

Private Veterinary Colleges in the United States, 1852-1927

Everett B. Miller, VMD

FORMAL VETERINARY MEDICAL education in the United States began in 1852, with the opening of the Veterinary College of Philadelphia.¹⁻⁵ This was a separate, privately owned veterinary college—the first of 26 such institutions that would help in the foundation and the growth of the nation's veterinary profession (Table 1).⁶⁻⁸ But, 75 years later, the commercial veterinary colleges were no more (Fig 1). The United States College of Veterinary Surgeons, in Washington, DC, which was the last operating one, closed its doors after the commencement exercises held for five on June 15, 1927.⁹ Altogether, this category of educational institution had graduated no less than 9,388 veterinarians.

A few analytical statements have been made about these private veterinary colleges, and generally little good was said.^{10,11} One graduate of this form (or category) of educational institution observed that "the private veterinary colleges should never have been allowed to become the necessity they were."¹² This may have been the best statement ever made about them. So the question arises: Why are the origins and early developments in the veterinary medical educational system in the United States contained in the story of the private colleges? Also, the second question: What caused them to disappear? The purpose in the present report is to search for answers to these questions.

Early Beginnings

When veterinary colleges appeared in the United States, higher education had hardly begun to organize to meet the growing American needs for scientific and technical persons.¹³⁻¹⁶ Religion (or theology), law, and medical practice were just becoming major studies at the established universities and colleges. But for many more years, persons entering into the practice of the farriery and the veterinary art obtained their know-how from older, traditional healers or from some one among the small scattering of foreign-educated immigrant veterinarians and sometimes by apprenticeship or by "reading" in an office. Moreover, lecture-hall presentations on veterinary medicine were given to agricultural society audiences (Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture) and to students attending medical colleges in Philadelphia (in 1813, by James Mease, MD; in 1846-1850, by Robert Jennings, VS).⁵⁻⁷ Also, in Boston in 1853, lectures on

TABLE 1—Private Veterinary Colleges in the United States, 1852-1927

Name	No. of graduates	Year established or chartered	Year of first graduates	Year closed or discontinued
Veterinary College of Philadelphia	ND	1852	1859	1866
Boston Veterinary Institute	ND	1854	ND	1860
New York College of Veterinary Surgeons	291	1857	1867	1899
Veterinary Institute of Chicago	ND	1862	ND	ca 1869
Pennsylvania College of Veterinary Surgeons	ND	1866	ND	1870
St Louis Veterinary College	ND	ca 1875	ND	(ca 1875)
American Veterinary College (New York)	578	1875	1876	1899
Columbia Veterinary College (New York)	79	1877	1879	1884
Chicago Veterinary College	2,320	1883	1884	1920
New Jersey Veterinary College (Trenton)	ND	ca 1887	ND	(ca 1887)
Iowa Veterinary College (Des Moines)	13	1890	1892	1894
Kansas City (Mo) Veterinary College	1,857	1891	1892	1918
Ohio Veterinary College (Cincinnati)	67	1891	1892	1896
Indiana Veterinary College (Indianapolis)	902	1892	1893	1924
National Veterinary College (Washington, DC)	50	1892	1893	1896
McKillip Veterinary College (Chicago)	1,223	1894	1897	1920
United States College of Veterinary Surgeons (Washington, DC)	419	1894	1895	1927
Western Veterinary College (Kansas City, Mo)	178	1897	1898	1908
San Francisco Veterinary College	330	1899	1900	1918
Collins Veterinary College (Nashville, Tenn)	ND	ca 1899	ND	(ca 1899)
Cincinnati Veterinary College	414	1900	1903	1920
University Veterinary College (Kansas City, Mo)	53	1902	1903	1906
St Joseph (Mo) Veterinary College	421	1905	1908	1923
Terre Haute (Ind) Veterinary College	145	1909	1911	1918
Southwestern Veterinary College (Dallas)	2	1909	1912	1916
Arkansas Veterinary College (Fayetteville)	25	1913	1916	1921

ND = not determined.

anatomy and diseases of the horse were given (by D. D. Slade, MD) on request of the Massachusetts State Agricultural Society,⁷ and in Cleveland between 1854 and 1857, Jennings had lectured to students enrolled at the old Ohio Agricultural College.⁵⁻⁷

A proprietary agricultural college in mid-19th century, such as the one in Cleveland, was an important forward step for the institutionalizing of veterinary medical education, but it was only one of the new forms of institutions that were now coming

Dr. Miller is associate editor, *American Journal of Veterinary Research*, American Veterinary Medical Association, 930 N Meacham Rd, Schaumburg, IL 60196.

Presented, in part, at the meeting of the American Veterinary Historical Society, July 22, 1980, during the 117th Annual AVMA Meeting, July 21-24, 1980, Washington, DC.

