

# Pioneer Women in Veterinary Medicine, Their History and Where They Studied

Howard H. Erickson

Until the last 50 years, relatively few women earned degrees in veterinary medicine. This paper presents the earliest women known to have studied veterinary medicine, and some of their trials and tribulations in a male dominated profession. The world's first veterinary school, L'Ecole Nationale Veterinaire de Lyon, was founded in Lyon, France, in 1761, followed by the L'Ecole Nationale Veterinaire de Alfort (Figure 1), near Paris, in 1765.<sup>1</sup> It would be more than 100 years (1897) before the first woman would graduate in veterinary medicine from the school at Alfort.

“A new phenomenon in the medical world, the first woman who has attached herself to the veterinary profession, is we learn, from the *Éclair* of 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1897, Mdlle. Marie Kapczewitsch, the daughter of a wealthy Russian family. Being resident for a pretty long time in Paris, she began six months ago to attend the clinical lectures at Alfort, with a view to being able to look after her own animals medically, but she became so enamoured of her veterinary studies, that she entered as an ordinary student, attending classes for eight terms, passed her examinations excellently, and obtained a veterinary diploma.”



**Figure 1.**  
**Ecole Nationale Veterinaire  
d'Alfort, circa 1900.**

*The Veterinary Institutions  
of the World at the Turn of  
the Century, H. Hauptner,  
Berlin, 1900.*

## Marie Kapczewitsch (1855-?)

According to a short article in the *British Veterinary Journal* in 1897,<sup>2</sup> translated from *Deutsche Tierarztliche Wochenschrift*, No. 37, 11 September, 1897, the first lady veterinary surgeon in Europe and probably in the whole world was Marie Kapczewitsch. The article reads as follows:

According to a hand-written register (Figure 2) recently obtained from the archives at L'Ecole Nationale Veterinaire d'Alfort, Marie Kapczewitsch was born on September 2, 1855 in the village of Loknistoe in the province of Chernigov in Ukraine, Russia (Personal communication with Dr. Claude Grandmontagne, General Secretary of Vet2011). On July 23, 1897,

more than 130 years after the founding of the school at Alfort, Marie Kapczewitsch, received a diploma in veterinary medicine at the age of 41. The name Marie Kapczewitsch may be of Ukrainian-Jewish origin (Personal communication with Vladimir Akoyev, Russian physician/scientist).

<b>Mlle. Kapsevitch</b>	
born. September 2, 1855	
Loknistoe, Chernigov, Ukraine	
Grades:	
1893-94	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester - 7.33 in French, médiane (the math median) 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester 8.71 (passable)
1894-95	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 6.91 (médiane) 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester 8.93 (passable)
1895-96	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 9.0 (passable) 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester 9.90 (passable)
1896-97	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 11.00 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester 11.66
Graduated July 23, 1897 – 1 <sup>st</sup> female to earn Veterinary diploma in France	

**Figure 2.** Transcribed from a hand-written register for Marie Kapczewitsch from the archives at Alfort giving date of birth (September 2, 1855) and place of birth, semesters enrolled (1893-97), grades, and diploma granted on July 23, 1897.

Both schools, at Alfort and Lyon, were under the Minister of Agriculture. The School at Alfort initially had three different curricula: the classic one for future veterinarians, similar to Lyon; the curriculum for inspectors of stud farms and finally a specific curriculum for military veterinarians. The location of the Alfort Veterinary School is still at the same location, the oldest school in the world remaining on its original site. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Marie Kapczewitsch studied there the school in Alfort had 10 Lecturers and 10 Assistants. The course of study consisted of 8 Terms of 6 months with one special examination and one general examination each year. The enrollment in the school was about 300 students.

### Aleen Cust (1868-1927)

The first woman to graduate with a degree in veterinary medicine in the United Kingdom was Aleen Isobel Cust (Figure 3).<sup>3</sup> She was born into a very distinguished family on February 7, 1868 at Cordangen Manor near Tipperary, Ireland.



**Figure 3.** Aleen Cust, possibly taken during her student years 1894-1900.  
*From Warwick and McDonald.*

Her mother was a grand-daughter of the Earl of Bedford, and became a Woman of the Bed-Chamber to Queen Victoria. Her father was Sir Leopold Cust, a grandson of Lord Brownlow, and godson to Leopold, King of the Belgians. Aleen's brother was Sir Charles Cust, Equerry to King George V. Aleen was probably home schooled; she first began training as a nurse at the London Hospital, but soon decided to become a veterinarian.

Aleen enrolled in the New Veterinary College in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1894 under the name A.I. Custance to shield her mother. Henry Custance, born in 1842, was a famous jockey, who rode three Derby winners and many others. Aleen was one of the best students in her class, winning the New Veterinary College medal for junior anatomy in 1895 and the silver medal for zoology from the Highland and Agricultural College in 1897. However, in the same year, 1897, she was denied permission by the all-male Council of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) to take the first professional examination for licensure. Aleen went on to complete her studies in 1900.

With the help of a testimonial from William Williams, Principal, New Veterinary College, that she had completed the course of study in veterinary medicine and was fully competent in all subjects, she obtained an assistantship with William Byrne, Roscommon, Ireland. She was a very capable and popular practitioner. In 1905, she attended the Eighth International Veterinary Congress in Budapest, presenting a paper on her trip to Budapest to the Central Veterinary Association of Ireland in 1906.

In 1906, Liautard noted in an editorial about female veterinarians in the *American Veterinary Review*<sup>4</sup> as follows:

“Ladies are now entering veterinary schools in almost all parts of the world. Russia, France, America, and Australia have their lady veterinarians. Some specialties of veterinary science can be well filled by them, and the presence of one of them at the International Congress at Budapest, where she was one of the most eminent speakers, and the recent election of one as Member of the Societe Centrale de Medecine Veterinaire of Paris, all tend to prove that soon England also must come in line and throw open the doors of the profession equally to students of both sexes.”

