

Horse Doctors, Livestockmen, and Quacks: Veterinary Services in Southeastern Dakota, 1880-1950

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Along with the first penetrations of pioneers near Vermillion in 1859 came the first oxen, milk cows, and small stock to the prairies of eastern Dakota Territory. By 1886, over five thousand hunters and skinners had exterminated the buffalo on the western ranges, and soon the South Dakota plains carried a million cattle. As railroads extended into the range lands to bring cattle to the Chicago packing plants, new stockyards were built: Omaha in 1884; Saint Paul in 1886; and Sioux City in 1887. Sodbusters followed the railroads back to eastern Dakota, and the lands began to fill up during the Great Dakota Boom of the 1880s, when twenty-four million acres were occupied by farmers from the east.¹ These homesteaders turned the sod with oxen and used horses to plow the broken land,² thus setting the stage for a "horse doctor boom" at the turn of the century. Fast behind the pioneers and their cows, horses, and other livestock were the vet-

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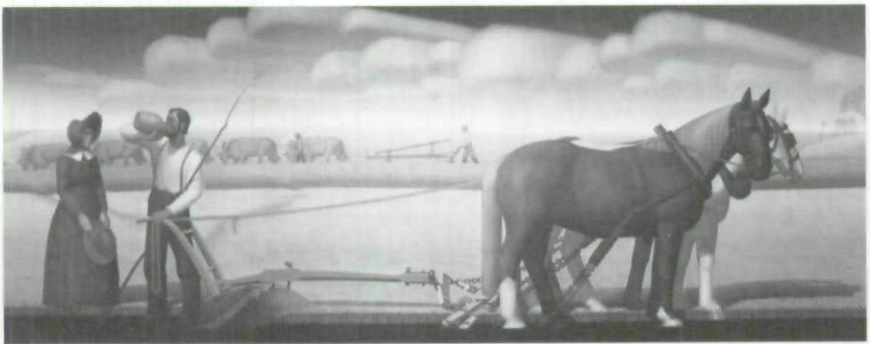
1. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 3d ed., rev. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), pp. 158-68, 243-44; Richard L. Willham, *The Legacy of the Stockman* (Ames: Iowa State University and Winrock International, 1985), p. 95.

2. Willham, *Legacy of the Stockman*, p. 94.

94 *South Dakota History*

erinarians. As the number of animal doctors in South Dakota increased, the state legislature made efforts to regulate them in 1909 and 1913. The influx of veterinarians abated after World War I, but the number of resident practitioners remained high until the 1930s, when tractors began to replace horses and drought and depression devastated the rural economy.

In the early days of veterinary practice, many of the men who were keenly interested in the diseases of animals did not have any formal training. Usually, they were farmers who read a lot and tended their own animals when necessary. Occasionally, some of them extended their activities to the animals of their neighbors, and sometimes one of them was so capable that he developed a full-time veterinary practice. These practices usually



In this mural by Grant Wood in the W. Robert Parks and Ellen Sorge Parks Library at Iowa State University, homesteaders use oxen to break sod and horses to plow the soil.

grew up in places lacking regular veterinary services. As the states enacted laws, such men were obligated to stand for an examination to receive a license; and as standards were raised, they failed the examinations and eventually left the field to formally trained veterinarians. A good example of this transition occurred in Ohio, where twin brothers John and David Myers, born in 1840, established large veterinary practices in villages approximately five miles apart. Neither of these men had ever attended veterinary school, but they had good libraries and obtained a wealth of experience as they worked.³

3. J. Arthur Myers, *Man's Greatest Victory over Tuberculosis* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1952), pp. 21-22.

In 1894, however, Ohio enacted its first law regulating the practice of veterinary medicine and surgery. This law, often amended, provided that graduates of veterinary colleges or universities be granted licenses on the presentation of their diplomas. Those applicants who were not graduates but who had practiced three years prior to passage of the law and who supplied affidavits to that effect would also be given licenses to practice. Even in cases where the examining board failed to receive the necessary information, persons would be certified if they passed an oral examination. As a result of this law, John Myers decided to give up his practice, but his brother David passed the examination and practiced veterinary medicine until he was nearly eighty-seven years old. As this example shows, the veterinary profession was liberal in its requirements during the early attempts to regulate practice. The lawmakers did not desire to handicap anyone who had reasonable knowledge of veterinary medicine and who had long earned at least a part of his livelihood in this field. There was also a shortage of graduates from veterinary colleges.⁴

For the same reasons, several other states had a similar policy of licensing nongraduates to practice veterinary medicine if they submitted evidence of competency. In 1893, California issued licenses to 46 college graduates and 23 nongraduates. Of the licensed veterinarians in Sioux County, Iowa, in 1920, 9 were college graduates, 7 were nongraduates. In 1922, there were 12,416 graduate licensed veterinarians in the United States, and 5,173 nongraduate licensees. At first, professional associations welcomed both graduate and nongraduate veterinarians, but membership was later limited to college graduates.⁵

South Dakota followed a similar sequence in regulating the practice of veterinary medicine. Although the state legislature enacted laws prohibiting the importation and sale of diseased animals as early as 1889, licensing for veterinarians was not started until 1913, although a few licenses were issued in 1909 to nongraduate veterinarians with several years of experience. Under the law of 1913, the first license was granted to Dr. L. T. Barber of Tyndall. Dr. O. W. Stanley of Sioux Falls was also licensed, as

4. Ibid. The *Non-Graduate Veterinary Journal* appeared in 1922 with circulation limited to nongraduate veterinarians.

5. Joseph M. Arburua, *Narrative of the Veterinary Profession in California* (Oakland, Calif.: By the Author, 1966), p. 57; Iowa, Commission of Animal Health, *Iowa State Veterinary Register* (Des Moines, 1920); David S. White, "Non-Graduates Still Numerous," *North American Veterinarian* 3 (Apr. 1922): 167.

