

NORTH BY NORTHWEST

A HERITAGE PRACTICE: ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF DENISON

Animal Hospital of Denison was established in the North Texas city of Denison, on Sept. 1, 1941, by W. N. Porter, DVM. He had graduated from Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine (TAMU CVM) on June 10, 1941, and after a brief period of practice time in Colorado City with his uncle, moved to Denison with his wife, Nell, and their two young children. Dr. Porter started his practice at 118 West Chestnut Street in an existing building just one block from Main Street and the center of town. The building was rather small, measuring only 25 feet wide and 40 feet deep. This size may seem inadequate for a veterinary hospital, however, one must remember this was before World War II, and Dr. Porter was the first graduate veterinarian from a credentialed veterinary college to practice in the northern part of the state.

Like all practices during that period, Dr. Porter's practice consisted primarily of treating livestock and horses, and he practiced for the most part by making farm calls. Small (companion) animal practice had not come into vogue, and there was very little need to kennel or hospitalize dogs and cats. In the ensuing years, especially after the war, many additions were made to the practice facility, including additional kennels and a large animal staging area with a chute and horse stock. In 1952, Dr. Porter purchased the adjoining 25-by-60-foot building and combined the two into a single practice facility. That building served as the animal hospital practice facility until 1982, when a new building was constructed on the same block to house the present practice.

During the 1940s and 1950s, veterinary medicine consisted primarily of large animal (milk and beef cows, equine, swine and

poultry) practice. Practicing in Denison was not an exception to what being a veterinarian was like any place else in the United States. Denison's beginning was the result of the railroad that crossed the Red River just north of the town. The MKT (Missouri,

THE ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF DENISON HAS SERVED NORTHWEST TEXAS FOR MORE THAN SEVEN DECADES. IN 2011, THE PRACTICE CELEBRATED ITS 70TH ANNIVERSARY.

Kansas and Topeka) Railway established its headquarters three miles south of the river by order of Charles Denison, a railroad magnate. The small town soon became a bustling community that was typical of new rail towns springing up across the country in the late 1870s through the remainder of the 19th century. For the most part, Denison never moved a way from being a labor, or blue-collar, community. The railroad undoubtedly set the stage for small industry and manufacturing to be Denison's economic base for the next century.

Denison has never developed an appreciable agriculture-based economy as most of this trade has always been in Sherman (county seat) and other smaller towns throughout Grayson County. However, like all rural America in the '40s and '50s,

many of the inhabitants of Denison had backyard farm animals that needed veterinary services. Those were the kind of veterinary services that Dr. Porter and his associates and colleagues provided before small pet practice began to evolve during the late '50s and '60s. Also, there were a few small dairies in the area, and Dr. Porter served as the city milk inspector for a number of years.

Dr. Porter had several associates who worked with him during this period. Dr. Roy Riddels practiced a short time in Denison before establishing his own practice in Sherman. Dr. L.T. Davis also practiced at the animal hospital before starting his own practice across town. Drs. J. T. Bush and Clark Mulkey were two other veterinarians who practiced with Dr. Porter during this time. These veterinarians were contributors to the pioneering of the practice of veterinary medicine as we know it today. It was during their tenure that companion animal practices began to revolutionize the profession. These practices set the stage for how the majority of veterinarians currently practice today.

In addition to how the profession was changing medically, these practitioners set the stage for collegiality and community of practice in this area of the state. They were active in local and state veterinary medical associations, they participated on the state licensing board, and they mentored young graduates just starting out in practice. They left a legacy of collegiality and veterinary community that continues to this day in Grayson County and the surrounding area. They were also active in the community, serving on school boards, participating in civic clubs and serving as city and church leaders. They were not only instrumental in making the veterinary profession better, they contributed to making the communi-



Old location of Animal Hospital of Denison



Current location of Animal Hospital of Denison

ty a better place to live. We pay tribute to these pioneers of modern veterinary practice and will be forever indebted to them for their contributions to the veterinary profession.

Dr. Porter practiced until 1975. At that time, he sold the practice and he and Nell retired to their lake residence on Lake Texoma in Colbert, Okla. Before failing health issues occurred, they enjoyed many years of retirement and continued to be active in church and civic clubs. Nell was a very gifted musician and writer, and she was a popular performer in the Denison community. Doc and Nell Porter have both passed a way, but their three children, Mike, Mary Pat and Margie, and a host of grandchildren were blessed to have them as wonderful parents and grandparents.