In 1907, the Galway County Council appointed Aleen veterinary inspector to administer the Diseases of Animals Act; the RCVS tried to block the appointment, but she prevailed under the compromise term “inspector.” When Byrne died in 1910, Aleen ran the practice on her own until 1915, procuring horses for the British Army in the last year. She subsequently went to France with the YMCA during World War I because she could not serve in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps with the British Army. She did, however, serve in the Queen Mary’s Army Auxiliary Corps from January 14, 1918 to November 10, 1918 and served in France from February 10 to October 9, 1918 as the Unit Administrator of a bacteriology laboratory. This was equivalent to the rank of captain in the British Army.

After the war, an Act of Parliament made it illegal to bar women from any profession because of their sex. In 1922, Aleen was permitted to sit for the final examination of the RCVS; she was awarded a diploma from the Royal Veterinary College in London since the New Veterinary

College was no longer in existence, and officially put on the register more than 20 years after she completed her studies.<sup>3</sup>

In 1924, Aleen sold her property in Ireland and moved into a house called “New Lodge” in a village called Plaitford in the New Forest in Hampshire, England. She kept one or two horses and began to breed dogs – Pomeranians and Cocker Spaniels, also birds, especially ornamental pheasants. She died in Jamaica on January 29, 1937.

In addition to the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, two other veterinary colleges were established in Edinburgh in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one by John Gamgee in 1857 and the other by William Williams in 1873.<sup>5</sup> William’s New Veterinary College was established at the request of numerous students of veterinary science, veterinary surgeons, and agriculturalists. The initial location was in Gayfield House, a large villa on East London Street in Edinburgh; it formally opened on October 22, 1873. On October 24, 1883, 10 years later, they moved into a custom-built Veterinary College at 41 Elm Row (Figure 4) where Aleen Cust studied. The logo on the front of the prospectus (Figure 5) for the session 1903-04 shows the sculpture of the horse, bull and dog at the entrance of the College. In 1904, the New Veterinary College moved to Liverpool University and became their new Veterinary Faculty. Williams

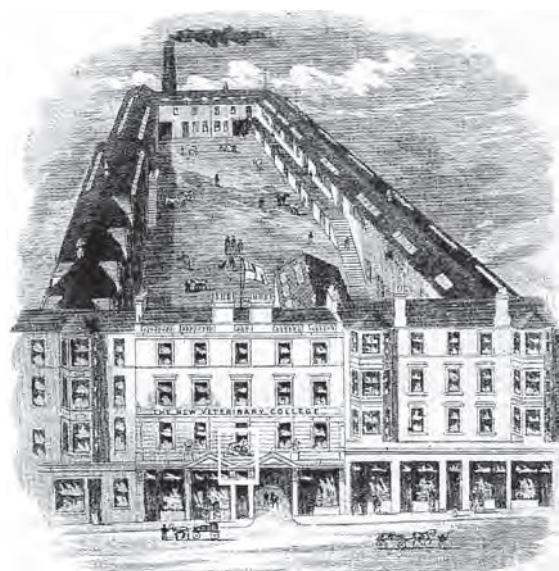


Figure 4. New Veterinary College at Elms Row, Leith Walk, Edinburgh. From Warwick and McDonald.



**Figure 5. New Veterinary College Prospectus for 1903-04.**  
From Warwick and McDonald.



**Figure 6. William Williams, Principal, New Veterinary College.** From Ford.

(1832-1900) was a Welshman with many family links to farriery and early veterinary medicine (Figure 6).<sup>5</sup> He enrolled in William Dick's College of Veterinary Medicine in 1855, passed his oral examinations in 1857, and received a diploma from the Highland and Agricultural Society. Williams established a large veterinary practice in Yorkshire from 1857 to 1867. After the death of William Dick, Williams returned to be the third Principal of Dick's Veterinary College. Williams resigned as Principal of the Royal Dick on July 16, 1873 and became the Principal of the New Veterinary College.

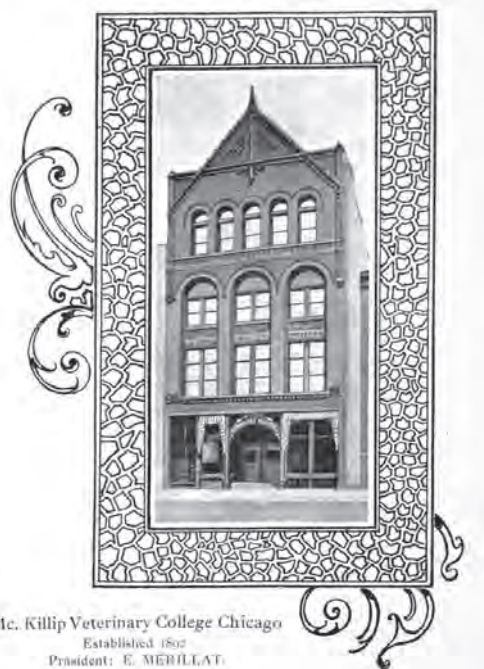


**Figure 7. Mignon Nicholson.**  
From *Delphos Daily Herald*, 1903.

### Mignon Nicholson (1876-1906)

Mignon or Mignonne Marie Nicholson (Figure 7) was born in 1876. A January 15, 1903, article, "Only Woman Veterinary Surgeon in the World," published in the *Delphos Daily Herald*, Delphos, Ohio, provides some background about her.<sup>6</sup> The article describes her as a tiny woman, graceful, slender and attractive. Her childhood was spent in Ravenswood, Long Island, New York. She married when she was very young; since her husband traveled a lot in his work, she began to study dogs and cats and kept busy treating the sick animals of her neighbors. The article suggests she had done some informal study of human medicine and surgery. It also notes she can handle horses adequately and was required to work with horses in her studies at the McKillip Veterinary College. Nicholson preferred small animals and was already well known in Chicago and planned to remain there. A similar article "A New Feminine Calling" was published in the *Indiana Messenger*<sup>7</sup> on January 28, 1903. The article notes that Mrs. Mignonne Nicholson is preparing herself for graduation from veterinary college and has already proved successful in her treatment of dogs.