96 *South Dakota History*

was nongraduate W. E. Kienney of Madison. Graduates of recognized veterinary schools received a license upon presentation of a diploma; nongraduate practitioners were licensed upon presentation of three affidavits attesting to three to ten years of satisfactory service to a community. According to records in the offices of the State Livestock Sanitary Board, a license was last issued to a nongraduate in 1933. Licenses were renewable by payment of an annual fee of one or two dollars. The last renewal of a nongraduate veterinary license occurred in 1949 when Walter Matthews of Flandreau reapplied. The last such practitioner retired in 1975.⁶

The records show that a total of 132 nongraduate veterinarians were licensed to practice in the state of South Dakota from 1913 to 1933. During the same period, 435 graduates of veterinary schools were licensed, and from 1913 to 1985, a total of 1,385 graduates were licensed.⁷ These numbers indicate that nongraduate licensed veterinarians comprised less than 10 percent of the total licensees in South Dakota; but the low numbers should not be interpreted as lack of importance. In the early years, these nongraduate veterinarians often provided the only veterinary services available in their communities, and they made significant contributions in South Dakota for over fifty years.

These 132 men were livestockmen: honest and intelligent, capable and industrious, curious about health and disease, and motivated to assist their friends and neighbors. In the early days, they were primarily horse doctors—men who combined a knack for handling horses (perhaps they “stood” a stallion or jack) with

6. Interview with Dr. Daryl K. Thorpe, Asst. State Veterinarian, Pierre, S.Dak., 10 Oct. 1985; Records of the South Dakota Livestock Sanitary Board, South Dakota Department of Agriculture, Anderson Building, Pierre, S.Dak.; Records of the South Dakota Board of Veterinary Examiners (the successor to the licensing division of the Livestock Sanitary Board), South Dakota Department of Commerce, Anderson Building, Pierre, S.Dak. These records indicate that the last renewal of a nongraduate license was for Walter Matthews at Flandreau in 1949. Others of that time were George Brown, Dell Rapids; L. Manbeck, Yankton, 1942; and E. C. Buck, Howard, 1943. In the 1960s, however, the board felt obligated to remonstrate with a ninety-three-year-old nongraduate veterinarian who was still in practice; he was induced to discontinue. Interview with Dr. George Chaffee, Board of Veterinary Examiners, Huron, S.Dak., 9 Oct. 1985. The State of Arkansas licensed such stockmen in the 1940s because of a shortage of veterinarians. Thirteen of them were still licensed in 1984. Dr. W. T. Hubbert, Beltsville, Md., to the author, 5 Nov. 1984.

7. Records of the Livestock Sanitary Board and the South Dakota Board of Veterinary Examiners.

Veterinary Services 97

some understanding of equine ailments. Their skills were based on experience in diagnosis and in the difficult art of administering medicine to a violently ill patient. They were attracted, no doubt, to the "vaccination schools" conducted from 1910 to 1924 by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the State Extension Service on how to immunize pigs against hog cholera. Many of the 132 began to vaccinate their own pigs and, when requested, helped their neighbors or relatives with the new technique. It was a chore that required four or five men to catch and hold the pigs, to clean and disinfect the skin, and to administer the virus and the serum. Farmers soon learned it was much easier and quicker to hire a veterinarian to supervise and make the injections than to rely on less experienced help. After three to ten years of such experience, the 132 practitioners had presented affidavits to the Livestock Sanitary Board attesting to their good services to the community and to their reputations as honest and moral men and had received their licenses.

These licensed but nongraduate veterinarians were in competition on an equal footing with the licensed college graduates, with one exception—they were not qualified to participate in the federal disease control programs of the USDA. In most cases, the nongraduates were accustomed to a lower standard of living than the college graduates and probably had lower costs for professional books, journals, and membership fees; therefore, they

Vaccinating pigs for hog cholera was a chore that required four or five men to accomplish.



98 *South Dakota History*

could work a little cheaper. During the Great Depression, the college graduates vacated many rural areas for jobs in the cities or moved to other states, but the nongraduates persisted and provided perhaps half of the veterinary services available in South Dakota in the 1930s. For example, in 1934 when a devastating outbreak of "sleeping sickness" occurred among the horses, a college-trained veterinarian was called to see the first case on the Stalheim farm near Sioux Falls. He, of course, was helpless, and the horse died in agony. By the time the next horse began to stagger, the college graduate had left for a job with the Civilian Conservation Corps in the Black Hills, and a nongraduate veterinarian was called to come to the farm. Dr. E. Weber, a small man with a heavy mustache, came dressed in overalls and a felt hat. He asked for a gallon pail and deftly bled the horse until the pail was full, giving us instructions for the care and feeding of the horse. "When he goes down," Dr. Weber said, "dig holes for his front and hind feet. Put ear corn in his mouth and run water in with a hose. Now, dig a hole and bury this blood." The horse died, but Weber's fee was modest; farmers around Sioux Falls kept him fully employed during the depression.

In addition to men like Dr. Weber, there was a broad category of self-taught, nonlicensed veterinarians in South Dakota during the depression.⁸ Like the nongraduate licensed veterinarians, these men had begun by vaccinating pigs or treating horses for various reasons, ranging from altruism to greed. Some were called "doctor"; some were quacks or worse. For a time they filled a need in the state, but with the influx of college graduates after World War II, they were displaced, sometimes as a result of acrimonious charges and countercharges. At other times, the practitioner retired when one of his sons graduated from a veterinary college and returned to the hometown. Because all nonlicensed veterinarians practiced in violation of state laws, county officials at various times brought charges against them but never very successfully. Most attorneys general were extremely reluctant to initiate a case.