In August 1968, after graduating from the TAMU CVM, Billy D. Martindale, DVM, moved with his wife, Ellen, and their two-year-old

daughter, Elise, to Denison and started practicing with Dr. Porter. After about three days into Dr. Martindale's practice, Dr. Porter took his family on a two-week vacation, leaving his young associate to hold down the practice. With the exception of putting a cast on the wrong leg of a poodle with a fractured ulna and radius, everything went quite well for the young graduate only two weeks out of veterinary school.

For the next few years, the small animal portion of the practice continued to expand. Even though there was a considerable amount of large animal practice, this aspect continued to decline as the pet practice began to grow. In 1969, Texas became involved in a national program to eradicate Brucellosis (Bang's disease) in cattle. Private practitioners were employed by the state to test cattle for the disease in their areas of practice. Dr. Porter purchased a new pickup and a portable headgate with which Dr. Martindale and their kennel man, a World War II veteran, made daily farm calls drawing blood samples to test for this disease. In those days, blood samples were taken

from the jugular vein as tail bleeding had not been discovered as a simpler method of collecting blood samples. Consequently, each cow's head had to be caught to obtain a blood sample. It took about a year for all the cattle in the area to be tested the first time, but it took an additional 10 years for Brucellosis to be eradicated in Grayson County. It took even longer for it to be eradicated throughout Texas.

Being the younger associate, it was also Dr. Martindale's good fortune to take most of the emergency calls during non-office hours. Additionally, the hospital phone number had just been extended to the house for calls that came in after office hours. Needless to say, there was a lot of work done at night and on weekends. Because of his long hours of work, Dr. Martindale contends that he missed the first years of his daughters' growing up. In those

days, working night and day was a way of life as a generation who had the mentality that one could work their way into a better life with more money and a preferable lifestyle.

The animal hospital was incorporated in 1973 to officially become the Animal Hospital of Denison, Inc. That business entity name and function has been maintained for the past 38 years. In July 1975, Dr. Porter became ill and had to stop practicing for an extended period of time. As a result of that illness, Dr. Martindale purchased all of the practice, including the real estate, in March of the following year. The practice continued to flourish for the next few years with Dr. Dale Butler joining the practice in 1980. He remained with the practice for the next five years. In 1986, Dr. Butler started his own practice in another part of Denison and continues to practice to this present time. In October 2008, Dr. Martindale and 11 of his colleagues in Grayson County started an emergency practice for the area. The Grayson County Animal Emergency Clinic is currently located in Dr. Butler's day-practice facility.

As mentioned earlier, a new hospital was constructed in 1981–1982. A portion of the new facility was given to large animal practice, but over the next 20 years, all of the large animal area was converted to personal office space and additional kennel space for companion animals. Dr. Martindale utilized a veterinary building architect from Ohio to design the hospital, and as a result of that designer's expertise in constructing veterinary hospitals, the facility has continued to maintain its original condition, usability and function.

The years between 1986 and 1994 were the most difficult years for practicing in Denison. With the economic recession in the mid to late 1980s, high interest rates and a high inflation rate all resulted in high mortgage payments with declining practice income. The practice suffered through some lean times during these years. Dr. Martindale and Ellen had also purchased some land and built a house in the early 1980s. Their fifth daughter was born at this time. Trying to raise five girls and make house and clinic mortgage payments during a recession was at times very daunting for him and his family, but with the Almighty's help, they not only survived but were blessed. However, Dr. Martindale readily admits that the blessing became much clearer after it became apparent that he was going to survive. Again, working as a single practitioner meant working long hours with night and weekend emergency calls coming all too often. The older daughters

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Drs. Chad Cruce, Billy Martindale and Alice Bradley

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helped out by assisting the receptionist or being kennel technicians. All five girls worked at the clinic during their high school years in different capacities but none of the five were interested in pursuing veterinary careers. However, the second born, Michelle, dated and eventually married a fellow that she met at Abilene Christian University. He later was accepted into the professional curriculum at TAMU CVM.

