

Doors Were Opening: 19th Century Women Pursuing Veterinary Medicine

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“This is the story of women—of young women with brains, energy and an ambition in life. Of young women who are brave enough to enter one more field of activity which men in the past have claimed for their exclusive use. The field is that of a veterinary surgeon.”

—*Buffalo Times*. 1898 Apr 27; p. 2.

History rightly tends to recognize “firsts,” including the first pioneer women to receive Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degrees in the United States: Mignon Nicholson from McKillip Veterinary College in 1903, followed by two more women in 1910, Elinor McGrath from Chicago Veterinary College and Florence Kimball from Cornell University.¹ In Europe, Marie Kapsevitch [Kapczewitsch] (b. 1855), from Loknistoe, Chernigov, Ukraine, graduated from the Ecole Nationale Veterinaire d’Alfort in 1897 and Aleen Cust, MRCVS (1868-1937), completed degree requirements in 1900 at the New Veterinary College, Edinburgh, Scotland. In 1906, Isabelle Bruce Reid (1883-1945) completed requirements at the Melbourne Veterinary College in Australia.

In their 1976 paper, Calhoun and Houpt acknowledged that, because of lack of readily available information, “the ‘first graduate’ may not have been the first student because other young women started but failed to complete the course for one reason or another.”²



Figure 1. Stylish ladies’ attire. *Cincinnati Inquirer*. 1897 Aug 22; p. 32.

Opening the doors before the first graduates were at least several women who had been admitted as students to a veterinary college or begun coursework, but for various and unknown reasons, did not finish their studies to be awarded professional degrees.

Among these early non-graduate veterinary students were Susie Jane Brayton, Lulu E. Fenton, and E. O’Neill. It is highly probable there were other women who loved animals, were driven by concerns for animal welfare and antivivisection, and influenced by the developing suffrage and New Woman Movement³ (Fig. 1) at the end of the 19th century. Those individuals aspired to become veterinarians before 1900, but research to date has not revealed their names and backgrounds.

In the September 9, 1897 issue, *The Cultivator and Country Gentleman* magazine published in Albany, New York, noted^{4,5,6} “Five young women have enrolled their names as students in the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons in New York City and will begin their course in the fall—F.L. Bradford, Knightsville, Me.; Edith L. Dustin, Londonderry, N.H.; Lulu E. Fenton, Falconer, N.Y.; E. O’Neill, Washington, DC; and Susie J. Brayton, Easton, Penn. [sic]. (Fig. 2)

How these ladies became aware that women could apply to the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons remains unknown. (Fig. 3) One possibility is that they read a column in

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Figure 2. Five young women have enrolled... *The Cultivator & Country Gentleman*. 1897 Sep 9; p. 711.

—Several women were admitted to the New York college of veterinary surgeons at New York at its opening last Monday. This is the first time in the history of the college that women have been admitted.

Figure 3. Several women were admitted... *Brookfield Courier* (Brookfield, New York). 1897 Oct 6; p. 4.

the August 7, 1897 issue of *American Agriculturist* describing opportunities for women in this field.⁷

That same year, “requirements for admission to a veterinary college in the State of New York are a college degree, or four years of high school work, or a Regents certificate representing 48 counts. This is the new standard which went into effect this year.”⁸

Susan Jane “Susie” Brayton (1876-1907)

Susie J. Brayton was born on June 17, 1876, near Easton, Washington County, New York. Located east of Glens Falls and northeast of Albany, this long narrow county borders Rutland County, Vermont. Established in 1683, rural Washington County had been known for its rich valley farmland between the Taconic Mountains, Adirondack Park, and Lake George.

Susie was one of three daughters of Thomas Waterman Brayton (1837-1920) and Mary Briggs Taber Brayton (1837-1915). They lived on grandfather Joseph Taber’s farm, where Susie’s father “raised blooded stock and was a horse fancier of note.”⁹ The *1880 US Census*¹⁰ and *New York State Census*^{11,12} indicated Thomas was a farmer. In addition to Minnie Effie Brayton Day (b. 1867), Susie had an older sister Elizabeth T. “Libbie” Brayton Biggart (1863-1944). Her sister’s husband George E. Biggart (1856-1926) was also a horse farmer who owned a trotting stable in Glens Falls. The Brayton family could trace its ancestry to the beginning of the 19th century in Washington County and back to the early 1600s in Rhode Island.¹³

It is quite possible, although unverified, that Susie’s grandfather Dr. Thomas A. Brayton was a veterinary surgeon or served as a local animal healer. In September 1887,¹⁴ the *Washington County Advertiser* published in nearby Fort Edward, New York, reported that a farmer had “sent for our old veterinary, Thomas A. Brayton, to see three fine cows which had been in his corn field. Dr. Brayton arrived in time to save one cow. The other two died soon after his [sic] reaching them, they being beyond relief.” The following year in June 1888, the same newspaper noted that “the old veterinary surgeon, Dr. T.A. Brayton, started a professional tour through Vermont last week.”¹⁵

Miss Brayton grew up on her father’s stock farm in Washington County. “Ever since she remembered she had known horses. She could ride the wildest of them. She was happy on the back of a half broke colt, and she liked nothing better than a steeple chase occasionally.”¹⁶ When interviewed years later, she said, “To begin with...I am very fond of horses, and of cats and dogs too; in fact, of all animals. And you see at home I have been with horses all my life.” She further “explained that she had long been accustomed to breaking in the colts and breaking in horses to harness.” She had also recently been buying the horses for the farm.¹⁷

Initially, Susie “thought she was called to look after children who go lame in their arithmetic and geography” and enrolled at Buffalo State Normal School [now, SUNY University at Buffalo] in Buffalo, New York, on September 10, 1894, at age 18, to become a teacher.^{18,19,20} While at the normal school, she studied physiology and zoology.²¹ However, “the more she

studied the more she was convinced that she was not suited for a schoolteacher” so she possibly left after a semester or so. Records from Buffalo State University do not indicate how long she was a student there.²²

Susie’s father raised coach and saddle horses. In the summer of 1897, he remarked, “You’re better than any horse doctor.” “Then the idea occurred to her that she might become a veterinary surgeon.”²³ As such, one of the reasons she gave for studying veterinary surgery was “to be able to judge of a horse’s soundness,”²⁴ and “...learn how to cure them when they are sick.”²⁵