At the bottom of this category of practitioners was the quack, who pretended to have skills he did not have and who claimed to

8. The information and anecdotes about nonlicensed veterinarians in this paragraph and the next five paragraphs are based on the author's experiences in his long career as a practicing veterinarian in South Dakota (1941-1960). A further discussion of quacks and the veterinary profession in the West can be found in Mart R. Steffen, *The Itinerant Horse Physician*, Veterinary Medicine Series, no. 11 (Chicago: American Journal of Veterinary Medicine, 1916).

have secret remedies, devices, or procedures that would cure the suffering animals if only the owner would agree to his offer. Quacks occurred in different levels of mendacity. "Hurley Jensen" was notorious in the early 1940s. He was a slender, dark man, with a furtive manner and a soft conspiratorial voice. His clothes reeked of dirt, barnyard odors, and strong medicines. Prompted by some sixth sense, he appeared at the side of a sick cow, sometimes before the owner realized his cow was ill. Softly but steadily, he described the seriousness of the ailment, his own superior success in such mysterious cases, and the failures of each of the nearby veterinarians. He stayed on and on, for days, as the animal grew worse. If the owner agreed to his terms, he would begin to dose the poor cow with all sorts of nostrums—linseed oil and turpentine, Epsom and Glauber's salts, and perhaps small doses of a powder he kept in a leather pouch. One after the other, concoctions were poured down the throat of the half-dead cow despite her anguished attempts to get away; the results were uniformly disastrous.

Until World War II, many people in the smaller towns kept a milk cow who was a valuable member of the family. When a veterinarian was called to treat a sick cow, he might be warned, "Jensen's been there all day. The cow is ready to die and you'll be blamed." But the veterinarian went anyway, only to find the cow was down, bloated, and comatose, apparently terribly overfed or poisoned. Jensen would come up at once and begin to explain in his soft, whiny voice. "She's got impaction, Doc. Too much corn cobs. I cured the corn but the cobs are stuck, and now she's got 'germitis.'" The veterinarian would study the vital signs (they were all bad) and, turning to the owner, suggest that he call the rendering truck immediately.

Jensen often inflicted great pain when he tried to deliver a calf. If the heifer was in trouble because the calf was too big, his favorite method of forced extraction was to attach a rope from the legs of the calf to a wagon wheel and wind the rope on the wheel. During one such episode of torture, a veterinarian was called at midnight. By an obstetrical procedure, the doctor straightened the neck of the calf, and then extracted it with ease. He then lectured Jensen and several farmers in terms that were remembered and quoted twenty-five years later.

The next group of self-taught, nonlicensed practitioners were the braggarts. They provided specialized veterinary services so they could brag about their skills and receive the plaudits of their community. An example of this type of practitioner was August

100 *South Dakota History*

Kaufman, who had assisted an itinerant ridgling castrator⁹ in performing two or three operations at the Kaufman farm. When another of his colts had a retained testicle, Kaufman boldly attempted the operation himself and was successful. For the next twenty years, until horses were replaced by tractors, Kaufman told everyone—and especially the nearby veterinarians—of his great skill. He repeated his exploit several times, but eventually he reverted to the role of assistant and commentator. Kaufman always used an anesthetic; he never harmed anyone; and because he was widely known, the local veterinarian gained many clients when he retired.

The third group of self-taught, nonlicensed veterinary practitioners was the largest, although no effort has been made to enumerate them. They were the "handy men" who helped their neighbors with springtime surgery (castrations, dystocias, de-horning, and so on), vaccinations for the prevention of diseases, and similar veterinary services that did not require knowledge gained from the veterinary literature. They were honest and capable and made no claims to great skills, but in many rural communities, from the 1930s to the 1950s, they did the hard, dirty jobs that comprised the bulk of veterinary services for South Dakota livestock.

These men had learned early to take care of their livestock. As a young man on a farm near Chamberlain, Lloyd Keiner had helped "pull" pigs "because he had a small hand."¹⁰ Then, in the early 1930s, anthrax struck. The first case was in the Keiner cattle; they lost eighty head. A bull died first, and as Keiner was digging a hole in the pasture to bury him, another bull suddenly collapsed and died as well. A veterinarian was called but offered little assistance. A few days later, as Keiner was driving the family's four milk cows up to the barn, the best one lagged behind, collapsed, and died as he watched. The Keiners bought a large amount of antianthrax serum and vaccinated all of their cattle, stopping the epizootic quickly. They believed it began when the cattle chewed on contaminated buffalo bones that were uncovered by the drought and wind erosion. Since then, the Keiners

9. A horse with a testicle retained in the abdominal cavity was called a "ridgling." They were mean animals and were often worthless for work with other horses. In the early days, ridgling specialists had a circuit. Usually each spring, they traveled from one town to the next by train, preceded by bold advertisements. With a local assistant, they castrated ridgling horses as requested.

10. Interview with Lloyd Keiner, Chamberlain, S.Dak., 3 July 1983.



About 1920, Dr. S. W. Allen of Watertown vaccinated a herd of cows to contain an outbreak of anthrax.

and virtually all cattle ranchers have vaccinated their cattle each spring to protect them from the dreaded disease.¹¹ From this beginning, Keiner expanded his abilities to include obstetrics and vaccinations for blackleg and brucellosis. On one memorable day, he administered thirteen hundred doses of brucellosis vaccine. Because there were no veterinarians for roughly fifty miles around Chamberlain, he was called for obstetrical cases as far away as Murdo, Pierre, and north-central Nebraska. With a helper, Keiner made seven long drives to deliver calves during a single night. When he reached home at daylight, another call sent him out yet again.

Keiner had no veterinary books or journals. If asked, he offered his opinion concerning the nature of a veterinary problem, but he did not make diagnoses. During a career of thirty years, he did not perform necropsies on dead animals, reduce fractures, or do surgery other than castrations. He was often called to deliver calves but performed only one caesarian section. In that case, the heifer was too small. The operation saved the calf, but the heifer died, and he never tried the procedure again. When asked, Keiner said that he had never been sued by an animal owner, been ordered off a farm, or been forced to reimburse a farmer for the loss of an animal. He attributed this record to his honesty—he

11. For an account of anthrax and farm vaccinations, see Hubert H. Humphrey, "Never Listen to Your Fears," *Guideposts* 32, no. 11 (Jan. 1978): 2-5.

