Veterinary Research Advances Human Welfare

SEATTLE—The discovery by a veterinary scientist that insects could transmit disease was instrumental in making possible the Panama Canal.

This is a little-known example of the role veterinarians have played in the advancement of human health and welfare, according to J. F. Smithcors, Editor, American Veterinary Publications, in an address to the American Veterinary Historical Society at the 116th annual meeting of the American Veterinary Medical Association held here, July 22-26.

In 1893, the USDA veterinarian Fred L. Kolborne discovered that cattle ticks transmitted the infective agent of Texas fever (bovine piroplasmosis). This work led to proof by medical scientists that other insects transmitted such diseases as yellow fever, the ravages of which had thwarted the French in their efforts to dig a canal across the mosquito-ridden Isthmus of Panama. Kilborne and the veterinary profession have not received credit for this epochal discovery, hailed as one of the most important advances in medicine of all time, because medicál historians have attributed it to the physician-scientist Theobald Smith, who himself disclaimed the honor not due him.

From ancient times much of the real knowledge related to human healing has been based on animal studies, but failure of medical historians to recognize the value of work by veterinary scientists has made medical research less fruitful than it might have been. As a means of correcting this deficiency, Smithcors urged that historians give more attention to the interrelationships of veterinary and human medicine, and to presentation of such topics in both the professional and popular media.

Work of this nature already underway through the Veterinary Heritage program at Washington State University was described by John F. Guido, Head of Special Collections at the WSU Library, which boasts of an outstanding collection of veterinary works dating from the 16th century. "We intend to keep the Veterinary Collection as free from dust as possible," Guido said, "by making it attractive to all who choose to plumb its riches. In short, we expect this collection to be used."

In addition to the history collection, the WSU Veterinary Heritage program includes a working museum and an oral history project designed to "capture, organize, preserve and make available for use the heritage which is the veterinary profession's." An immediate project is a graduate and undergraduate student prize essay competition, and an extensive exhibit of rare books and veterinary artifacts was presented at the Seattle meeting.

In speaking on nonacademic influences on veterinary education, Everett B. Miller, Associate Editor, *American Journal of Veterinary Research,* said that nothing approaching a unified educational concept existed until about 1900. At this time there were only 5 state-supported veterinary schools, the 5th being at Washington State University (1899). Beginning in 1852 in Philadelphia, 24 private schools had been established as business ventures by 1900, but 14 of these had already ceased operation, primarily because they were no longer profitable.

The quality of education improved as various states began to require examination for veterinary licensure, and the USDA Bureau of Animal Industry adopted educational requirements for employment. With the institution of more rigorous requirements for admission and graduation, especially since World War II, the quality of veterinary educaton has equalled that of human medicine.

Submitted by the American Veterinary Historical Society.