Shortly thereafter, it was reported, “Miss Susie J. Brayton of Easton, N.Y. is the first woman to enter the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons. She is an enthusiastic lover of animals and understands the horse thoroughly. She has not undertaken the study as a fancy, but intends to fit herself to make practical use of her knowledge.”^{26,27} (Fig. 4)

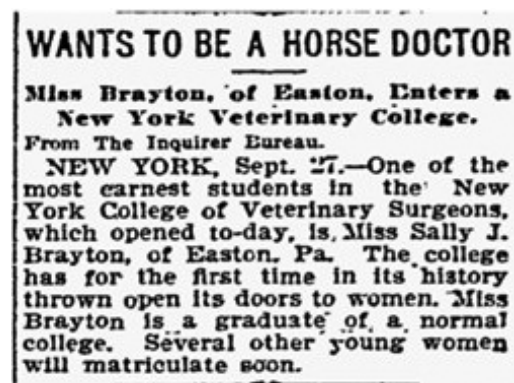


Figure 4. Wants to be a horse doctor. *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). 1897 Sep 28; p. 1.

The New York College of Veterinary Surgeons (NYCVS) had been chartered before the Civil War in April 1857 as a private veterinary college in New York City. Despite several reorganizations and other difficulties over the years, it remained in operation under the direction of Harry D. Gill, V.S., one of its 1884 graduates, for the last 10 years of its existence.

At that time, the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons was located at 154 West 57th Street, adjacent to present day Carnegie Hall.²⁸ “The college building is a brick structure, four stories high, having a basement and extension. In the basement and on the first floor are situated the hospital for horses, the operating-room and the forge. There are both open and box stalls. On the second floor are found the offices, the pharmacy, chemical laboratory, and a lecture-room capable of seating two hundred persons. The students’ reading-room is also on that floor.”

“On the third floor is the museum, histological and bacteriological laboratories, and a ward for dogs that have contagious diseases, besides a large dissecting-room. The general hospital for dogs and cats is on the top floor, while an outdoor run of 1,800 square feet is arranged on the roof.”

“In the laboratory there is a room for twenty-four persons to work, and each worker has a desk and sinkroom. All drugs and paraphernalia necessary in the hospital are found in the dispensary. In the museum the collection of specimens comprehends all kinds that show pathological conditions as found in veterinary practice. Good illustrations of the comparative anatomy of domestic animals are also included among the specimens.”

“The course of instruction entered upon takes up lectures, demonstrations, clinics, laboratory and section work. The dispensing and mixing of medicines is also required of students.”

“Examinations at the end of the first year will be held in anatomy, physiology, chemistry, materia medica and therapeutics.”

While the entrance to the 4-story building was said to “look a good deal like that of a livery stable,”²⁹ the hospital inside treated any animal, including elephants seasick from their ocean voyage each given a quart of gin a day, to amputation of a canary’s leg to warming chilled tropical monkeys along with the many common ailments of horses, dogs, and cats.

The Hospital of the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons was under the direction of Drs. Harry D. Gill and Rush Shippen Huidekoper. In addition to medical services, boarding for horses was provided at \$1.50 per day, dogs and cats at \$0.50 per day. Baths for small dogs were \$0.50 and long-haired dogs at \$1.00.³⁰

In 1897, the school “abandoned its conservative principles in favor of new womenism this season and threw open its classes to the fair sex.”^{31,32,33} The intention was for the women to “attend the lectures with the men and go through exactly the same tuition during the entire year.”³⁴ (Fig. 5)

Miss Brayton was the earliest applicant. It was reported in *The World*, “she was duly entered at the college on Monday [September 27], and went to work with an earnestness that proved she was neither a tyro nor pursuing a fad. She is on business intent and she will ‘arrive’...and talked of her chosen profession in glowing terms.”³⁵

She said to the reporter, “*Do I like the work? I’m in love with it; I’ve always dabbled in doctoring, rather successfully with our own animals, and am determined to become thoroughly proficient.*” When pressed, “Miss Brayton denied that she would devote herself to cat and

dog cases.” She had already “made arrangements to become an assistant at a veterinary hospital as soon as her studies will permit her.”

Dr. Edward N. Leavy was “responsible for this invasion of man’s field by women.”³⁶ He said, “*I felt women were needed in the profession...and suggested it to the faculty, and I am fully satisfied of the wisdom of that decision. Especially dealing with pet dogs woman’s gentleness and sympathetic manner are invaluable.*” He went on to say, “*I am sure Miss Brayton will be a success. Why, you ought to see her about a horse.*”

Described as “big and breezy [happy, confident] and strong, but gentle and womanly though she breaks horses,” “Miss Brayton is well fitted to cope with the exactions of a profession which will not be without its disagreeable features. Her tall, well-developed figure denotes strength. She has the ruddy glow of health in her cheeks and the cheery, decided manner of a woman who does not know what nerves are. She walks with the swinging gait of the typical horsewoman.”³⁷

Upon matriculation at age 21, “Miss Brayton has brought her saddlehorse, a magnificent gray, with her. She demonstrates her love for him by herself caring for this stable and making his bed, as well as grooming his glossy coat.” The reporter further noted, “During the fall Miss Brayton will give proof of her horsemanship as teacher at one of the riding academies” in the city.³⁸ Her address was given as 596 Pacific Street, Crown Heights, Brooklyn.³⁹

As a result, “New York has a woman ‘vet,’ and it is confidently asserted that she is the first of her kind not only on this broad continent but in the world. Miss Susie J. Brayton is her name...”⁴⁰

The “first girl to enter the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons” must have been a source of newsworthy interest and curiosity. At the beginning of the term, a reporter for the *New York Herald*^{41,42} showed up at the college one day to witness “a young woman in black [who] stood the other morning in the hospital of the College of Veterinary Surgeons, New York, and felt the muscles of a jaded looking horse with her gloved hand. She was Miss Sally [sic] J. Brayton, the first woman to study for a degree in the college. She took the halter off the horse and slowly led him up and down. ‘Lame in the right foreleg,’ she said. Her diagnosis was confirmed by Dr. Gill, who had charge of the clinic. [Harry D. Gill, V.S. had joined the faculty as Professor of Theory and Practice of Veterinary Medicine in 1890 and served as dean for 10 years.]^{43,44} Miss Brayton is one of twenty students—the rest of them young men.” She told the reporter after the clinic, “*I think...that I shall enjoy this profession. I have always been fond of horses. At home they say that I am something of a horse doctor. Of course I know only about the ordinary diseases of horses.*”