102 *South Dakota History*

never claimed to be a veterinarian and never covered up his mistakes.¹² In 1974, Keiner developed a heart problem and retired from his veterinary practice, having gained the respect and friendship of ranchers and veterinarians of the area.¹³

The fourth group of nonlicensed practitioners of the veterinary art included those more knowledgeable individuals who either had some college education or on-the-job training so that they became highly competent in all phases of veterinary services. In fact, many of them did everything the licensed veterinarians did except work in the state-federal control programs. Most were prominent members of their communities, respected and honored as honest, conscientious workmen who filled a dire need during a shortage of veterinary services.

J. A. Swenson was born in 1900 on a South Dakota farm not far from Sioux City, Iowa. His first job was selling feed and hog tonics for the I. Miller Company of Sioux City. When farmers

12. Interview with Lloyd Keiner.

13. Dr. M. Bairey, Ames, Iowa, to the author, 6 Feb. 1983.



*J. A. Swenson,
a retired veterinar-
ian who practiced
in both South Dakota
and Minnesota,
had his office
in Jasper,
Minnesota.*

began vaccinating their pigs for hog cholera in the early 1920s, Swenson took a job with Fred Nolan as a vaccinator. Every day, he went to the serum plant, loaded his car with serum and virus, and drove to one farm after the other, vaccinating pigs in Iowa, South Dakota, and Minnesota. In the early 1930s, Swenson settled down in Jasper, Minnesota, to serve the farmers in Minnesota and South Dakota; he retired in 1963 when his son received the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from the University of Minnesota and took over the practice.

Although Swenson never went to college, he attended several schools of instruction in vaccination and obstetrics (how to diagnose pregnancy and to perform artificial insemination of cows) and accumulated a rather large library of veterinary books and journals. He was competent in most aspects of his occupation. He never falsely represented himself to be a licensed veterinarian but considered himself a neighborly person with more experience in veterinary medicine than the farmers in the surrounding area. He was never sued for a mistake; he was never seriously injured; and he did not become wealthy. While South Dakota officials never complained of his veterinary work, Minnesota officials regularly wrote letters demanding that he desist, and sometimes they sent investigators to obtain evidence that Swenson administered live hog cholera virus to pigs even though he did not have a veterinary license. He recalled that when he noticed a strange car in town, he drove around until he lost the car or spent his working hours in South Dakota, where he never went to court.¹⁴

While the Great Dakota Boom of the 1880s and the privations of the 1930s had thus attracted both self-taught unlicensed veterinarians and nongraduate licensed veterinarians to practice in South Dakota, college-trained practitioners from the eastern states and Canada had come to the area as well. An account of the graduate veterinarians in Clay County, South Dakota, and of how they adapted to demands for their services during economic ups and downs from the 1880s to the 1940s will provide both an overview of the history of veterinary services in southeastern Dakota and a basis for a subsequent comparison of veterinary services in other areas of the state. In the southeastern corner of South Dakota, many farmers now specialize in raising cash crops of corn and soybeans and no longer raise livestock; most have no chickens and not even a milk cow. Consequently, veterinarians today must derive most of their income from the care of "companion"

14. Interview with James A. Swenson, Jasper, Minn., 10 July 1984.

104 *South Dakota History*

animals or leave; most have left the area. From 1882 to 1947, however, Clay County, which now has no full-time practitioners, had numerous resident and nonresident veterinarians.

The first graduate veterinarian in Clay County (and perhaps Dakota Territory) was Gabriel Smith Agersborg, a Norwegian physician, who came to the United States in the early 1860s. After brief employment in a scientific laboratory in New York and a short stay in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, he arrived in Vermillion, Dakota Territory, in 1865. When the early settlers organized a school district in 1867, he became the teacher for its first term. One of his first pupils, Julia Larson, became his wife two years later. By this time, he had a pharmacist's license and was employed in a Sioux City, Iowa, drugstore. In 1875, he moved to Saint Helena, Nebraska, where he ran a drugstore and practiced medicine. In 1877, he started a drugstore in Vermillion, but two years later, he sold his business to Dr. Alfred Helgeson in order to attend the American Veterinary College in New York City. Agersborg received the Doctor of Veterinary Science degree in March 1882 and soon built an extensive practice. From his farm north of Vermillion, he made occasional trips to Sioux City and ferried across the Missouri River to Nebraska.¹⁵

The demand for veterinary services increased rapidly at this time because of the prevalence of serious diseases affecting farm animals, especially horses and swine. During the 1880s, hog cholera began taking a heavy toll of Clay County swine, and Dr. Agersborg became particularly interested in Pasteur's "vaccine virus," which showed promise as a possible cure, and presented a paper on the plague at a meeting of the Clay County Farmers' Alliance in April 1885. In October, Dr. Agersborg received from New York the hog cholera vaccine prepared by the Pasteur process (by attenuating a bacterial culture derived from tissues of infected hogs). Special syringes to administer the vaccine arrived in November, and Dr. Agersborg vaccinated pigs on the farms of Canute Weeks and B. W. Collar. The results of the experimentation are not known, but the disease began to abate the next year.¹⁶

In addition to his veterinary practice, Dr. Agersborg found time for other activities. He was a skilled taxidermist and a bird

15. Herbert S. Schell, "The Varied Contributions of Dr. G. S. Agersborg," *Vermillion Plain Talk*, 4 Oct. 1979.

16. *Ibid.*; Herbert S. Schell, *Clay County: Chapters Out of the Past* (Vermillion, S.Dak.: Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce, 1985), p. 68.

specimen collector. In 1885, he published a list of 225 different birds in Clay County and the surrounding territory.¹⁷ During the 1880s, he served four years as a county commissioner, ran unsuccessfully for register of deeds, and served as fish warden. He was a census enumerator in 1890. When the newly established University of South Dakota began classes in 1882, Dr. Agersborg offered to teach a class in bird lore and methods of collecting and



Dr. G. S. Agersborg, who arrived in Vermillion in the 1860s to practice medicine, received a veterinary degree in 1881 and was probably the first graduate veterinarian in Dakota Territory.

mounting birds. An early catalogue listed him as instructor in zoology and curator of the museum, and he apparently taught the first course offered in zoology in 1883. His appointment was mere-

17. Gabriel S. Agersborg, "The Birds of Southeastern Dakota," *Auk* 2, no. 3 (1885), reprinted in *Proceedings of the South Dakota Academy of Science*, 1929-30 13 (1930): 15-33.

