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Women In The Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Sydney – The Early Years: Paul Canfield and Jenifer Edols, The Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Sydney, NSW 2006.

(Much of this article was compiled with the assistance of Jenifer Edols in 1985. It was amended for the 1999 Australian Veterinary History Society Conference.)

Introduction

In 1985 The University of Sydney was celebrating one hundred years since women first graduated from the University of Sydney. At the same time the Faculty of Veterinary Science was celebrating its 75th anniversary and the passing of fifty years since the graduation of its first woman: Patricia K. Abbott (née Littlejohn). At that time Patricia was still teaching as a Demonstrator in Veterinary Pathology. She was the first, but far from the last, to contribute significantly to her Faculty and this article attempts to highlight, albeit in a condensed form, the early role of women graduates in maintaining and extending the Sydney Veterinary School and the Australian Veterinary Profession.

In 1910 there were none, in 1930 there was one, in 1985 there were 208; and in 1999 there are 302. Such has been the growth of the numbers of female undergraduates. Today they occupy approximately 66% of the undergraduate places at the University of Sydney, a figure that is repeated in other veterinary schools both in Australia and overseas. In the beginning, however, it took special women to brave the all-male Veterinary Science Faculty at the University of Sydney and attempt to overcome the prevailing socio-economic prejudices. Not that the Faculty, capably run by Professor J.D. Stewart, provided any obstacle to such women. Indeed, from the start, women received strong encouragement and support from
Professor Stewart and many other members of the staff to join and complete the course. The prejudices that they were to encounter were more from their peers and from the public they were to serve. These prejudices were not to be short-lived and were partly responsible for directing the early female veterinary graduates towards teaching.
The first female graduates - Patricia Littlejohn and Ann Flashman

The first woman to enter the Faculty was Ann Rylah (née Flashman) in 1930. She was followed a year later by Patricia Abbott (née Littlejohn). Both were the product of Ascham School, Edgecliff, and were heavily influenced by the progressive thinking of headmistress of that time. Both, although possessing contrasting personalities, had a determination to succeed. Supported by their families, Faculty staff and their colleagues, graduation was to be in 1935 for Pat and a year later for Ann. The course had proved a challenge, especially so for Ann, but the real challenge lay ahead. Pat was appointed Demonstrator in Veterinary Anatomy in 1935 at the "princely" sum of £200 per annum, while Ann moved to Melbourne and established one of the few all-small animal practices. A criticism has been directed often at our women graduates - and indeed at all women graduates - that they do not have the dedication or the inclination to devote more than a small part of their lives to their professions. This unjust criticism could not be directed at our early women graduates, for both Pat and Ann managed to establish full-time careers as well as coping with their families. Ann was at work in her practice on the day of her untimely death, while Pat established a career in Veterinary Pathology.

Other women graduates in the 1930's

Other women entered the Faculty in the early thirties but not all were to succeed. In part, failure of some women to complete the course was due to their restricted schooling in the sciences. However, this handicap was easily overcome by others, and in 1937, Dorothy R. Scamps (née Arnott) and Joyce A. Hadley (née Steel) graduated, followed by Kathleen I. Farr and Kathleen L. Raymond in 1938. Both Dorothy Scamps and Kathleen Raymond became Demonstrators in Veterinary Anatomy, whilst Kathleen Raymond and Kathleen Farr became Junior House Surgeons for a period. Kathleen
Raymond was honoured also with the now defunct Walter and Eliza Hall Veterinary Science Research Fellowship for 1939 to


study "pathological changes in the testes and accessory sex glands of normal and abnormal rams whose clinical history and seminal characteristics are known". Kathleen Farr is remembered today for a different reason, for the Farr Memorial Fund established in 1941 by a gift of £50 in memory of her parents. The prize is awarded to a First Year student who shows the greatest proficiency in the written examination in Animal Husbandry concerned with horses.
Into the 1940's - Virginia Osborne, Nancy Wickham and Jenifer Edols

In 1939, two women graduated, Gwen Griffith and Elizabeth Harvey; while in 1941 another female graduate, Virginia E.

Associate Professor Virginia Osborne and Professor Rex Butterfield in 1981 surrounded by their tools of trade.

Osborne, was to begin a long and fruitful association with the Faculty. Virginia, like so many of her predecessors, decided to join the Pastures Protection Lecturer, Richard M. Webb, and demonstrate in Veterinary Anatomy. The reason why so many of our earlier female graduates were attracted to Veterinary Anatomy must be
attributed in part to the empathy with, and encouragement provided by, Dick Webb. Virginia continued teaching in Veterinary Anatomy until her retirement in 1982 as an Associate Professor. In a period spanning 40 years, she was a Demonstrator until 1947, then a Teaching Fellow, and a permanent Lecturer in 1952. Many students remember Virginia with affection and benefited from her kindness. Of course, Virginia was not the only early woman graduate to reach academic heights. In the early days she was joined by Nancy Wickham, who graduated in 1944 and became a Demonstrator in Veterinary Pathology and Bacteriology and a Lecturer in the same subject in 1952. After having been a Lecturer in Veterinary
Pathology and acquiring a M.V.Sc. at the University of Liverpool, Nancy decided in 1958 to become one of the first private veterinary pathologists in Sydney, a role she fulfilled for many years.