About 6 months later, as of early March 1898, Miss Brayton was reported to be the only one of the three women admitted in the early winter “who has persevered in the course, the others finding too little taste for the work to continue in their studies.”⁴⁵ In contrast, “Miss Brayton’s love for animals and her experience with her father’s coach and saddle horses on

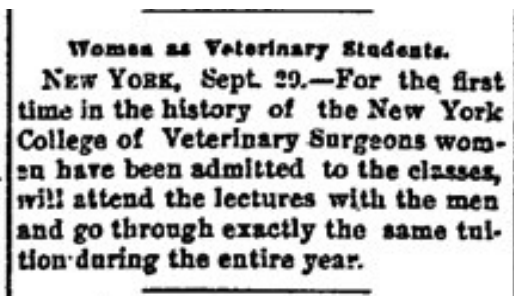


Figure 5. Women as veterinary students. *Emporia Daily Gazette* (Emporia, Kansas) 1897 Sep 29; p. 1.

his farm, at Easton, Washington county, are of valuable assistance to her now.”

Also, during that March interview, Miss Brayton explained, “We study physiology in the human form first, though not dissecting, and from that it is easy to understand animal physiology, as animals are only modifications of human beings. Most people seem to think that veterinary science includes only the care of horses, but that is a great mistake. Horses are really only a small part of the practice, which includes attendance upon all animals, and especially domestic animals.”

She also said, “Perhaps you would be surprised to know that the treatment of dogs and cats and of pet birds is one of the largest branches of the work in cities. In New York the number of pets that are constantly needing attention is remarkably large. Veterinary doctors have all that they are able to do in this line, both in answering calls and in office work. The fee is \$2 to \$3 a visit, and animals are not hard to treat. They are quick to understand that one is trying to help them, and a second treatment is always more easily made than the first. Moreover, they are extremely grateful. Work on the small animals is extremely interesting.”

Miss Brayton admitted, “The most amusing subjects are parrots, as they do not always comprehend quickly what one is trying to do; they are most decided in their opinions, and never hesitate to express themselves. Monkeys, too, are clever little creatures. Indeed, all animals know more than the majority of people give them credit for.”

As for her course work, she said, “After I finish the regular college course I hope to ‘take up’ lions and tigers. Indeed, I go to the [Central] Park now as often as I can, and am making a study of these animals and their habits.”

When asked if anesthetics were used in the treatment of animals, Miss Brayton replied, “Always, when the operation is at all painful. The dean [Dr. Harry D. Gill] of the college is an exceptionally humane man, who would not tolerate cruelty to animals in any respect. Reading so much of the needless suffering inflicted on animals during experiments in vivisection...I made up my mind that that would be one thing I should combat when I got in a position where I could.”

Because the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons housed the numerous horses employed in the production of lifesaving human diphtheria antitoxin serum for the city,⁴⁶ students were familiar with the process. Miss Brayton mentioned, “We have a great deal of antitoxin treatment at the college, having the horses of the [New York State] Health department for that purpose. We bleed them. I rather dreaded it at first, thinking it might be unpleasant, but it is not, as they do not flinch at all, and it is not painful to them. They are bled in the neck.”

In speaking with her, the reporter remarked that “Miss Brayton is exceptionally pretty and is refined, intelligent and sensible, with the ‘low, sweet voice’ which is not without influence, even on dumb patients.”

The next month in early April 1898,⁴⁷ Miss Brayton wrote the following about women in veterinary medicine in the “Mothers and Daughters” column of the *American Agriculturist*:

The study of veterinary medicine is a rather difficult one. I think a veterinary should be as well trained as the student of the human form. With animals we are guided by symptoms only, while human beings are able to a great extent to tell where the trouble lies. There is a wide field for women in the work. They must have a strong love for animals, nerves and sympathies well controlled, as in the study of the human form. In regard to country girls taking up the work I think they will find a larger field than the average city girl. I myself have lived in the country the greater part of my life, and when not in college spend my time training the saddle horses on my father's stock farm. My father keeps in stock high-bred coach and saddle horses. It was with him I obtained my schooling in training horses.

My specialty after graduation from the New York veterinary college will be the smaller animals, as dogs, cats, rabbits, etc. My practice with horses will be largely on my father's stock farm with our own horses. The requirements for entrance to the college are the same as with other medical colleges. At present I am the only woman in the college, and I can truly say I find no unpleasantness whatever.”

Nothing more is known about how her studies progressed at the college after her apparently successful first year. However, slightly more than a year later, the *Granville Sentinel* from Granville, New York, near her hometown noted in August 1899,⁴⁸ (Fig. 6) “Miss Susie Brayton, daughter of Thomas W. Brayton of Easton, has taken up the study of veterinary surgery and is said to be the only lady of that profession in the state.”

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Figure 6. Miss Susie Brayton... *Granville Sentinel* (Granville, New York). 1899 Aug 4; p. 11.

Since the veterinary course required 3 years of study, Miss Brayton would have been awarded her professional degree in spring 1900 or even 1901 had the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons not amalgamated with the American Veterinary College in fall 1899.