Nicholson probably enrolled in the McKillip Veterinary College (Figure 8) in Chicago in October of 1900 since it was a 3-year program. The 1901 *Chicago City Directory* lists Mignon Nicholson as a veterinary surgeon, living at 5727 South Paulina when she was a student at McKillip. Since the academic session extended from October



Mc. Killip Veterinary College Chicago  
Established 1892  
President: E. MERILLAT

**Figure 8. McKillip Veterinary College.**  
*The Veterinary Institutions of the World  
at the Turn of the Century, H. Hauptner,  
Berlin, 1900.*

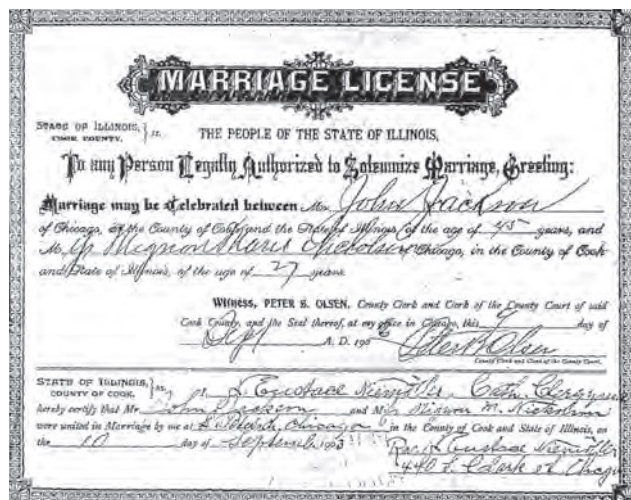
to March, it was common for students to practice veterinary medicine when they were not in school. In the 1901 *Chicago Blue Book*, there is a listing for Mignon Nicholson, Boarding Kennels, on page 788. It also notes Angora cats, imported mice for sale, all pets called for and returned. Nicholson graduated from the McKillip Veterinary College in 1903 with a M.D.V. (Medical Doctor Veterinary) degree during the Seventh annual commencement exercises. There were 19 graduates in the class of

1902, so there were probably 20-30 in the class of 1903 (*Journal of Comparative Medicine and Veterinary Archives* 23:317, 1902). Nicholson may have been engaged in practice in the Douglas District in Chicago.

On September 10, 1903, about six months after she graduated, Nicholson married John Jackson, the owner of a restaurant, Becker and Jackson’s, at Lake Street and Wabash Avenue. The marriage license (Figure 9) indicates that Jackson was 45 years old and that Nicholson was 27 years old. The marriage ceremony was officiated by a Catholic clergyman.

Less than three years later, on June 8, 1906, the headlines on the front page of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*<sup>8</sup> read as follows: **SPURNED WIFE SHOTS SELF: Mrs. Mignon Jackson Commits Suicide in Husband’s Café.** The Jackson’s had been separated for about two months. She came to his restaurant, known as Becker & Jackson’s, hoping for reconciliation; however, he refused because of her use of alcohol. She then stood up, drew a revolver, pressed the muzzle of the gun to her temple and shot herself. In her pocket was a note that read “You know darling that I cannot live without you. The rings go to Kid and Tad. With all my heart. DOLLY.”

On the following day, June 9, 1906, there was a follow-up article on page 9 of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*<sup>9</sup> with the following headline: **BEQUEST FOR DOG AND CAT: Provision for Care of Her Two Household Pets Made by Mrs. Jackson, Who Killed Herself.** The note in her pocket requested that her rings, valued at nearly \$1,000 be sold and the money secured for the care of her pet dog and Angora cat, Kid and Tad.



**Figure 9. Marriage license between John Jackson and Mignon Nicholson.**

The McKillip Veterinary College, 1639 Wabash Avenue, Chicago, was chartered in 1892 by M.H. McKillip, J. M. Wright, and L.A. Merillat and opened to receive students in October, 1894.<sup>10</sup> It started with a course of three collegiate years of six months each. The college had 1223 graduates from 1897 until it closed in 1920; it was the third largest private veterinary college in the United States. The McKillip Veterinary College was distinguished from other schools of its time by the tremendous private clinic conducted in connection with it.<sup>11</sup> In 1905, it was advertised to have the largest practice in the world and offering several courses (Figure

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**McKillip Veterinary College**

CHICAGO. (Chartered 1892.)  
**LARGEST PRACTICE IN THE WORLD.**  
 (Affording unlimited clinical advantages.)

Regular Graduate Course, acquiring the Degree of  
 Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.  
 Post Graduate Course, acquiring the Degree of  
 Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.  
 Meat Inspection Course, Preparatory to the Civil  
 Service Examination for Government Inspectors.  
 (Special attention is given this course in order to  
 prepare the student for the Civil Service Examination.)  
 Practitioner's Course, five weeks advanced work in  
 Medicine, Surgery and Lameness.

SESSION BEGINS OCT. 3, 1905.

Write for a catalog and other information.

G.A. SCOTT, V.S., Secretary,  
 No. 1639, Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill

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**Figure 10. McKillip Veterinary College advertisement.**  
*Massachusetts Ploughman and New England*  
*Journal of Agriculture 64:3327, 1905.*

10), including a five-week practitioner's course with advanced work in medicine, surgery, and lameness (*Mass Ploughman and New England J of Ag 64:3327, 1905*).

The Dr. Fred Born Veterinary Office in the Galloway House and Village in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin has a composite picture of the class of 1906, showing 14 faculty and 55 students. The class of 1914 composite picture shows twenty faculty and sixty-one graduates, including Asta Striever. She may have ranked sixth in her class if the graduates were displayed by class rank. In 1916, Grace Pearce graduated from the McKillip Veterinary College.