106 *South Dakota History*

ly nominal, however, and was not extended. Dr. Agersborg died on 13 March 1900.¹⁸

Additional veterinary services became available in Clay County when Marvin McCapes opened a "veterinary stable" in Vermillion in the 1880s. The initial date cannot be definitely established because he lived on a farm north of Vermillion and gradually began practicing to fill the local demand. As the need grew, he moved into Vermillion, where he probably did some horseshoeing for the relief of lameness in addition to practicing veterinary medicine. Marvin McCapes was born in New York State in 1832. He moved first to Illinois, then to Wisconsin, and finally to Vermillion in 1869. Although not a graduate of a veterinary school, he was considered one of the best practitioners in the area at the time, and he was the first of four generations of veterinarians to service the Midwest and Far West. Marvin McCapes continued to live in Vermillion until he died in 1917.¹⁹

Shortly after he arrived in Vermillion, Marvin McCapes and his wife adopted a three-year-old boy who had come to South Dakota by wagon train and been orphaned. The boy, Adelbert B. ("Dell") McCapes, was no doubt influenced by his adoptive father's active veterinary practice. In 1888, he graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College and established his office in the Hart Brothers livery stable in Vermillion. His first employer was the Sioux City Traction Company, for whom he "floated" the teeth of one thousand horses at fifty cents a head. By June of 1890, his reputation was widespread, and he was called beyond the boundaries of Clay County to attend sick horses. On the first and third Monday of the month, he provided veterinary service to Elk Point, South Dakota, the county seat of the adjoining Union County.²⁰

On 24 September 1891, several veterinarians met in the Cataract Hotel in Sioux Falls and organized the South Dakota Veterinary Medical Association. Dr. A. B. McCapes was elected secretary of the organization, which had as its purposes the diffusion of the knowledge of veterinary medicine and surgery and the advancement of its members. In 1895, Dr. McCapes began to advertise the virtues of his stallion, "Survivor 14552," listing eleven reasons why his horse was entitled to the attention of the horse-

18. Schell, "Varied Contributions," *Vermillion Plain Talk*, 4 Oct. 1979.

19. "Four Generations of McCapes Family Choose Veterinary Profession," *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 167 (15 July 1975): 123; *Dakota Republican* (Vermillion, S.Dak.), 25 Jan. 1917.

20. "Four Generations," p. 123; *Dakota Republican*, 6 Dec. 1888, 26 June, 3 July, 6 Mar. 1890, 30 Nov. 1893.

breeding public. In 1897, he advertised in the local newspaper that he would perform the more common surgical procedures at about half the usual price; other services were similarly reduced. The next year, his office and barn was leased for livery service, and Dr. McCapes moved to Colorado where he was employed as a state veterinarian and developed a widespread practice of castrating ridgling horses.²¹

21. "South Dakota Veterinary Medical Association," *American Veterinary Review* 15 (1891-1892): 538-39; *Dakota Republican*, 26 Apr. 1895; "Four Generations," pp. 123-24; Schell, *Clay County*, p. 71.

Dr. A. B. McCapes used posters to advertise his services.

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108 *South Dakota History*



Dr. H. S. Matthews, a veterinarian who worked in Clay and Yankton counties, treats a horse, while Fred W. Binder (right) and a third person hold the animal down.

From the late 1880s through 1905, other veterinarians located in Clay County and offered their services to the public. A Doctor Kean located at Wakonda at the northern end of the county in the 1880s. Dr. John W. Maher, who was associated with the veterinary hospital at Beresford, South Dakota (just northeast of Clay County), announced in 1901 that every Thursday he would be at C. R. Grange's Livery Stable in Vermillion, where he might be contacted on matters pertaining to veterinary science. A Doctor Lutas purchased a livery stable near the flour mill on Center Street and established his veterinary office there. In October 1901, Dr. H. S. Matthews began practicing veterinary surgery in

Vermillion on two Mondays each month. He advertised in the newspaper at Wakonda in northern Clay County that veterinary dentistry was his specialty and that he would be at the Collins livery barn in Wakonda on the first and third Tuesday of each month. About the same time, Dr. E. J. VanDerhule located in Wakonda, and his office was likewise in the Collins livery barn.²² Both men undoubtedly dealt with the "corn stalk disease," which, the editor of the *Wakonda Monitor* reported, had "killed so many cattle last year, [and] seems to have broken out among the horses this year."²³

In 1894, the editor of the *Monitor* enthusiastically applauded the services of Dr. P. Kirby in Wakonda, noting that many cattle suffered from "lumpy-jaw." The next year, Dr. Kirby erected a building at the south end of town to be used for his veterinary hospital. Kirby divided his time between Wakonda and Running Water, Nebraska, where he had a horse ranch. A veterinarian at Centerville, a few miles north of Wakonda in Turner County, also offered his services to the farmers in Clay County. Dr. F. Pierce, a recent graduate of Cornell University, had an office at the H. G. Ellis Palace Livery where he specialized in dentistry of horses. A few years later, Dr. J. C. Foy, also of Centerville, announced that he would be in Wakonda every Thursday for the practice of veterinary medicine and surgery.²⁴

The influx of veterinarians into eastern South Dakota at the turn of the century prompted a wry comment by the editor of the *Wakonda Monitor*. "Horse doctors," he said in 1901, "seem to be getting plent[iful] around here. There must be a lot in it."²⁵ Perhaps by that time he was particularly dissatisfied with itinerant veterinarians—transients who drifted into towns, worked a few days or weeks, and moved on. Traveling horse doctor B. T. Seeley, for instance, advertised in Vermillion in 1892 that he would treat horses on the basis of "no cure-no pay."²⁶ Such veterinarians first made an arrangement with the proprietor of a livery barn, placed ads in the local newspapers and distributed handbills, performed veterinary services as requested, and then moved on. Many of them used "hard sell" tactics to get money from area farmers.