The school closed in 1899 upon consolidation with the American Veterinary College, chartered in 1875, located at 141 West 54th Street, and headed by Professor Alexandre F. Li-autard. That amalgamation formed the New York-American Veterinary College, affiliated as a veterinary department of New York University and was also known as the Veterinary School of the New York University.⁴⁹ The New York College

for Veterinary Surgeons had granted the V.S. degree to a total of 292 graduates before amalgamation.⁵⁰

For the 1900-1901 academic session, “S.J. Brayton, Brooklyn, New York” was listed in the *Announcement* as having enrolled as a second-year veterinary student along with 9 men at the New York-American Veterinary College.⁵¹

For second-year veterinary students, lecture course and practical anatomy classes convened at the former American Veterinary College building at 141 West 54th Street, while some lectures, demonstrations, and general laboratory instruction were held at the University and Bellevue Hospital Medical College at 26th Street and First Avenue.⁵² The hospitals of the former American Veterinary College and American College of Veterinary Surgeons (337 East 57th Street) continued to be used for clinical instruction along with daily clinics. There was a matriculation fee \$5, lecture fee \$100, and dissecting fee \$10, totaling \$160 for class year 1900-1901.⁵³

It is not known how much course work Miss Brayton completed or even if she finished that entire second year of study. In any case, her name did not appear in the College’s *Announcement* as a student the following session for 1901-1902 when she would have been in her third and final year.⁵⁴

When the newly consolidated New York-American Veterinary College held its first commencement ceremony after a week of festivities on June 7, 1900, none of the women, including Miss Brayton, were among the inaugural class of 8 men receiving degrees.^{55,56,57}

Nevertheless, personal notes in *The County Post*⁵⁸ locally published in Cambridge, New York, in June and October 1900 and again in December 1901 report visits to Easton from New York City by “Dr. Susie Brayton.”

“Dr. Susie Brayton of New York, is at home [in Easton].”

“Dr. Susie Brayton returned to New York City on Monday.”

“Dr. Susie Brayton of New York, is spending a short time with her parents.”

In addition, while living in Brooklyn, she was listed as an Associate Member of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences for several years through 1901.^{59,60}

After the school merger, Miss Brayton may have decided on her own, been forced out, or was simply not allowed to continue the last year of formal study toward a degree at the New York-American Veterinary College, a department of New York University, the successor institution.

A major reason behind Miss Brayton not continuing her studies is likely found in the college’s catalogues. Interestingly, a “Special Announcement” section describing background on the school was included on an opening page of the New York-American Veterinary College’s first *Announcement* for the 1900-1901 year.⁶¹

When the school’s second catalogue was issued for the 1901-

1902 year, the text of that announcement was the same except the phrase “for men only” had been inserted as follows:⁶²

*“The new institution [created by the merger of the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons and the American Veterinary College, and its subsequent affiliation with NYU] with its enlarged Faculty, composed entirely of experienced teachers, its increased and abundant clinical resources, and its regular use of the extensive laboratory equipment and advanced instruction of the University and Bellevue Hospital Medical College, is enabled at once to offer the means for the attainment of a thorough veterinary education **for men only**, and it is the hope and belief of the Council of the University that the importance of the new school for such education will lead to its wide approval and support.”*

This statement that veterinary education at that college was limited to men appeared in subsequent catalogues issued from 1902/03 through 1912/13.^{63,64} During this period, Dr. Alexandre Liautard, former dean of the American Veterinary College, remained as director of the amalgamated program until becoming emeritus dean in 1913. Dr. William J. Coates became dean when the State Legislature passed Chapter 676 of a 1913 law designating the school as the New York State Veterinary College at New York University.⁶⁵ That program closed about 2 decades later in 1923.

Years earlier in an 1897 interview, American Veterinary College dean Dr. Alexandre Liautard had indicated women would be welcome at veterinary schools.^{66,67} This view had been shared by at least some of the previous New York College of Veterinary Surgeons’ faculty but was not likely the case across the new institutional affiliation. A number of physicians and faculty from NYU’s School of Medicine and Bellevue Hospital Medical College taught comparative pathology, chemistry, theory and anti-septic surgery, bacteriology, and histology courses to veterinary students. While non-degree women were permitted to study in some schools at NYU as early as 1873, including the co-educational School of Pedagogy in 1890, the Medical School remained closed to women and did not matriculate its first female students until 20 years later as of the 1919-1920 academic year.⁶⁸

Given the Medical School’s long-standing and apparently firm practice of not admitting women, it might be suspected there was sufficient opposition against making an exception to allow Miss Brayton to continue veterinary studies for her last year or so toward the D.V.S. degree.

Had she intended to continue pursuing a veterinary degree by attending another institution, there were few other choices at the time. The private veterinary schools with lower admission standards were located largely in the Midwest. The Ontario Veterinary College was still a 2-year program, while the New York State Veterinary College at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, established in 1894, had just started accepting students for its first class to graduate in 1900. There is no record that Miss Brayton traveled to Toronto to finish studies for a degree at the Ontario Veterinary College.⁶⁹ Similarly, no

registrar's card has been found indicating evidence she was a student at Cornell.⁷⁰

Little is known of Miss Brayton's life after leaving New York City about 1901. However, the *1905 New York State Census* listed her at age 28 living in Easton with her father and mother, who were in their late 60s. Susie's occupation was noted as "house-work," but she was also probably involved with helping to run the stock farm, training and driving horses, and medically treating the farm's own animals even without a professional degree and New York State practice license.

Surprisingly, in May 1907, no fewer than 20 newspapers across the country carried "items of interest to women" in which was printed the following notice praising Susie Brayton's veterinary skills:⁷¹

"Miss Susie J. Brayton is a veterinary surgeon and extremely skillful at performing operations on horses, dogs and other animals."

The source of this syndicated news notice remains unknown, but many local editors obviously felt it was of enough interest to their readers to publish it.

A few months after those numerous newspaper references appeared, Susie Brayton died at Easton, New York, on August 19, 1907, after swallowing chloroform.^{72,73} It was reported, "A strange case of suicide occurred last week at Easton, Washington Co., when Miss Susie Brayton, daughter of a prosperous farmer, swallowed chloroform. The remarkable feature of the case is the utter lack of motive. She was 30 years old and had no known reason for doing away with herself. She had no love affairs or was not life troubled in any way. She arose at 4 o'clock in the morning and went to the barn. At seven o'clock her father went to call her for breakfast and detecting the strong odor of chloroform found the girl's body [lying on the hay loft], and scattered about were sponges and towels saturated with the chloroform."

The *Amsterdam Evening Recorder* stated, "Although she had threatened to swallow poison several times, her parents say that she never had any reason for doing away with herself.... She was an enthusiastic horsewoman and was well known throughout that section of the state as a cool-headed driver and horse trainer."⁷⁴ "In fact, she was so enthusiastic about the animals that she studied to become a veterinary."⁷⁵

Furthermore, "she was a rather striking woman as regards personal appearance, but she had no love affair. Neither did she have any financial reverses nor was her life troubled, apparently, in any way, and yet she said that some day she would take the drug which eventually ended her life."⁷⁵ "There was no room for doubt. She had made good her oft repeated threat and ended her life." After holding an inquest, the coroner decided an autopsy was not necessary.