### **Isabelle Bruce Reid (1883-1945)**

Isabelle Bruce Reid was born on December 21, 1883 in Melbourne, Australia, the youngest of ten children of Robert Joseph Reid, a merchant from Scotland, and his Victorian-born wife Mary Jane, née Clancy.<sup>12</sup> The family owned a large property at Balwyn, a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Belle, as she was known, developed a passionate interest in animals, particularly horses in her early years. She was educated at Genazzano

convent school, Kew, where she did well academically and showed potential as a soprano. She wanted to continue to study singing, but her parents considered a career on the stage unsuitable for a young woman of her social standing. They did, however, support her decision to enter W. T. Kendall's private Melbourne Veterinary College, Fitzroy, in 1902. This was the first veterinary school in Australia.

Completing the four year course in 1906, Reid was one of five final-year students who were examined, and the only one to pass.<sup>12</sup> When she was registered by the Veterinary Board of Victoria on November 21, 1906 she was said to be the first formally recognized female veterinary surgeon in the British Empire.<sup>13</sup> Australia was much more tolerant of women in veterinary medicine than other countries. She immediately set up practice in a house in Whitehorse Road that had formerly accommodated her family's chauffeur. Driving to her calls by pony and trap, she became a familiar sight around Balwyn. In 1923 she retired and left the practice in the hands of P. T. Kelynack, a 1916 Melbourne graduate, husband of her favorite niece Sylvia.

In 1911 Reid and her sister Mary ('May') had bought one thousand acres of farmland at Bundoora and named it Blossom Park. Belle moved to the farm in 1925.<sup>12</sup> She had stables built to accommodate both her own horses and others on assignment, and supervised the construction of a large dairy. A keen breeder of animals, she imported an Irish cob stallion, Hafron Sensation, which provided the main bloodline of her stud. She also bred Jersey cattle: their names all began with Jubilee. As a dog-breeder, she initially kept Pomeranians, but soon turned to Irish wolfhounds. A member of the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria, she regularly exhibited her cattle, dogs, pigs and harness horses with excellent results. She rode with the Findon Harriers Hunt, took part in show jumping and played polo, often at Blossom Park.

She died of coronary thrombosis on December 13, 1945 at Canterbury and was buried in Box Hill cemetery.<sup>12</sup> A formidable woman, she only gained limited status in what was then a conservative, male-dominated profession, partly because she retired from practice early. However, Belle Reid is remembered in the historical records of

the Victorian RSPCA, Melbourne Lost Dogs' Home, and the Animal Welfare League of Victoria as having rendered a singular service to those organizations in the early development of veterinary services.<sup>13</sup> Her veterinary practice is the oldest continuing practice in the State, operating from the original site. In 1996, her name was included in the National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame, Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

According to the *JAVMA*, Dr. William Tyson Kendall (1851-1936) is the father of veterinary medicine in Australia.<sup>14</sup> He emigrated from England to Australia in 1880 and helped found the Australasian Veterinary Medical Association the same year. He opened the country's first veterinary college to students in 1888. The College produced 61 graduates from 1891-1909, after which 22 students from the college transferred to the newly established veterinary school at the University of Melbourne.



*Miss E. McGrath*

**Figure 11. Picture of Elinor McGrath.**

*From 1910 Chicago Veterinary College composite picture.*

### **Elinor McGrath (1878-1963)**

Elinor McGrath was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on December 25, 1878 (Christmas Day) of parents who probably emigrated from Ireland. She entered the Chicago Veterinary College in the fall of 1907 and graduated on April 5, 1910 (Figure 11). In 1910, the *American Veterinary Review* reported<sup>15</sup>

“The Chicago Veterinary College closed its twenty-seventh session on the evening of April 5, 1910. One hundred and thirty-seven young men received diplomas.”

A later issue of the *American Veterinary Review* in 1910 under News and Items reported,<sup>16</sup>

“Miss Eleanor McGrath, class of 1910, was the first lady to receive the degree at the Chicago Veterinary College.”

In the same issue of the *American Veterinary Review*, it was reported,<sup>17</sup>

“The twenty-seventh annual commencement of the Chicago Veterinary College took place in the auditorium of the Central Y.M.C.A., 153 LaSalle Street, Chicago, Tuesday evening, April 5, 1910. On the stage were seated all the members of the faculty, Professor W. L. Williams, of Cornell University, and Rev. J. B. Shaw, D.D., LL.D., pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Chicago. After music by the orchestra and the invocation by the Rev. Dr. John Balcom Shaw, Dr. Joseph Hughes, president of the college, gave his presidential address. Following him, Dr. A. H. Baker, dean of the college, made a short speech, in which the degree Doctor of Comparative Medicine (M.D.C.) was officially conferred upon the candidates present.”

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## Catalogue

of

### The Associated Specialty Clubs Shows

Chicago Collie Club

Saturday, October 1st, 1910

Bismarck Garden

Evanston Avenue, Grace and Halsted Streets

Chicago

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Price, 25 Cents

**Figure 12. AKC 1910 Catalog of the Associated Specialty Clubs Shows.**

McGrath established a small animal practice in the Douglas District in Chicago, named for Senator Stephan A. Douglas, a famous Illinois politician.<sup>18</sup> McGrath lived in the 3100 block of Indiana Avenue, now a historic area consisting of 1880's Italianate row houses. The address of her clinic was 3247 Indiana Avenue while her residence was 3143 Indiana Avenue.

McGrath was granted her license to practice veterinary medicine on October 1910. According to the American Kennel Club, McGrath was listed in the *Catalogue of the Associated Specialty Club Shows* (Figure 12) on Saturday, October 1, 1910, Bismarck Garden, Evanston Avenue, Grace & Halsted Streets; she may have done health examinations for the show. An advertisement in the catalogue lists McGrath as follows, "Miss Elinor McGrath, M.D.C., Veterinarian, Specialist in Diseases of Cats and Dogs, Only Woman Veterinarian in U.S., Animals Boarded, Town and Country Kennels (Figure 13)." McGrath obviously did not know about Kimball who also graduated in 1910 from Cornell University a few months apart.