Dr. Chad Cruce graduated from veterinary school at TAMU in May of 1996 and moved his family, Michelle and two boys, to Denison. He began practicing with Dr. Martindale. The practice was beginning to thrive again, which allowed the employment of certified technicians and a hospital manager. Computerizing the practice in the 1980s was also a considerable step toward making the practice more profitable and efficient. In 1996, Dr. L.T. Davis retired

from practice, and Dr. Martindale purchased his portion of the practice, along with continuing to maintain Dr. Davis's contract with the City of Denison to house and manage the city pound. When this purchase was made, the decision was also made to set up a non-profit shelter with the intent to adopt out pound dogs and cats. A low-cost spay and neuter program was also included in the Happy Hearts Pet Shelter's mission to help market to and motivate the public to adopt these animals. The Animal Hospital of Denison continues to manage the city pound, and the Happy Hearts Pet Shelter (HHPS) continues to operate out of the Morton Street Clinic on the west side of the city.

In October 2003, Dr. Alice Bradley was employed by the animal hospital as an associate veterinarian. She graduated from TAMU in 2000 and had worked at the Terrell Veterinary Hospital in Terrell for the two years after graduation. She and her husband, Jim Bob, and their two boys live in Denison.

In 1997, Dr. Martindale decided to become more active in TVMA since having an associate like Dr. Cruce gave him more time to participate in organized veterinary medicine. Dr. Martindale has served in various capacities at TVMA, including president in 2004. After that, Dr. Martindale ran for the position of TVMA Delegate to the American Veterinary Medical Association, and he continues to serve in that capacity today.

Dr. Martindale and Ellen were blessed with five daughters, all who grew up in Denison and graduated from Abilene Christian University: Elise, Michelle, Danielle, Camille and Amber. All the daughters have married, and 13 grandchildren have been born to these five unions. In April 2006, Ellen, Dr. Martindale's

wife of 43 years passed away after a long battle with Hepatitis C. The following year Dr. Martindale sold the practice to his son-in-law, Dr. Cruce. In September 2008, Dr. Martindale remarried, and he and his wife, Linda, continue to live in Denison. He is semi-retired from active practice but enjoys playing golf and traveling with Linda. They are active in their church, where Dr. Martindale continues to serve as an elder and Bible class teacher. They also have a small beef cattle operation on their farm outside of Denison near Lake Texoma.

The Animal Hospital of Denison today continues as a companion animal practice from its two facilities in Denison. It also continues to manage the city pound and the Happy Hearts Pet Shelter. At present, the Animal Hospital employs three veterinarians, Dr. Chad Cruce, owner, and two associate veterinarians, Drs. Alice Bradley and Billy Martindale. It also employs 15 support staff members, including the hospital manager, Kelly Howerton; Morton Street clinic supervisor, Sharon Braziel; four technicians and nine other receptionists and hospital-support personnel.

The Animal Hospital of Denison has been serving Denison and the Grayson County area for more than 70 years. All the veterinarians and others mentioned in this historical narrative have contributed to its success and long history of serving this wonderful profession by serving the needs of those needing veterinary care and services. **TV**

The Texas Veterinary Heritage Practice Award Program

In 2009, at the Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) Annual Conference, TVMA was privileged to formally celebrate the beginning of the Texas Veterinary Heritage Practice Award Program by honoring four practices: The College of Veterinary Medicine in College Station, Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital in San Antonio, El Paso Veterinary Hospital and Rutherford Veterinary Hospital in Dallas. This program was established by Dr. John Morton of Athens in 2008 to systematically recognize all practices of veterinary medicine in Texas that have been in continuous operation for 50 years or more. The daily practice of veterinary medicine is not an easy endeavor; therefore, a business with 50 years or more of sustainable medical contributions to the public and their animals is quite noteworthy.

In 2010, five additional heritage practices were recognized at the TVMA Annual Conference in College Station: Glenwood Animal Hospital in Tyler,

Park Cities Animal Hospital in University Park, Wharton Veterinary Clinic, Pasadena Veterinary Hospital and the Bellville Veterinary Clinic. At the 2011 TVMA Annual Conference, four new Heritage Practices were honored: Haltom City Animal Hospital in Fort Worth, Casa Linda Animal Clinic in Dallas, Animal Clinic in Galveston and Richmond Animal Hospital. In 2012, four new Heritage Practices were selected: Ridglea Animal Hospital, Holt Veterinary Clinic in Dallas, Sweetwater Veterinary Hospital and Animal Hospital in Denison. All practices will be honored in issues of the *Texas Veterinarian*.

The TVMA office has developed an official registry of qualifying heritage practices. If your practice or one where you are employed is 50 years of age or older, please call Janet Knippa at the TVMA office at 512/452-4224. (While the practice must have been in continuous operation for 50 years or more, the building does not have to be the original.) **TV**