22. *Dakota Republican*, 6 Dec. 1888, 3, 17, 24 Oct., 14 Nov. 1901; *Wakonda Monitor*, 1, 22 Aug. 1901.

23. *Wakonda Monitor*, 16 Jan. 1902.

24. *Ibid.*, 13 Apr. 1894, 6, 27 Dec. 1895, 18 July 1901, 6 May 1909.

25. *Ibid.*, 27 Aug. 1901.

26. *Dakota Republican*, 1 Sept. 1892.

110 *South Dakota History*

About 1910, itinerant veterinarian Mart R. Steffen arrived in Chamberlain, South Dakota, to visit his brother, but almost immediately he took the train west because it was an "'off year' in crops."²⁷ After working in Idaho, Nebraska, and Wisconsin, he returned to South Dakota in July of 1912. Even though business was slow, his description of his selling methods is a good example of the itinerant veterinarian's practice. Every morning, he and his brother drove down the roads soliciting work:

As an illustration of how hard we "went after them" that week I will relate the following. One morning as we stopped at about the fourth farm without having done any work, we saw a farmer in a field cultivating corn. We pulled up to the fence and waited until he came down to our end of the field. He was driving a team of pretty good horses to the cultivator; they were small but good chunks, and one of them looked just a bit thin. We told the farmer who we were and what we did and suggested that he let us examine the thin horse's teeth. He consented to have it done after some argument, and the horse's mouth really needed attention. He said we could come around in the evening and fix them up; but we were afraid he might change his mind by that time, or possibly somebody might talk him out of the notion. So we talked him *into* the notion of having the job done right away, and we fixed those teeth right there in the corn-field. He had no money with him, so we got him to write a note to his wife ordering her to pay us \$2.50; we drove to his house and collected the money.²⁸

Steffen pointed out how essential it was for the college-trained veterinarian, whether itinerant or resident, to master the art of "handling trade." A veterinarian in South Dakota, he said, "must combine the selling qualities of a sewing machine agent with his professional ability as a practitioner if he expects to do any business."²⁹ As an itinerant veterinarian, Steffen mastered the art (he calls it diplomacy) of offering enough to entice the farmers to employ his services but not promising more than he could deliver. In this way, he claimed, the graduate veterinarian could establish a successful practice even in direct competition with quacks and nongraduate practitioners.

The increase in competition among horse doctors in southeastern South Dakota at the turn of the century was brought on by an outbreak of a mysterious disease in horses along the Missouri River. Called "bottom disease," it reached alarming proportions in 1892. When almost two thousand horses died in Clay County and other areas adjacent to the river, the United States Bureau of Animal Industry dispatched a veterinarian from Washington,

27. Steffen, *Itinerant Horse Physician*, p. 135.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

D.C., to make an inspection.³⁰ In his report, Inspector E. C. Schroeder recorded the observations of Dr. A. B. McCapes. The symptoms included, McCapes reported, "an elevation of temperature, . . . and death follows in two to three days during severe nervous excitement, or, as many farmers express it, the horse dies perfectly crazy."³¹ Treatment was of no value. Although a few horses appeared to recover, they later relapsed and died. The cause is now thought to have been a plant toxin similar to locoweed disease.

During this period also, the number of cattle in Clay County nearly tripled, and anthrax became a serious problem, further increasing the need for veterinary services. Anthrax usually appeared each summer, and methods for prevention and treatment were not then available. The disease was particularly severe in 1908. Licensed veterinarians representing the State Livestock Sanitary Board quarantined many farms and prohibited the movement of cattle, and the Clay County fair was cancelled. Nebraska placed an embargo on all livestock from Clay County and ordered the ferry boats to stop all traffic from the area. All abattoirs in the county suspended operations, and meat markets sold only USDA-inspected meat from Sioux City.³²

Before the introduction of penicillin, anthrax was also a serious health hazard to veterinarians and others who were exposed to infection by contact with animals. In 1915, Dr. Carl Viers contracted anthrax from a dead cow on a farm near Vermillion in Clay County. To determine the cause of death, he had conducted an autopsy on the cow, but he had not used rubber gloves. During the autopsy, a mosquito bit him on his bare right arm, and he unconsciously rubbed the site with a contaminated knife held in his left hand. Three days later, a dark, tender spot developed on his right arm; his arm and shoulder were sore. A blood test at the

30. *Dakota Republican*, 8 Sept. 1892.

31. E. C. Schroeder, "'Bottom Disease' among Horses of South Dakota," in U.S., Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Industry, *Eighth and Ninth Annual Reports of the Bureau of Animal Industry for the Years 1891-1892* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), p. 372.

32. *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Animal Industry* (1897), p. 295; *Dakota Republican*, 13, 20, 27 Aug., 17 Sept., 1 Oct. 1908. While this outbreak was eventually contained, anthrax continued to appear sporadically among cattle in Clay County. It was particularly destructive during the hot, dry summers of the 1930s and 1940s, and an outbreak occurred as late as 1985. An effective vaccine is now available, however, and outbreaks are quickly controlled by injections of penicillin. Dr. M. Kromminga, Centerville, S.Dak., to the author, 4 Feb. 1986.