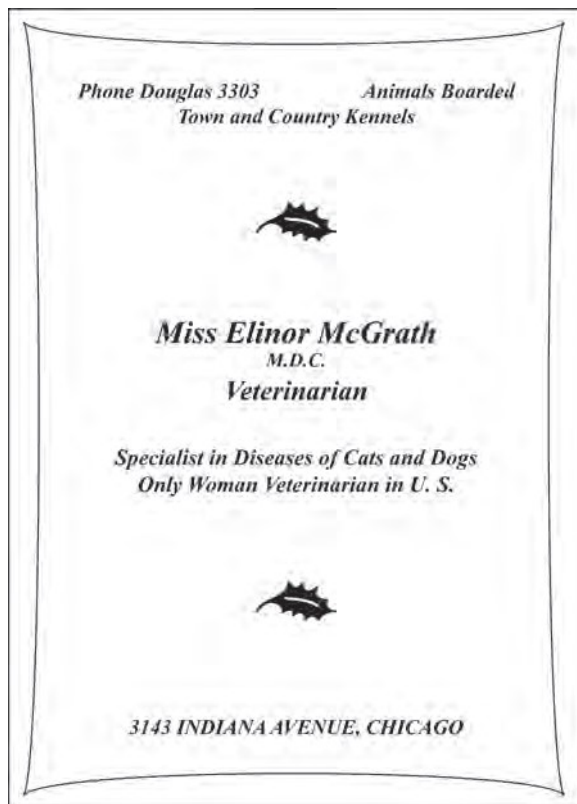


Figure 13. AKC 1910 advertisement for Miss Elinor McGrath, M.D.C., Veterinarian.

At the annual meeting of the Illinois Veterinary Medical Association,<sup>19</sup> November 30 to December 1, 1910, held in the amphitheater of the Chicago Veterinary College, presided by Dr. Louis A. Merillat, Professor of Surgery, many surgical and medical cases were presented, including the following:

**“Tonsillectomy:** The patient was a six-month old bull puppy with a troublesome cough. McGrath demonstrated how to perform a tonsillectomy on a six-month old bull puppy with a troublesome cough.<sup>19</sup> Surgeon, Dr. Elinor McGrath, Chicago’s only lady veterinarian. Anesthetic, H-M-C. The tonsils were completely and neatly removed. The surgeon stated that the anesthetic was perfect and the audience readily agreed that the operation was also perfect. Dr. McGrath stated that diseased tonsils are a frequent cause of troublesome coughs in dogs that resist all treatment except removal of the tonsils, which quickly cures them.”

McGrath’s name is listed in the February and June, 1911 *Classified Telephone Directories* in Chicago under the category of Veterinary Surgeons.

In 1914, there was a short article in the *American Veterinary Review* which had earlier been reported in the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>20</sup> The article reads as follows:

“Six weeks ago Charles S. Babcock, who is in his senior year at the Chicago Veterinary College, happened to think that soon he would be out of school bucking up against the proposition of making a living for himself. He had heard of Dr. Elinor McGrath, whose dog and cat hospital at 3247 Indiana Avenue is said to be quite a prosperous institution. Yesterday Dr. McGrath and Mr. Babcock were married. A few hours after the ceremony Mr. Babcock was waylaid while in the Veterinary College, which is at 2537 South State Street. He was tied into a cart behind a nervous hound. Three hundred students with enough animals to stock a two-ring circus paraded up to the bride’s cat and dog hospital. There are fifty-two animals in the hospital. They raised their voices and joined in the charivari. The bride appeared, smiled at the assemblage, and at her husband, and expressed herself as delighted with the entire procedure.”



In 1916, McGrath became the first woman to be admitted to membership in the AVMA which occurred at the 53<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the AVMA, August 21-23, 1916 in Detroit. For more than 35 years, she practiced small animal medicine in Chicago in a neighborhood largely filled with immigrants from all over Europe. Her last address in Chicago was 6947 South Wentworth Avenue before retiring to Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1947. She became a Charter member of the Women's Veterinary Medical Association and was elected Midwest Vice President in May, 1947. On August 2, 1948, she married James Donnelly (age 59) of Hot Springs, Arkansas. McGrath's age was given as 65. She died Elinor Lake in Hot Springs, Arkansas on June 19, 1963 at the age of 85 years, so evidently married again. She was buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Hot Springs, Garland County, Arkansas. She was survived by a son, Thomas McGrath.

The Chicago Veterinary College, located at 2537 and 2539 South State Street, was the first private veterinary college west of New York.<sup>21</sup> It was the largest of the private veterinary colleges in the U.S. with 2,320 graduates from 1884 to 1920 when it closed. The Chicago Veterinary College granted the Doctor of Veterinary Surgery (D.V.S.) degree from 1884 to 1892. In 1893, by a unanimous request of the senior class, the M.D.C. (Medical Doctor Comparative or Doctor of Comparative Medicine) degree was adopted.<sup>22</sup>

### Florence Kimball (1885-1947)

According to information compiled by Phyllis H. Larsen, Florence Kimball (Figure 14) was born on October 15, 1885 in the city of Worcester, Massachusetts.<sup>23</sup> In 1901 she enrolled in the Boston Girls Latin School for one year. From 1903-05, Kimball attended Elisabeth-Schule in Dresden, Germany, a private school operated by the Lutheran Church, graduating in 1905 and gaining a fluent knowledge in French and German. It is not clear why she studied in Germany, but it was not uncommon for children of well-to-do parents to study in Europe. Kimball then took pre-veterinary courses at Wheaton Seminary (now Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts) from 1905-07. The courses she took included English, Latin, Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, Botany, Physics, Physiology, and History. Wheaton was founded in 1834 as a female seminary. The college became coeducational in 1987, after more than 150 years as a leading college for women.



