

## **Establishment of the University of Sydney Veterinary School**

Australia in the late 1800s was very much a land enjoying the fruits of primary industry. The fledgling veterinary profession was making a great contribution to this prosperity. However, the problem was that if Australians wished to obtain a degree in veterinary science they needed to travel and apply to established schools either in England or Scotland. It was true that veterinary certificates or diplomas were obtainable from certain Australian institutions, but they lacked standing in the Commonwealth. Consequently, through much agitation by individuals and by the Australian Veterinary Association during the 1890s and early 1900s, veterinary schools were proposed for both the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney. In 1909, Melbourne had its first intake of students, while Sydney took its first students in 1910.

The Veterinary School of the University of Sydney was established at the same time as the Faculty of Agriculture because of the David Berry Bequest of 1889, which provided money for the establishment and maintenance of an institution that would promote agriculture and veterinary science. However, the importance of James Douglas Stewart in founding the Sydney School cannot be underestimated. An Australian who graduated from the Royal Dick Veterinary School in 1893, James became a part-time lecturer in Elementary Veterinary Science at the Sydney Technical College as well as joining the NSW Department of Agriculture as a stock inspector. He soon realised there was a real need for university veterinary education and pushed hard for the NSW Government to establish a school at the University of Sydney. By the time this came to fruition, JD Stewart was Chief Inspector of Stock for NSW; but this did not deter him becoming the founding Professor of the school.

At the opening in 1910, there were about 16 enthusiastic students, some of whom had waited for years to enter the course. The buildings were incomplete, staff minimal and the course work yet to be fully developed. Despite all the impediments to the survival of the school, eleven of the original students graduated in 1914, and a further three within another two years. However, further intakes of students were poor and the school was under pressure to close. This was further exacerbated by the onset of the First World War and the 'Old Prof', as he was affectionately known, had to use all his guile and influence to keep the school open. In 1920, despite continuing poor enrolments, the School was upgraded to the status of a full Faculty and additional teaching staff were appointed. Things looked rosy towards the end of the 1920s but if there was any complacency then it was soon dissipated by the onset of the Great Depression. Now JD Stewart had to really fight for the life of the School. However, by the early thirties survival was assured partly due to the closure, ironically, of the Melbourne Veterinary School to undergraduates, partly due to the passing of the NSW Veterinary Surgeons Act and partly due to the increasing status of the Australian Veterinary Association. And despite the hard times, the number of graduates continued to increase, from five in 1931 to 10 in 1935, and to 24 in 1938.

By the time of the 'Old Prof's' retirement in 1939, the future of the School was assured. From the humble beginnings of two teaching staff in 1910, the Faculty now had 19; and even the onset of the Second World War could do little to shake its foundations. No doubt the School's survival was assisted by the appointment of Sir Ian Clunies Ross as Professor and Dean in 1940. He steered the School through the difficult years of the Second World War and once this task was completed, went on to become Chairman of the CSIRO.

With the end of the Second World War, there was an enormous influx of ex-servicemen into the School, obviously taking advantage of the free education and training offered to them by the grateful Government of the

day. With this expansion of undergraduate numbers came an expansion of the Faculty, and by 1950 there were three departments, and by 1966 six departments. These were spread on two campuses, one at Camden, where most livestock teaching occurs, and one at Camperdown where the basic sciences and companion animal medicine and surgery were taught. Since 1966, there have been some dramatic changes to the Faculty. The Faculty now has a unifying structure that negates the need for separate departments. More-over, with increasing numbers of graduates, including international students from the four corners of the world, there has been a need to introduce a new curriculum that is appropriate for veterinary challenges in the 21st Century

Another great change in the Faculty has been the increase in the number of female graduates. Certainly, in the early days of the Faculty, women were not actively encouraged to enrol as undergraduates. This was probably due to the fact that most graduates were employed in equine or livestock practice, and to the prejudice that women would find the work too onerous. Despite this, our first female graduate, Patricia Littlejohn, was in 1935. By 1940, 8 females had graduated from the Faculty and numbers did gradually increase through the forties, fifties and sixties. However, it was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s that numbers rose substantially. This trend has been maintained and women now approach 70-80% of new graduates.

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