112 *South Dakota History*

State Health Laboratory in Vermillion revealed the presence of the causative bacteria. Dr. Viers was taken immediately to Saint Joseph's Hospital in Sioux City, Iowa. A portion of the infected area was surgically removed, and the arm was bathed in hot water to control the infection. He recovered and resumed his practice.³³

The ravages of a disease known as hog cholera also kept veterinarians busy in the 1890s. First identified in Ohio in the early 1830s, hog cholera spread throughout the swine-growing Midwest by the 1870s, causing an annual mortality rate of 15 to 60 percent and more. Between 1891 and 1896, swine numbers in South Dakota decreased from 275,000 to 150,000. As early as 1885, the disease had made deep inroads among swine in Clay County. Local farmers lost heavily, and thoroughbred and pedigreed hogs were as susceptible to the disease as the more common stock.³⁴

33. *Dakota Republican*, 19 Aug. 1915. Others were not as fortunate as Dr. Viers. In August 1919, Dr. F. A. Reichmon of Geddes contracted anthrax. He was taken to Sioux City in a special train but died on the train in the depot. "Necrological," *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 56 (1919-1920): 112; Interview with Dr. K. Sadler, Wagner, S.Dak., 10 Sept. 1983.

34. J. F. Smithcors, *The American Veterinary Profession: Its Background and Development* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1963), pp. 451-52; *Dakota Republican*, 12 Nov. 1885; *Fourth and Fifth Annual Reports of the Bureau of Animal Industry* (1887-1888), p. 258.



Inspecting cattle and overseeing the burning of diseased animals were part of a veterinarian's job during an anthrax outbreak.

Although the state regulations required that dead hogs be buried or burned within one hundred feet of where they died, men clandestinely dug them up at night and hauled them to the rendering plants. The carcasses were cooked, and the lard used to make soap, axle grease, or animal feeds. By 1901, dead hogs were quoted at \$1.10 per hundredweight in Sioux City, Iowa. One buyer bought ninety-two thousand pounds of dead hogs in two days. Another said he paid out an average of one thousand dollars a day for two weeks for dead hogs at his plant. Many dead hogs from Clay County were sold on the Sioux City markets.³⁵

Not until 1903 was the viral etiology of hog cholera established. A preventative vaccination (simultaneous treatment with virus and antiserum) was soon developed and field-tested in 1908. The results were extremely successful, and farmers clamored for supplies of the antiserum. The method was patented by the USDA and dedicated to the public; and to expedite the development of facilities for the production of the antiserum, public demonstrations of its use were made in South Dakota and other swine-producing states. The procedure was effective in controlling the disease.³⁶ In 1918, Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston reported, "The death rate from hog cholera in the United States was 144 per thousand in 1897, 118 in 1914, and only 42 in 1917, the lowest in 35 years."³⁷

When the treatment for hog cholera finally appeared, fraudulent vaccinations were detected in Clay County. A layman, Charles Hart, was brought before Judge James A. Copeland in Vermillion on a complaint signed by local licensed veterinarian Luther P. Brewster. Hart and an assistant were charged with vaccinating hogs with a serum guaranteed to cure hog cholera, in violation of state laws regulating the practice of veterinary medicine. Dr. Brewster charged that the serum was worthless and that the vaccination was illegal and fraudulent. Hart claimed that he worked with the authority of a veterinarian in Huron, South Dakota. The case was continued in order to permit the defendant to obtain evidence from customers about his vaccinations. In December, Hart pleaded guilty as charged. Judge Copeland considered Hart only unconsciously guilty in that he vaccinated the

35. *Dakota Republican*, 28 Feb. 1901.

36. W. B. Niles, "Field Tests with Serum for the Prevention of Hog Cholera," *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Animal Industry* (1908), pp. 177-213.

37. David F. Houston, "Report of the Secretary of Agriculture," in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1918* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 27.

114 *South Dakota History*

hogs through a misunderstanding. Hart received a minimum fine of thirty dollars, including court costs.³⁸

The boom in veterinary services in Clay County ended with the depression of the 1930s and an epidemic of sleeping sickness in horses. Farmers began to adopt the gasoline tractor for draft power; the veterinary profession was in panic; and dozens of veterinary schools closed. Veterinary services in Clay County, however, were enjoying a period of stability. The established practitioners in Vermillion and Wakonda persisted despite the failures of 429 of 577 South Dakota banks between 1920 and 1934 and the drop in income from livestock from \$150 million in 1929 to less than \$45 million in 1932. Their persistence can be partially explained by better crops in Clay County; farmers always had supplies of fodder—hay, straw, cornstalks—and many cattle were brought into Clay County for wintering-over.³⁹

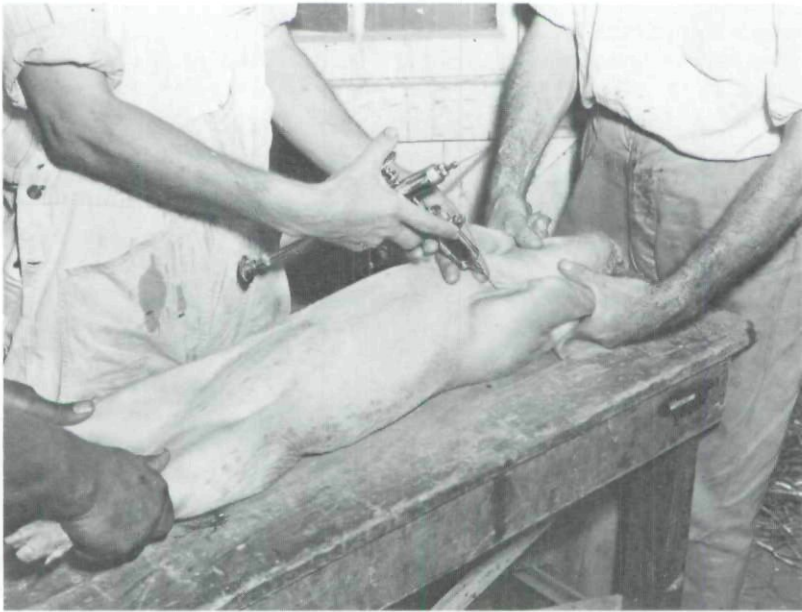
Most of the veterinarians that came to Clay County at the turn of the century had not stayed long, but Dr. Luther P. Brewster proved to be an exception, providing veterinary services for more than forty years. He built the first horse hospital in Vermillion and saw it converted to the care of dogs and cats. His tenure spanned the time of the "horse doctor," the shift from horse practice to preventative medicine for hogs and cattle, and the modern era of antibiotics and companion animal medicine. Although he was two years away from graduation at a veterinary college, Dr. Brewster announced his practice in 1903 with an office in the Waldorf Livery Barn. After spending the winter of 1903-1904 at the veterinary college, he returned to Vermillion in March of 1904 and resumed his practice. In January of 1905, Dr. Brewster again returned to study and received the Doctor of Comparative Medicine degree from Chicago Veterinary College on 24 March 1905. He promptly established his permanent practice in Vermillion. He was appointed a deputy state veterinarian and, as such, performed inspections of animals to be exported to Canada and elsewhere. For several years, Dr. Brewster had an office in the basement of a drugstore on Main Street. Dr. Carl Viers, who had been an assistant to Dr. Brewster, joined him as a partner in 1914 upon his graduation from veterinary school.⁴⁰