**Figure 14.**  
Graduation  
photograph of  
Florence Kimball.  
*Flower-Sprecher  
Veterinary Library,  
Cornell University.*



**Figure 15.** NYSVC faculty and students, June 1908; Kimball is seated in the second row with the 11 faculty members. *Flower-Sprecher Veterinary Library, Cornell University.*



Figure 16. NYSVC Class of 1910 with a horse.  
*Flower-Sprecher Veterinary Library, Cornell University.*

Doctors of Veterinary Medicine.	
Howard Kelsey Aiken,	Florence Kimball,
Irving Olney Denman,	Morton Lown,
Curtis Emery Doll,	Lewis Sheridan Matthews,
Maurice John Dooling,	Audrey D Moore,
Frederick FitzGerald Dowd,	Warren Adsitt Munsell, B.S. in Agr.,
LeVerne Dunham,	Floyd Carter Overton, Jr.,
Maurice Edward Joseph Evans,	Leon Luther Parker,
Charles Radcliffe Fairchild,	Chester Austin Roig,
Harry Frederick,	Alexander Schlesinger, Jr.,
Lynn W Ham,	Abraham Maurice Stark,
Murray Howes,	George Waterbury Wheeler.

Figure 18. List of 22 graduates in veterinary medicine  
at Cornell University in 1910.

Kimball's preparation at Wheaton provided an excellent foundation for her study of veterinary medicine. From 1907 to 1910, Kimball attended the New York State Veterinary College at Cornell University. Kimball's academic work was mostly accomplished in James Law Hall, named after James Law who was the dean from 1894 to 1908. Figure 15 shows the faculty and students in June, 1908; there are eleven faculty seated in the second row with Kimball seated with the faculty on the far right. The primary focus of the clinical curriculum at that time was on the horse (Figure 16); however the curriculum also included some work on small animals. On June 23, 1910, Florence Kimball graduated from Cornell with a D.V.M. degree (Figures 17), the first woman to graduate from Cornell in veterinary medicine (Figure 18) and the first veterinary degree awarded to a woman by a veterinary college that is still in existence. She was one of 22 students in her class. Following graduation, Kimball renovated

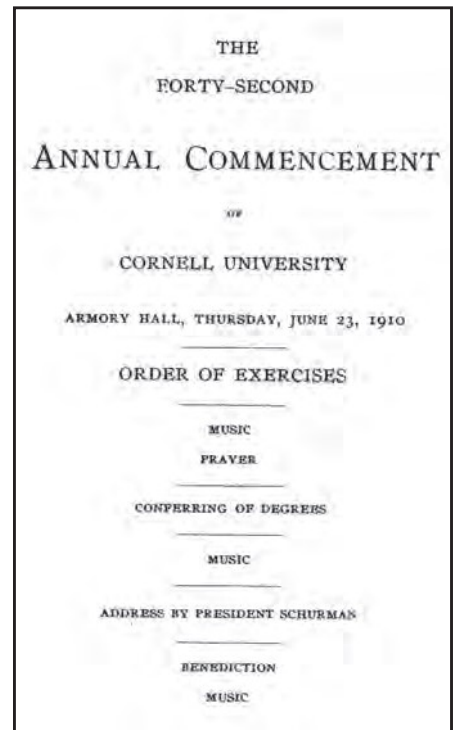


Figure 17. The Forty-Second Commencement of Cornell University.  
*Flower-Sprecher Veterinary Library, Cornell University.*

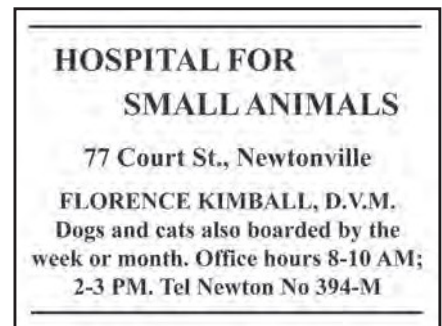


Figure 19. Advertisement in  
*Newton Journal*, March 4, 1911.

a stable in Newtonville, Massachusetts at 77 Court Street, establishing a private small animal practice and boarding facility. Figure 19 shows an advertisement in *The Newton Journal* on March 4, 1911.

World War I influenced Kimball to enroll in the Massachusetts General Hospital Training School for Nurses in Boston in 1915, receiving her R.N. degree in 1918. She may have served as an Army nurse during World War I, but this is not clear. Kimball worked for a short time in a hospital in

Schenectady, New York. She subsequently moved to St. Louis in 1920 where she was the Head Nurse in the Department of Contagious Diseases, St. Louis Children's Hospital. In 1929, Kimball moved to Oklahoma City where she served as the Night Nursing Supervisor, Oklahoma University Medical Teaching Hospital for 17 years from 1929 to 1946. Beginning in 1929, Kimball also became the proprietor of Chuwanusuh Pet Farm, Route 5, Edmond, Oklahoma, located about 12 miles north of Oklahoma City. She raised and may have practiced veterinary medicine on prize-winning rabbits, white rats, fancy mice, collies, and dachshunds. Kimball died on April 12, 1947; the obituary noted that her body would be cremated in Dallas and the ashes strewn from an airplane over Oklahoma.<sup>24</sup>

Shortly after the Cornell University was founded in 1865, Ezra Cornell insisted that a chair of veterinary medicine be established. He instructed Andrew D. White, Cornell's first president, to seek the best-qualified person to teach courses in veterinary medicine and surgery. President White secured the services of Dr. James Law, a graduate of Edinburgh Veterinary College in Scotland. In 1871, the University Faculty passed a resolution requiring four years of study for a Bachelor of Veterinary Science (BVSc) degree and an additional two years for a Doctor of Medicine (DVM) degree.