Her parents were heartbroken, and the community was shocked. Being so unexpected,^{76,77} "a large concourse of people assembled at the home of Mr. and Mrs. T.W. Brayton,

South Easton, on Wednesday last, to pay their last tribute of respect to their daughter Susie. Dressed in white and reposing in a bed of flowers, it seemed hard to realize that Susie, always full of health and spirit, with a kind word for all, should be no more... The community certainly feel deeply for them in their sorrow and trouble." Miss Susie J. Brayton's cremated remains were buried at Easton Rural Cemetery.⁷⁸

Susie was described as "a sturdy, comely girl devoted to horses who became a veterinary surgeon when that profession held few women and tragically ended her life by suicide at a young age."⁷⁹

Before the turn of the twentieth century, Miss Susie Brayton had all the personal qualities, attitude, and experience qualifications needed to study veterinary medicine successfully and become a qualified practitioner. Ironically, she came so close to achieving her worthy personal objective and achieving a remarkable professional milestone had circumstances not been against her.

Because she was very likely subjected to the institutional sex discrimination existing at that time, Susie may have felt disheartened and disappointed since she tried so hard, had such perfect credentials, and was so enthusiastic about pursuing veterinary medicine. We will never know the reason for her suicide, but we might guess being denied continuing her education and fulfilling her dream could have played a role.

Despite her valiant attempt, Miss Susie Brayton deserves wider recognition given her experience and love for animals, practical understanding of the nature of the work, skill and proficiency in medicine, her initiative and drive in a male-dominated field, and many personal qualities and enthusiasm. She well could have been the first graduate woman veterinarian in the United States.

LuLu E. Fenton

In 1897, Lulu E. Fenton was another of the 5 women mentioned in *The Cultivator and Country Gentlemen* article as being interested in studying veterinary medicine at the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons. She sent a letter inquiring about study to Dr. Leavy.⁸⁰

Lulu E. Fenton was born in August 1868 at Falconer in the eastern district of Jamestown, Chautauqua County near Lake Erie in western New York, to parents Emery [Emory] William Fenton (1836-1909) and Louise Myers Fenton (1839-1916). Her father did factory work making pails, woodenware, fine furniture, and bicycles.⁸¹ The Fentons also lived in Ellicott, New York, a northwestern suburb of Jamestown, for some years.

Miss Fenton attended Jamestown Business College and even won first prize at the college's spelling match in 1889, receiving an unabridged Webster's dictionary. Founded in 1886 as a co-educational institution, the Jamestown Business College continues to offer programs that develop office and business competencies and also provides a general education.

While working in an office, she wrote to Dr. Leavy “that she has been a bookkeeper, but as that business is overcrowded and she has been always regarded as the cat and dog doctor of the family, she has made up her mind to study veterinary surgery.”⁸²

When she enrolled, the nearby *Westfield Republican* newspaper wrote,⁸³ “five young women have enrolled their names as students in the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons, and will begin their course in the fall. Miss Lulu Fenton of Falconer, Chautauqua county, is among the women who will learn how to cure the ills to which horse, dog and cat are heir.”

We know little about the time Miss Fenton spent in New York City. However, when Dr. Leavy described in an April 1898 interview how the women students under his tutelage gained experience necessary for real everyday work in veterinary practice, he mentioned both Miss Fenton and O’Neill by name.⁸⁴

The young women practice daily in the rear of the hospital where the dog kennels and dissecting [examination] room of the establishment is located. A chorus of yelps and howls greets their endurance.

‘We always commence the day’s work in this part of the hospital, because we want to do all we can to relieve the sufferings of the animals before anything else,’ said one of the pupils.

The doctor carried a small black dog to a dissecting table. While the class of young women crowded around him to examine the case.

‘This is not a severe case,’ said Dr. Leavy, ‘simply bruised in a street fight. Miss Fenton will sponge the cuts with a solution prepared by Miss O’Neill. The others will prepare bandages and ointment for the dressing.’

...the instructor carefully went over the points of the case, to which the young women gave close attention.

One or two other cases were brought out and “treated in a similar manner” for about an hour before the daily free clinic began at 11am.

As was the case for Miss Brayton, it is unknown how far Miss Fenton continued with the veterinary program before the school was amalgamated in fall 1899. However, she was reported to be one of Dr. Leavy’s students as of April 1898.

Nevertheless, she abandoned becoming a practicing veterinarian. The *1900 US Census*⁸⁵ listed her in Elliott, New York, living with her father and sister and working as a bookkeeper at a fur company. She was also employed by other local textile mills, including the Chautauqua Worsted Mills and a towel mill.⁸⁶

Miss Fenton never married and in her later years lived with her younger sister J. Grace “Gracie” Falconer, an artist, in the city of Jamestown.⁸⁷ During her life, she was active in church

and community, serving as president of The Sunshine Society. Lulu was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution lineage (DAR #126895). She died on December 9, 1948.

E. O’Neill

Miss E. O’Neill was also mentioned in *The Cultivator and Country Gentleman* article. However, nothing is known about her background other than she was noted as being from Washington, D.C.

By August 1897, Dr. Leavy reported he had received letters from several young women who wished to join the veterinary class.^{88,89} A *Baltimore Sun* article singled out Miss E. O’Neill of Washington, D.C., as being expected to enter the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons that fall.

While little has been learned about Miss O’Neill before or after she started college in 1897, she likely did matriculate with some other women that September by indirect reference. When Dr. Leavy described the daily routine of his women students, Miss O’Neill had been tasked with preparing the antiseptic solution to treat wounds in dogs.

The status of the other two women from New England states—Misses F.L. Bradford, Knightville, Maine, and Edith Louise Dustin Wright (b. ca1880), Londonderry, New Hampshire—remains undiscovered. Yet, from descriptions of Dr. Leavy’s teaching activities, one or both could have been among the unnamed women involved in training at his veterinary hospital.