38. *Dakota Republican*, 27 Nov., 11 Dec. 1913.

39. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 283-84; Interviews with Dr. Luther P. Brewster, Vermillion, S.Dak., 1947.

40. *Dakota Republican*, 26 Mar., 14 May 1903, 24 Mar. 1904, 6, 20 Apr. 1905, 23 Mar. 1911, 5 Feb. 1914; "College Commencements," *American Veterinary Review* 29 (1905-1906): 492-93; *Vermillion Plain Talk*, 3 Aug. 1950.

Carl Viers was born at Red Cloud, Nebraska, in 1885. He moved to Clay County and farmed for several years before he enrolled at the Saint Joseph Veterinary College, Saint Joseph, Missouri, from which he graduated in 1914. He enlisted during World War I and served as a first lieutenant in the veterinary corps. After the war, he resumed his practice and also served as mayor of Vermillion for four consecutive terms from 1923 to 1932.⁴¹ In 1914, Dr. Viers and Dr. Brewster had moved to a fine new hospital building



At a USDA-sponsored school for farmers, a veterinarian demonstrates how to vaccinate a pig with both virus and antiserum for the control of hog cholera.

on National Street. It had several box stalls, many tie stalls, a special surgical room with an operating table, an office, drug room, a large overhead mow for storage of hay, and an outside exercise area for the horses. Five years later, the partners sold the veterinary hospital to two young Clay County men who had just

41. *Vermillion Plain Talk*, 3 Aug. 1950.

116 *South Dakota History*

graduated from the Saint Joseph Veterinary College—Dr. George Lohre and Dr. Julius Skordahl. Dr. Brewster temporarily retired from practice, and Dr. Viers conducted a private practice for many years, retiring in 1947. Three months after the sale, Dr. Skordahl decided to resume academic work, and Dr. Brewster bought back his interest in the hospital.⁴²

George H. Lohre, who purchased an interest in the hospital from Dr. Viers, was born in central Clay County in 1894. He graduated from high school in Vermillion and attended Jewell Preparatory College in Jewell, Iowa. He was enrolled at Saint Joseph Veterinary College when World War I began. After service with a trench-mortar battery, he was detailed back to the college to complete his veterinary training. He graduated in 1919 and practiced in Clay County until 1933, when ill health forced his retirement. Dr. Lohre died on 25 March 1947.⁴³

From World War I and into the 1940s, most veterinary services in Clay County were provided by three resident veterinarians: Dr. J. J. Donovan was in Wakonda;⁴⁴ Dr. Viers practiced from his home in Vermillion; and Dr. Brewster maintained an office in his equine hospital. They managed to survive the depression of the 1930s and then retired or died in the 1940s. Dr. Donovan retired in 1942; the little town of Wakonda has not had a veterinarian since then. Dr. Viers retired in 1947 and died in 1950. In 1944, Dr. Brewster sold his hospital and retired; he died in 1949.⁴⁵ The hospital was remodeled to accommodate the mixed veterinary practices of three successive owners. In 1966, the practice ceased, and the building was converted into an "atmosphere" restaurant, signaling the end of full-time veterinary services in Clay County.

The early veterinarians in southeastern Dakota provided competent veterinary services for the treatment of noninfectious diseases, wounds, lameness, digestive disturbances, and similar maladies, but they were helpless to control the infectious diseases. With neither vaccines for the prevention of infections nor antibiotics to cure them, veterinarians and stockmen did the best they could with the remedies available to them and relied on inspection and quarantine regulations to prevent the introduction and spread of disease. Veterinary services developed mostly in response to economic factors. They boomed during the Great

42. *Dakota Republican*, 5 Feb. 1914, 8 May, 28 Aug. 1919.

43. *Dakota Republican*, 27 Mar. 1947.

44. *Wakonda Monitor*, 21 Sept. 1916.

45. *Vermillion Plain Talk*, 20 Oct. 1949.

Veterinary Services 117

Dakota Boom and around World War I with its rural prosperity and agricultural expansion, declined with the depression, and would flourish again with the general prosperity after World War II. For Clay County, however, the heyday was over at the end of the 1940s. While other parts of the state would attract record numbers of resident veterinarians by the 1980s,⁴⁶ Clay County would have to rely on veterinary centers in other counties. Reviving a practice that began in the 1890s, traveling veterinarians from surrounding counties now visit Vermillion two days a week.

46. *American Veterinary Medical Association Directory, 1981* (Schaumburg, Ill.: American Veterinary Medical Association, 1981); Dr. D. E. Hughes, South Dakota State Veterinarian, to the author, 19 Nov. 1985.

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