Dorothy Arnott and Joyce Steel, the 3rd and 4th female graduates present at the celebration of the 2000th graduate in 1981.

Another graduate of that era, who was to leave her mark on the Faculty, but for a different reason, was Jenifer H. Edols. Jenny, noted in her undergraduate days as the first woman to win the Baker and Ridley Prize for Animal Husbandry, graduated in 1949 and worked in various private practices in Australia as well as for the British Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, before returning to the
Patricia Littlejohns and Barbara Menzies (then in 4th year) at the 75th Anniversary of the Faculty in 1985

Faculty in 1968 as its Graduate Assistant and Assistant to the Dean. She capably filled this role and was responsible for the effective reorganisation of the Faculty administration until her retirement. Jenny is remembered also for her involvement in the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA). She was the first woman to be President of a Division of the AVA and also the first woman to be made a Fellow of the AVA.
Sport and the growth in numbers

From the start, the women of our Faculty were active in student matters and University sport. In 1938, Lena Donaldson and Jean Scott (both, unfortunately, did not finish the course) were in the University Women's Hockey First Eleven, while Virginia Osborne was in the University's Basketball Team. In 1939, the year of commencement of interfaculty women's sport, both Lena and Jean were chosen for the intervarsity hockey team, with the latter chosen to play for the combined university team. In 1940, the Faculty had been placed third in women's interfaculty sport. Participation was aided by the growth in numbers of women in the Faculty. By 1944-45, there were 25 women in the Faculty. This had increased to 26 in 1946, but apparently this was a disappointment according to the Women's Report in Centaur. They were hoping for over 30, but stated that "matrimony has already taken toll of some of our members" (matrimony in fact prevented few from finishing, failures or loss of interest accounted for most discontinuations). In 1947, however, the number of women graduates had reached 33, although the number declined past that year and did not begin to climb until the 1960's. Nevertheless their influence on the Faculty and, indeed, on the profession, continued to grow. Many of the women graduates of that first twenty year period (see Table) contributed to teaching or became actively involved in both large and small animal practice. Some are still active today.

Despite this vanguard, the growth in numbers of women as permanent members of the academic staff was slow and even today there are some departments that are under-represented relative to the increasing percentage of women graduates. In 1999, the Faculty has one associate professor, two senior lecturers and four lecturers who are women. The Associate Professor, Daria Love, was the first female graduate to receive a PhD from the Faculty.
The future?

Today, women graduates are becoming increasingly important for the promotion and success of the veterinary profession, both in Australia and overseas. It is inevitable that they will strongly influence how the public perceives the role of veterinarians in society. No doubt it will a positive influence, an influence that will successfully lead the profession into the 21st Century.

In the 1950’s, women may have been considered still as oddities, but their colleagues should have taken note of an ominous quote presented at the end of the Women’s Report in Centaur, University of Sydney, 1952:

“Women do not want equal rights; they would be dissatisfied with so few”.

Female Graduates In Veterinary Science: The First Forty five Years (1910-1955)

The graduates have been grouped according to their final year. The actual year of graduation may at times be inaccurate, due to the fact that graduation dates fluctuated from November through to March of the following year.

1935
1936
1937
1938
1939
1941

Patricia K. Littlejohn
Ann F. Flashman
Dorothy R. Arnott
Joyce A. Steel
Kathleen I. Farr
Kathleen L. Raymond
Gwen A.L. Griffith
Elizabeth Harvey
Virginia E. Osborne
1942  Margaret J. Glasson
       Helen K. Racklyeft
       Annette F.M. Rogers

1943  Margaret E. Christian

1944  Nancy Wickham
       Jean I. Clayton

1945  Patricia M. Stuart

1946  Patricia McGrue
       Helen V. McVicar
       Laurie J. Stewart

1948  Betty J. Maiden
       Kathleen J. Stainforth

1949  Beryl W. Bott
       Jill M. Capel
       Jenifer H. Edols
       Barbara F. Smith
       Joan M. Stringer
       Patricia M.A. Yardley

1950  Rosalind B. Baxter
       Nancy M. Butler
       Alison S. Kyle

1951  Mary R. Bardsley
       Ena M. Dexter
       Norma P. Gordon
       Priscilla M. Bennett

1952  Heather J. Galloway

1953  Margaret Goodwin
       Margot A. McKinney
       Joan C. Kater
       Margaret E. Wilson

1954  Jill Clout
       Elaine Edmonstone
       Patricia M. Wilkinson

1955  Jan Caterson
       Dorothy R. Edmonstone
       Isabel E.R. Grant
       Jean B. Wootton