### Summary

The women described in this paper were the early pioneers in veterinary medicine; they studied in some of the best veterinary colleges in the world at that time. They paved the way for other women who studied veterinary medicine in later years. According to Drum and Whitely,<sup>25</sup> by 1936, there were only 30 female veterinarians in the United States; this was an era when admission to veterinary college for women was nearly impossible. In 1963, there were 277 female veterinarians in the United States, but by 1987 women made up 17% of the veterinary profession.<sup>25</sup> The February 15, 2010 issue of the *JAVMA* reported that male enrollment in U.S. veterinary colleges decreased from 89% for the 1969-70 school year to 22.4% for 2008-09.<sup>26</sup> During the same period female enrollment increased from 11.0% to 77.6%.

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6. Anon. Only Woman Veterinary Surgeon in the World. *Delphos Daily Herald* (page 3), Delphos, Ohio, Jan 15, 1903. The text of the article is as follows: "A tiny woman, less than five feet tall in her high heeled "colonials," graceful, slender, low voiced, attractive, Mrs. Mignonne Nicholson has chosen for herself a life calling, a profession seldom included among the possible opportunities for women. She is the only woman veterinary surgeon in the world. A New York woman once attempted to qualify herself in this direction, but failed to study more than a short time. No other woman, so far as known, has done work of this kind. To Mrs. Nicholson, however, the work seems quite natural and ordinary. Endowed always with a passionate love of the smaller animals, her childhood, most of which was passed in Ravenswood, Long Island, New York, was deprived of indulgences in the way of four footed friends and comrades. ['Ravenswood is the name for the strip of land bordering the East River in Long Island City, in the New York City borough of Queens.'] Marrying while still almost a child, the nature loving girl decided to have plenty of animal companionship, and at once began to cherish and study cat and dog pets. Her husband being a traveling man, away from home much of the time, Mrs. Nicholson says she began to "amuse herself" by treating the sick animals of her neighbors; her love for the "little people" of the animal world gave her splendid success in this direction. Just how and when the idea of professional study in the line of veterinary surgery took possession of her mind she hardly knows. But two years ago she determined upon this course of action, and entered McKillip Veterinary College, from which she will graduate next March. Much previous study, informal but thorough and persistent, of the human frame and of medicine and surgery as applied to human beings helped her greatly, she declares, to do successful work with dogs and cats, which she has "doctored" with loving affection and marked ability for years. Horses she can handle adequately also, being required to do this work exactly as her masculine fellow students, but she does not intend to treat horses after her graduation, not loving them as she does animals of smaller order. As a "canine specialist" Mrs. Nicholson is already well and favorably known in Chicago, and probably will remain here."
7. Anon. A New Feminine Calling. *Indiana Messenger*, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Jan 28, 1903. The text of the article is as follows: "The calling of veterinary surgeons is not one in which women have heretofore evinced any special disposition to shine, but one member of the fair sex is preparing herself for graduation from a veterinary college and expects to receive her diploma in the spring. The aspirant for honors in this particular field is Mrs. Mignonne Nicholson, now a resident of Chicago, but whose childhood days were spent in a Long Island town. Cats and dogs are her special pets and while in accordance with the requirements of the veterinary institution she is obliged to learn how to doctor horses she

proposes to give her attention after graduation to her special favorites and has already proved successful in her treatment of dogs.”

8. Anon. Spurned Wife Shoots Self. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Page 1, June 8, 1906. The text of the article read as follows:

**“Mrs. Mignon Jackson Commits Suicide in Husband’s Café. He Tries to Ignore Police. First Report of Woman’s Fatal Injuries Come from Hospital.** Imploring her husband to return to her after two months separation and being repulsed, Mrs. Mignon Jackson shot herself last night and died at 2:30 o’clock this morning. Mrs. Jackson, for the first time since their separation, on May 30, visited her husband at his restaurant, known as Becker & Jackson’s, Lake Street and Wabash Avenue, and the shooting occurred there. The wounded woman was taken to St. Luke’s hospital by her husband in an automobile. Physicians there at once pronounced it a hopeless case, the bullet having penetrated the brain. The police were not notified for three hours afterward of the restaurant tragedy, and this effort at secrecy cast a mystery over the case for a time and suggested a crime. However, the facts point to suicide. Jackson was arrested.”

**“Seeks Out Her Husband.** Early in the evening Mrs. Jackson went to the restaurant in an automobile. In the restaurant were a number of patrons. Mrs. Jackson went in alone, seated herself at a table in one of the compartments of the café, and sent one of the waiters for her husband. He entered and stood facing her silently across the table. ‘You know I can’t live without you, Jack,’ she said, ‘I’ve come to ask you to go home with me.’ ‘It’s all over between us, Dolly.’ Jackson replied, ‘and there’s no use trying to patch it up. We’ve quit and that’s all there is to it.’ ‘You must come home with me,’ replied the woman. ‘We can be happy again.’ ‘I can’t go home with you,’ was the answer.”

**“Bullet is Her Last Reply.** The conversation was ended abruptly by Mrs. Jackson rising from her chair and drawing a revolver. Jackson leaped toward her, but he was an instant too late and she fired as the muzzle of the gun was pressed against her temple. The report brought several waiters to the table and, with the aid of Jackson, the injured woman was placed on a couch. Although Jackson said a doctor was summoned immediately, he could not give the physician’s name, and the police were not notified until long afterward. In a pocket of Mrs. Jackson’s coat was found a note either written before going to the place in anticipation of her husband’s refusal. It follows: You know darling that I cannot live without you. The rings go to Kid and Tad. With all my heart. DOLLY. Jackson professed to know nothing of ‘Kid’ and ‘Tad.’ Two rings were found in her pocketbook.”

**“Hospital Notifies Police.** When the police were notified of the shooting by telephone from St. Luke’s, Policeman Rosenthal was sent to the place and later was joined by Detective Cannon of the Harrison street station. After examining the waiters who witnessed the tragedy they concluded it was a case of attempted suicide. However, they arrested Jackson. ‘I know of no motive my wife might have had for suicide other than the apparent one of her disappointment at my refusal to live with her again,’ said Jackson. “She drank heavily, this being one of the causes of the trouble between us, but she was not so dissipated as to be led to suicide by it.”

