



Florence Kimball



Helen Goldhaft



Marie Koenig Olson

The early women graduates in veterinary medicine were tenacious, combining fortitude and determination with decency, honor, and a healthy sense of humor. These women were outstanding individuals who often had a positive effect in areas beyond medicine. as they applied their talents and education in other areas of their lives.

During their student days, many of the early women veterinary students were well-accepted by their male classmates. However, the challenges that they faced must not be forgotten. They

**Women
Veterinary
Graduates
BEFORE 1950**

entered into a traditionally male field and, as in other professions, faced challenges of sexism. For some of these women, the challenges included being assigned the most foul cadavers available to the class. Others were excluded from ambulatory or farriery privileges on the grounds that the clientele would not accept women in the barn. There were no locker facilities for women students. The occasional practice of misinforming female students of the actual times of examinations or assignments may have seemed like a practical joke to the perpetrators, but the ramifications were sometimes serious. Nonetheless, each of



Patricia O'Connor Halloran



Jeanne Neubecker Logue



Helen Borchmann Doremus

these early women became role models for those that followed.

Here are some of their stories.

Florence Kimball entered Cornell and graduated with 21 men in 1910. Widely acknowledged as the first woman to graduate from a non-proprietary American university, Dr. Kimball operated a successful small-animal hospital in Massachusetts for several years before entering the nursing profession where she spent the remainder of her career.

Helen Goldhaft '33 was the daughter of a veterinarian. She aspired to follow her father's footsteps to the University of Pennsylvania. However, there were no facilities for women there, so Helen came to Cornell. Dean Pierre Fish was so impressed with her academic qualifications that he provided her a lucrative scholarship. During her final year, Helen quietly eloped with Nathan Wernicoff '31, but fear of discrimination and loss of dormitory privileges forced them to keep their union a secret until after graduation. The Drs. Wernicoff operated a small-animal practice together for several years, eventually becoming partners with members of their family in the highly successful Vineland Poultry Laboratories, a vaccine company.

Marie Koenig '37 was the daughter of a member of Cornell's veterinary faculty. Dr. Koenig Olson was a community leader and activist. Along with such people as Amelia Earhart, she was a charter member of Zonta International. Some of the practice ideals that Marie Olson instituted include v-trough restraint methods, the use of intravenous fluids, isolation wards with separate air flows, and a passion for continuing education. She also established early protocols for treating liver and inflammatory bowel disease. Olson's granddaughter will soon matriculate at Cornell, becoming the fourth generation in this family of Cornell-educated veterinarians.

The classes of 1939 and 1940 had a total of seven women students. One of the best known was Patricia O'Connor Halloran '39, who became the first female zoo veterinarian. Dr. O'Connor

wrote numerous articles, but even more were written about her. She was an icon in the veterinary world, not so much because of her gender—though that was clearly an issue of great interest at the time—but because of the manner in which she blended zoo medicine with public education and scientific writing, most notably in her 1955 compendium, *A Bibliography of References to Diseases of Wild Mammals and Birds*.

At the age of 12, Helen Borchmann '40, who grew up in the Bronx, announced to her parents that she would like to become a veterinarian. Nine years later, she graduated in a class that included three other women. She



Sylvia Burg Salk

and husband, Henry Doremus '46, established practices in New Jersey and Vermont, sequentially. An animal-rights activist, Dr. Borchman Doremus was influential in compelling the Canadian government to halt the clubbing slaughter of baby seals on the Newfoundland ice floes during the 1970s. She also was deeply committed to shelter medicine and, following her death, a large and ultra-modern animal shelter opened in her retirement community of Vero Beach, Florida, as a lasting tribute to her and others with a passion for supporting helpless and homeless animals.

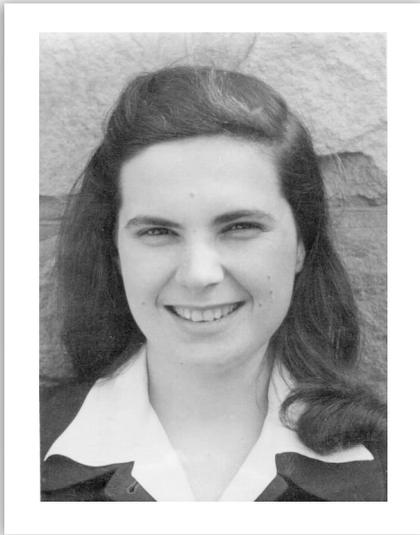
Jeanne Neubecker Logue '44, one of the country's earliest female large-

animal veterinarians, chronicled her personal veterinary experiences in a James Harriet-like book written after she retired from active practice. However, her writing reached a pinnacle in the biography of Cooper Curtice, an 1881 graduate of Cornell who studied under James Law and other members of the first veterinary faculty. *Beyond the Germ Theory* chronicles the powerful story of the elucidation of the origin of Texas fever in cattle.

Sylvia Burg Salk '46 did not have farm experience when she applied to Cornell. After her second rejection, her mother journeyed from New York to the college and held a private conference with Dean Hagan—Sylvia Burg was admitted the following fall. Dr. Burg Salk and her husband, Herman Salk '46, settled initially in Vermont, where she became the state's first female veterinarian. They later moved to western Pennsylvania, where her husband raised laboratory animals, kept a small animal practice, and may have assisted his brother, Jonas, in developing the vaccine against polio. The Salks later moved to Palm Springs, California, where they operated a successful small-animal practice. They were eventually drawn to use their skill to help people in underdeveloped regions of the world. They sold their practice and embarked on a series of tours with Heifer Project International in Cameroon, Egypt, Thailand, China, and Laos. Thereafter, they returned to work in the southwest United States with the Navajo and Hopi nations, where they taught vaccination strategies, production medicine, nutrition, and management. The Salks also established a scholarship program for African students to attend college in North America. In 1990, Dr. Burg Salk enrolled in a master's degree program in international public health at Loma Linda University in California. As the oldest student and the only veterinarian in the program, she was able to share a firsthand global perspective, especially on the subject of zoonotic diseases.

Cornell's early women veterinary graduates were pioneers in breaching

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Estelle Hecht Geller

barriers in biomedical research. Estelle Hecht Geller '47 worked as a research veterinarian at the Veteran's Administration Hospital in the Bronx, then took a faculty position in pathology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Yeshiva University, where she taught for more than 35 years. She helped found the Animal Care Panel (American Association of Laboratory Animal Science) and in 1957 was the only woman

among the first group to pass the board examination for the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine. Lisbeth Kraft '45 led an extraordinary career as a research scientist. She held academic positions at Cornell, Yale, and Harvard, specializing in microbiology and laboratory-animal medicine. While at Yale in 1958, she characterized and described a rotavirus-induced diarrheal disease of infant mice. From her development of the first static filter-top devices for rodent cages (known as Kraft tops), individual ventilated-cage systems were developed. Dr. Kraft was a founding charter diplomate of the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine and served as its president in 1966. She spent the last 11 years of her professional career with NASA's Ames Laboratory in northern California, receiving three achievement awards for her role in biomedical research.

The 34 women who received DVM degrees from Cornell University in the first half of the twentieth century had an extraordinary impact on the veterinary profession. They also became part of the Cornell legacy. We honor them and cherish the stories of their profes-



Lisbeth Kraft

sional and personal accomplishments.

Material for this article was drawn from many sources, but none more meaningful than countless conversations with the surviving women themselves, their spouses and family members, and their classmates and colleagues. For more information about the first 50 years of our female veterinary graduates, see <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/library/archives/Legacy/intro.htm>.