All these women likely encountered many hurdles and deterrents. In addition to education, there was a growing need to raise competency standards for the profession as a whole. Veterinarians were required to pass an examination to obtain a license to practice in each state. In New York State, “An extract from an amendment of the Public Health Law, Section 171, reads: No person shall practice veterinary medicine after July 1, 1896, unless previously registered and authorized, unless licensed by the Regents and registered, as required by this article.”⁹⁰

Epilogue

Even though they did not receive veterinary degrees as professional credentials, these few 19th century young ladies were vanguards on the forefront of future development. They cracked open the door and were witness to beginning public curiosity and potential recognition of the contributions women could make in veterinary medicine. As their numbers very slowly increased during the early part of the 20th century, it would take nearly 80 years before the passage of Title IX in the 1970s that provided significant impetus in opening the door even wider for women in veterinary medicine.

Author’s Note

The exact number of women students associated with the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons in its later years is uncertain. Several sources indicate 5 women were planning to enroll in the 3-year program in fall 1897. In describing their training at Dr. Leavy’s Lexington Avenue Veterinary Hospital, at least 2 students driving the ambulance while “remaining members of the class” stayed behind to prepare for the injured dog. It wasn’t specified how many students stayed back. By March 1898, another report noted that only one of the 3 women students (probably Susie Brayton) who had been

admitted earlier in the winter remained as the others had dropped out “finding too little taste for the work.”

While “S.J. Brayton” was listed as a second-year student at the amalgamated New York-American Veterinary College for 1900-1901, a note in the *American Veterinary Review* reported that several woman had already matriculated for the next session.⁹¹ The identify of any other female students has not been verified.

Special Veterinary Class for Women

In 1897, Frances E. Willard (1839-1898), an American educator, temperance reformer, and woman’s suffragist, published a book entitled *Occupations for Women*.⁹² It was intended to advance the development of women by providing practical suggestions concerning the various professional career and employment options. Willard pointed out that women had been involved in every occupation, except marshalling an army and conducting war, and had made progress in trade, industry and many professions between 1870 and 1890, except veterinary medicine. She included a table on page 172 listing the number in each profession, presumably from government sources. (Fig. 7)

Concerning veterinary medicine, Willard wrote, “Veterinary surgery is a profession from which a woman might derive a good income, for she would, no doubt, be patronized by the numerous female owners of cats and dogs that are always having some ailment which feline and canine flesh is heir to. Dr. Levy [sic], of the Lexington...Veterinary Hospital [in New York City], says that a woman assistant would be so valuable to him in his practice that he would willingly pay her a good salary in return for her services during the college course.”^{93,94}

As similarly stated in a *New York Tribute* article,⁹⁵ Willard further felt, “a woman would be likely to have an extensive practice among the smaller pets of society. The expensive pets of fashionable women would probably be taken to a woman in preference to a man, and by becoming a successful veterinarian she would make even more than the average doctor, the fees of a veterinary surgeon being double those of the ordinary M.D.” (Fig. 8)

Even the superintendent of the S.P.C.A. “declared that a woman would be likely to have an extensive practice among the smaller pets of society. He said there was one woman, whom he personally knew, who doctored sick cats and dogs,

	1870.	1890.
Actors,	692	3,949
Architects,	1	22
Artists and teachers of art,	412	10,815
Authors and literary,	159	2,725
Chemists, assayists and metallurgists,	39
Clergymen,	1,143
Dentists, draughtsmen and inventors,	13	305
Engineers (civil, mechanical, electrical and mining),	124
Journalists,	35	888
Lawyers,	5	208
Musicians and teachers of music,	5,753	34,518
Officials (government),	414	4,875
Physicians and surgeons,	527	4,557
Professors and teachers,	81,047	246,066
Theatrical managers, showmen, etc.,	100	634
Veterinary surgeons,	2
Other professional service,	8	479
Totals,	92,757	311,687

Figure 7. Women in professional occupations, 1870, 1890. From: Willard FE. *Occupations for Women*; p. 172.



Figure 8. Woman veterinary hospital ward. From: Willard FE. *Occupations for Women*, p. 451.

not for pay, but purely for the love of them...He thought some woman, who was a lover of animals and in search of a congenial occupation ought to try this."⁹⁶

When interviewed by *The New York Tribune* in August 1897, further support for women as veterinarians was expressed. In particular, "The Dean of the American Veterinary College, Dr. [Alexandre] Liautard, before this departure for Europe, said that but one woman had ever applied for admission to that institution. That was some years ago. Now, he said, a woman would be welcome in any of the schools. He added there was a great opening for women in the profession, particularly in the treatment of pet dogs and cats. The wealthy women who owned dogs would certainly take them to a woman veterinarian if there was one. Pet cats are always having fits of indigestion, or some ailment, and need medical attention. The half hour with the veterinarian would become quite a feature of the society woman's existence."⁹⁷

After Edward Nathaniel Leavy, D.V.S. (1874-1924), graduated from the American Veterinary College in 1896, he became a canine specialist with an infirmary at Lexington Avenue and 61st Street in New York City.⁹⁸ He also joined the faculty of the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons. In addition, Dr. Leavy served as zoo veterinary caring for elephants and other animals at the Central Park Zoo.⁹⁹

Colleagues were told,¹⁰⁰ "Dr. Edward N. Leavy, of Gotham, considers the domain of canine and feline practice the sphere of women veterinarians and there will never be a proper regulation of matters veterinary until the college doors are open to students of the gentler sex."

On August 21, 1897, *The New York Times* reported,¹⁰¹ "when the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons opens for the term on September 27 it will have a women's class, the first in the country and the first in the world. So says Dr. Edward N. Leavy, lecturer in hygiene and breeding, and assistant in materia medica at the college, who has been assigned by the Faculty to take charge of the class."

That article and a similar one in the *New York Tribune* went on to note,¹⁰² "Dr. Leavy said yesterday that in this city at least a great deal of a veterinary surgeon's business comes from well-to-do women who have numerous pets, dogs, cats, parrots, squirrels, monkeys, and other animals. One family has as many as fifteen dogs of all kinds of breeds, and others have regular menageries. Of the 1,700 cases that, he had during the past year only thirty of those who employed him were men. He found it embarrassing to elicit the necessary information from women as to the condition of their pets, and employed a woman assistant. Her success suggested the establishment of a female class, and the Faculty of the college adopted his views."