**“Married Three Years Ago.** The Jacksons were married in Chicago three years ago. Mrs. Jackson’s maiden name was Mignon Nicholson and she is said to have been a favorite with habitués of Jackson’s restaurant for several years before

her marriage with him. They lived until their separation at 5920 South Boulevard, Mrs. Jackson having moved to 69 East Thirty-Third Street after her husband left her.”

9. Anon. Bequest for Dog and Cat. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Page 9, June 9, 1906. The text of the article read as follows: “Mrs. Mignon Jackson, who shot herself in the presence of her husband in the Becker and Jackson restaurant, Wabash Avenue and Lake Street, Thursday night, and died early yesterday morning at St. Luke’s hospital, left a note requesting that her rings, said to be worth nearly \$1,000, be sold and the money secured for them used for the maintenance of her pet dog and Angora cat, Kid and Tad. Mr. Jackson told the coroner’s jury the story of the separation and said he refused to patch up the breach because of his wife’s use of intoxicants. When they were reconciled six weeks ago he said she promised to reform, but failed to do so. Jackson said his failure to report the shooting to the police was a mere oversight. The jury exonerated Jackson and decided that despondency caused Mrs. Jackson to kill herself.”
10. Merillat LA, Campbell DM. *Veterinary Military History of the United States*, Volume I. Veterinary Magazine Corporation, Chicago, 1935; p.318. Matthew Harrison McKillip was the owner and head of the McKillip Veterinary College. Its Deans were Olaf Schwarzkopf (1892-1896), F. S. Schoenleber (1896-1899), E. Merillat (1899-1901), F. S. Schoenleber (1901-1905), and Charles Frazier (1905-1920). The college had 1223 graduates from 1897 until it closed in 1920; it was the third largest private veterinary college in the United States. The McKillip Veterinary College was distinguished from other schools of its time by the tremendous private clinic conducted in connection with it; for the fiscal year ending May 1, 1899, there were 37,562 cases.
11. Anon. *Am J Comp Med Vet Archives* 20:384, 1899. “No less than six graduates of other veterinary schools added the degree of the McKillip Veterinary College to their previous attainment at other schools. The large clinical opportunities at the McKillip College make it very attractive for those desiring more extended studies or a post-graduate course in clinical work.”
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13. Wirth, HJ. Belle’ Isabelle Bruce Reid GMVC (1883-1945): First Woman Veterinarian Registered in the British Empire (1906). *Austral Vet Hist Rec* 34, July, 2002.
14. Cima, Greg. Father of Veterinary Medicine in Australia. *JAVMA* 238:546-547,2011. Dr. William Tyson Kendall lobbied for legal recognition of the veterinary profession through the Veterinary Surgeons Act of Victoria, which was passed in 1887. The legislation required four years of education for veterinarians, and it would make Australia’s first veterinary school the first in an English-speaking country to provide four years of instruction for veterinarians. His institution, the Melbourne Veterinary College, was supposed to show the usefulness of such a college and prompt a governmental takeover of the facility, Instead it produced 61 graduates from 1891-1909, after which 22 students from the college transferred to the newly established veterinary school at the University of Melbourne. Dr. Kendall’s privately run college operated at a loss for each of the 20 years between its founding and the formation of Australia’s first university-based veterinary school. Following the closure of his college, Dr. Kendall taught at the University of Melbourne until 1918.
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18. Larsen PH. *Our history of women in veterinary medicine:*

*gumption, grace, grit, and good humor*, Omnipress, Madison, Wisconsin, 1997. Stephan A. Douglas was an American politician from the western state of Illinois, and was the Northern Democratic Party nominee for President in 1860. He lost to the Republican Party's candidate, Abraham Lincoln, whom he had defeated two years earlier in a Senate contest following a famed series of debates. He was nicknamed the "Little Giant" because he was short of stature but was considered by many a "giant" in politics.

19. Anon. Illinois Meeting. *Am. J. Vet. Med.*5:344,1910.
20. Anon. Bridegroom Has Dogcart Ride—Veterinary College Senior Weds Owner of Hospital for Pet Animals—Students Celebrate. *Am Vet Rev* 46:191,1914.
21. Merillat LA, Campbell DM. *Veterinary Military History of the United States*, Volume I. Veterinary Magazine Corporation, Chicago, 1935; p. 317. The Chicago Veterinary College was organized in 1883 by Richard J. Withers, M.D., V.S.; Joseph Hughes, M.R.C.V.S.; and Austin H. Baker, V.S. Initially, the college was a four-month, two-year institution but the curriculum was lengthened to three years in 1895.
22. Bierer BW. *American Veterinary History*, Baltimore, MD, 1940.
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24. Anon. Miss Kimball, Retired City Nurse, Dies. *The Oklahoman*, April 13, 1947; p. 4. Excerpts from the obituary are as follows: "One of Oklahoma's most devoted adopted daughters died Saturday in the hospital she had served as nursing supervisor for 17 years. She was Miss Florence Kimball, 61, linguist, nurse and veterinarian, who until her retirement a year ago was night supervisor at University hospital. A native of Worcester, Massachusetts, Miss Kimball traveled in Europe as a child and gained a fluent knowledge of French and German. She attended preparatory schools in France, Germany and Belgium and graduated from Cornell University in 1910 with a doctor of veterinary medicine degree. War in Europe influenced her to enter nurse training at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston in 1915.
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Howard H. Erickson** earned his DVM degree from Kansas State University in 1959 and PhD degree from Iowa State University in veterinary physiology in 1966. He was engaged in private practice in

Wahoo, Nebraska from 1959-60, called to active duty in the United States Air Force in 1960, serving from 1960-81, and retiring with the rank of Colonel. He joined the faculty in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Kansas State University in 1981 as Professor of Physiology and retired in 2011 as Emeritus Professor of Physiology and History of Veterinary Medicine.