed to reap the full benefits from that brief window in time the USC veterinary program existed - Thomas Jefferson Kinard. What became of this lone student to emerge with a DVM degree from a South Carolina institution? According to his grandson, Dr. Kinard remained in Ninety-Six, SC all his life, practicing veterinary medicine and serving as a veterinarian for the Southern Railroad. The family still possesses Kinard's DVM diploma from USC (Figure 1) - a piece of the past that is truly one of a kind.^{24, 25}

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