Furthermore, "Dr. Leavy said that he was sure, besides those who will take up veterinary surgery for a living, many

well-to-do young women will study it so as to be able to treat their own pets."¹⁰³

Thus, it was largely Dr. Leavy's experience and understanding of the needs of the pet-owning public that the special class for women was established at the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons in the fall of 1897.

As the result of Dr. Leavy's initiative,¹⁰⁴ "five of them have been enrolled by the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons, with a view of taking the three-years' course and qualifying with the degree of Doctor of Veterinary Surgery. They will form the first woman's class in a veterinary college in this country, though France has one graduate [Marie Kapsevitch from Alfort in 1897]. There are a few in Germany and Russia."

As word got out,¹⁰⁵ "The New York institution is receiving letters of inquiry from others every day. Dr. Edward N. Leavy, lecturer in hygiene and assistant in materia medica, has been assigned by the faculty to form the class. He said today that so far as possible the wishes of the women would be respected in the matter of having lectures and dissections apart from the men, and that in all probability the woman 'vets' would confine their dissecting to cats, dogs and smaller animals, as it seemed that most of them wished to take up the profession with a view to treating household pets. In case, however, any of them wished to make a special study of the diseases of the horse they may do so."

For teaching purposes, Dr. Leavy used the facilities and cases seen by his Lexington Avenue Veterinary Hospital. "The young women practice daily in the rear of the hospital where the dog kennels and dissecting [examination] room of the establishment are located."¹⁰⁶ It was anticipated they would get continuous hands-on training and "go through every experience necessary to the complete mastery of the practical science of their work and this they do with a vim and enthusiasm that is promising for their future." One student remarked, "When the class started...we were all new at the business."

Each day started at the back of the hospital treating the cases that needed attention. That was followed by the free clinic from 11 to 12 every day of the year for "the poor of New York who are not able to pay fancy prices to have their pets attended" await their turn at the door. "The horse or dog doctor in this city charges \$2 or \$3 a visit and \$5 for a night call."

The women students also handled emergency trauma cases, such as when a telephone hurry call came in about a dog that had been run over on Third Avenue. As described,¹⁰⁷

"While the horse was being hitched to the dog ambulance...Dr. Leavy turned to his class, 'Now, then, who's turn is it?' Two of the young women stepped forward without a tremor and in another moment were sitting in

the seat [of the horse-drawn ambulance], with whip and lines well in hand, ready for the run. 'All right!' said the doctor, and with scraping of [hoofed] feet over the planks the horse was into the street and headed for the scene of the accident. As he disappeared around the corner the remaining members of the class went upstairs to get everything in readiness for the injured dog. When the ambulance rattled into the room below the class went down and carried the dog into the dissecting room for examination. 'He'll be all right in a week at most,' said a woman veterinary. In ten minutes more the dog's wound was washed, bandaged and he was lying in a comfortable position in a kennel filled with clean, soft straw. Then the young women, doffed their aprons, put on their street attire and the day's work of the class of women veterinary surgeons was at an end."

Of his women's class, Dr. Leavy further explained,^{108,109} "It all came about as the result of an article that appeared in a certain publication stating that in this line of work there was a field for women. Some time before this class was organized we wanted a woman assistant at this hospital. Upon investigation there was no such person to be found. Yet there was an excellent opportunity for any woman who would try it. Of all the hospital's patients [clients] 19 out of 20 are women. They would rather tell their pets' troubles to a sympathetic and intelligent woman than to a man, and they would be able to speak without restraint. This is how the class started."

While Dr. Leavy did not identify the article he referred to, the "Mothers and Daughters" column in the August 7, 1897 issue of the *American Agriculturist* described such an opening for women in the veterinary profession.¹¹⁰

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Special thanks are extended to Janet M. Bunde (University Archivist, New York University), Jennifer LaRock (Washington County Historical Society), Laura M. Linke (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library), Daniel DiLandro (Archivist, SUNY University at Buffalo), Amy Dzija Driscoll (Director, North Shore Historical Museum), Docteur Christophe Degueurce (directeur ENVA), Dr. Lisa Cox (Curator, Barker Veterinary Museum, Ontario Veterinary College), and Kathryn Harvey (Archivist, Archival and Special Collections, University of Guelph).

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APPENDIX: Other Women Studying Veterinary Medicine

—Unidentified Cornell University Student

When Cornell University was founded in 1865, James Law, FRCVS (1838-1921), joined its first faculty as Professor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery.¹¹¹ Several years later, a Veterinary Department was inaugurated in 1868. Until the New York State Veterinary College was enacted by the State legislature in 1894 and the first class of 1900 matriculated, Dr. Law instructed students interested in agriculture by offering courses in veterinary science.

Several years after opening on May 19, 1871, the Board of Trustees authorized granting a Bachelor of Veterinary Science (BVS) degree after 4 years of study, and a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) after an additional 2 years of study. Seventeen graduates were awarded these degrees prior to 1900, including Daniel Elmer Salmon who, after earning a BVS in 1872, became the first recipient of a DVM in the United States in 1876.

Offering education in many subjects and being open-minded,

Cornell was among the first universities in the nation to admit women alongside men. The first woman began studies in 1870 and at least 2 women attended classes in fall 1871 even though there was no on-campus dormitory to house them. On February 13, 1872, the trustees accepted a gift of \$250,000 from Henry W. Sage to construct a dormitory for women on campus called Sage College and soon voted to begin admitting women starting April 1872.^{112,113} As of 1895, 224 women were enrolled in the university, 104 of whom lived in Sage College.¹¹⁴

Being a land-grant institution, courses related to various aspects of plant and animal agriculture drew students from farm families and other backgrounds seeking higher education to grow better crops and raise more productive animals among many other advancements.

Some of the early female students attending Cornell took courses in agriculture before the turn of the century. Nevertheless, records do not indicate when the first woman enrolled in one of Dr. Law's veterinary courses. Yet, in 1892, beyond those studying agriculture, one female student was reported to be pursuing a career in veterinary medicine. For example,

“Women can’t be headed off. A Cornell girl is studying veterinary surgery.”

That latter fact appeared to be sufficiently newsworthy that nearly 100 syndicated newspapers across the United States and in Canada carried this notice in varying versions under personal, editorial, or women’s interest columns throughout 1892.¹¹⁵ (Fig. 9)

PERSONALS.

A Cornell College girl has taken up veterinary surgery as her professional study, and means to make it her future profession.

Figure 9. Personals. *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 1892 Sep 30; p. 4.

Unfortunately, the identity of this woman student remains unknown. Moreover, it is not known how far she might have progressed toward finishing a course of study for a BVS but obviously did not earn a DVM degree, or if her efforts were simply preparatory. When the veterinary department was disbanded in 1898 after the New York State Veterinary College was established, the University discontinued awarding a bachelor’s degree, replacing it with the DVM after 3 years of study.¹¹⁶

—Jennie Revert (ca 1869/71-1899)

Jennie Revert [Jeanne L. Revert] garnered public attention as another pre-1900 American woman interested in pursuing veterinary medicine. However, details of her study are conflicting and cannot be corroborated for accuracy in authoritative sources. In part, it may be speculated hers could be a case of mistaken identity inadvertently perpetuated in the popular press.

Miss Revert’s heritage is unclear, but her father Alphonse [Alfonse] Revert (b. 1838), a traveling agent, birth mother Marie Lise Revert, and stepmother Emma Revert (b. 1851) were French. Jennie was also born in France about 1869-1871 as was her older brother, Albert Leon Revert, at LeHavre (1869-1953),¹¹⁷ while her half-brother, Paul Revert, was born in Nevada.¹¹⁸ Albert became a naturalized US citizen and was a company president in Las Vegas, Nevada, until he retired. It is assumed Jennie would also likely have naturalized even though this cannot be confirmed.

By the 1890s, Miss Revert maintained a city home at 124 East 27th Street in Manhattan. She was also said to be owner of Robindale Farm in Glen Head, Nassau County, New York. At her stock farm on Long Island, she raised blooded horses and fine bulldogs and was devoted to all animals.^{119,120,121} For example, Miss J.L. Revert was listed as entering a bulldog bitch in the first annual show hosted by the Queens County Agricultural Society at Hempstead in September 1896.¹²²

Frances Willard somehow became aware of Miss Revert’s interest in becoming a veterinarian. In her 1897 book, *Occupations for Women*, she wrote,¹²³ “It was mainly on account of these pets of hers—for they are pets—that Miss Revert took

up active work as a veterinarian.” She further explained that “Germany and France have a number of woman veterinarians, but the United States claims only one, Miss Jennie Revert, who attended the New York Veterinary College during two terms. Women have applied at the different veterinary schools in this country, most of them wishing to make a special study of cats and dogs, but none have ever done more than take a preparatory course at the various schools, especially at the one connected with Cornell University.”

A number of local newspapers from Connecticut to Montana carried similar descriptions of Revert’s coursework in New York City. In particular, an August 7, 1897, *American Agriculturist* article¹²⁴ on veterinary opportunity for women stated that “she is the only woman in the United States who has gone thus far in a veterinary education.”

Because records do not exist, it is impossible to confirm if Miss Revert attended any classes at either of the two private veterinary colleges in New York City in the 1890s. Moreover, it was implied she was studying for a degree at the veterinary college at Alfort, near Paris, but was likely being confused with Marie Kapsevitch, its first female graduate. Despite the reported anticipation and notoriety of a young American woman becoming a veterinarian, there is no record of Miss Revert ever earning a degree or studying at the Ecole Nationale Veterinaire d’Alfort (ENVA).¹²⁵

Nevertheless, the popular press inadvertently distributed misinformation about her periodically over the next several years. Beginning in July 1897, it was reported “Miss Revert does not approve of the new women, though she is fearless and passionately fond of animals. She hopes to finish her course and take a degree. She speaks appreciatively of the kindness, consideration and good-fellowship with which she was treated by professors and fellow students. Miss Revert treats the horses and dogs on her own farm, and the horses are always shod under her personal supervision.”¹²⁶

Specifically, during the months of August and September 1897, no fewer than 20 newspapers perpetuated her erroneous study at Alfort by reporting,¹²⁷ “A new field of work for American women has been invaded by Miss Jennie Revert, of Long Island, who will this year be graduated from the Veterinary School in Alfort, France.” (Fig. 10)

Other newspapers carried similar erroneous statements, such as “Miss Jennie Revert of New York is said to be the only woman in this country studying veterinary science with intention of entering the profession”¹²⁸ and “probably no other woman

A new field of work for American women has been invaded by Miss Jennie Revert of Long Island, who will this year be graduated from the veterinary school in Alfort, France.

Figure 10. A new field of work... *Greensboro Telegram* (Greensboro, South Carolina). 1897 Sep 14; p. 3. Also, *Beatrice Daily Express* (Beatrice, Nebraska). 1897 Sep 14; p. 3.

has heretofore fitted herself for the practice of this profession, and a degree in the same."¹²⁹

A year later, the "Personal" column of an August 14, 1898, issue of *Harper's Bazaar*,¹³⁰ the popular fashion and literary weekly ladies' magazine, carried news about Miss Revert receiving a veterinary degree that year. The article further said, "Other women in this country have taken special courses of study at veterinary schools, but probably no other has undertaken to fit herself for a full practice of the profession and taken a degree, although there are women in Germany and Russia."

The same incorrect announcement was repeated in no less than 15 local newspapers in the fall of 1898 and 5 the following March 1899 from Los Angeles to Georgia, such as: "Miss Jennie Revert, who has a stock farm on Long Island, has invaded a new field for women by graduating from the Veterinary School at Alfort, France."^{131,132,133}

Beyond all the newspaper articles across the country, nothing more is known about Miss Revert's life or how she might have been involved in any aspect of veterinary medicine in the United States.

Miss Jennie Revert thus remains an enigma. Her name is also difficult to trace, yet a notice from New York Probate Court¹³⁴ in New York City cited the death of a Jeanne L. Revert on November 16, 1899. If the same person, she left an estate of eight \$1,000 bonds [about \$300,000 in 2022] from the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad to family and the woman and her son who "cared for me during my last illness." Miss Revert was buried at Calvary Cemetery in Queens, New York.

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