



Bellwether Magazine

Volume 1
Number 13 *Fall 1984*

Article 7

10-1-1984

Founders Day Dinner Address

Thomas Ehrlich
University of Pennsylvania

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FOUNDERS DAY DINNER ADDRESS

It is a special pleasure for me to join with you and, on behalf of the University, to salute the School of Veterinary Medicine—its alumni, faculty, students, staff, benefactors, friends, and, most particularly, its dean—for a past of great accomplishments and a future that sparkles with optimism.

A hundred years ago, no one could have predicted the strength of the School today and its extraordinary success. Even in an era of cautious conservatism, the University Trustees certainly hedged their bets in blessing the start of veterinary medicine at Penn. They approved less than \$17,000 for a building and only \$350 to furnish it.

The years that followed were, to understate the matter, difficult ones. As many of you know, veterinary medicine was housed for a time in an old building on Woodland Avenue that apparently was inadequate for its intended use as a trolley-car barn. Even when the School moved into another facility in 1907 it had to include in a small two-story building operating rooms for large animals, a pharmacy, eleven single, and five box stalls, a stable for the livestock sanitary board, a room for dispensary service, dissecting room, a postmortem room, lecture hall for seventy people—all that on the first floor—with rooms for dogs, student study, a kitchen, store-room, bone room, feed room, and three wards on the second floor. Whenever Bob Marshak complains to Tom Langfitt or me, I like to remind Bob of those golden days on the frontier of veterinary medicine.

How did it happen, in spite of those horrendous hurdles, that this School became what it is today—the best in the world? The key was, and certainly still is, leadership. Then, as now, the School was led by remarkable individuals. The first was Rush Shippen Huidekoper, the founding dean, described as a man of “magnificent physical proportions” whose forebears included Dr. Benjamin Rush, the great physician, and Edward Shippen, the first mayor of Philadelphia. What a fellow Huidekoper must have been. He fought with tenacity to build the School, apparently dipping into his own pocket to help with the finances. His extra-professional life was at least as interesting. Many of you have seen those famous photographs by Eadweard Muybridge—a series of still photographs of animals that were rapidly projected on a machine to give the illusion of motion—the forerunner of the movie projector. If you look at the exhibit currently in the Museum you can see pictures of the good Dean Huidekoper, completely nude, riding his favorite horse, Pandora.

Huidekoper seems to have been in perpetual motion, and that quality, if not a prerequisite for the decanal role over the last century, is certainly epitomized by our current dean, Bob Marshak. Time and time again over the past three years, as we have worked together, I have seen a looming rock, a mountainous hard place, and the School—piloted by Bob—seeking to slip between. Time and time again—usually with Tom Langfitt, in an effort to outnumber Bob—we would press to halt, regroup, be cautious, and all the rest of the litany that university administrators are paid to provide. Make no mistake, we always meant it. Occasionally, our cautions prove right, and occasionally Bob even admits that. More often, however, he finds a way to maneuver between that rock and hard place and emerge triumphant.

Do you know that little verse by Ogden Nash about the turtle?

The turtle lives 'twixt plated decks
which practically conceal its sex.
I think it clever of the turtle
in such a fix to be so fertile.

Time and again, in seemingly impossible fixes, Bob's fertile mind has found a way to propel the momentum of this extraordinary institution.

In the years ahead, of course, differences will continue to arise. The University administration is committed to doing all we can to help maintain and enhance the finest School of Veterinary Medicine. Sometimes, as in the past, our different perspectives will no doubt lead to problems about some of the scores of issues on which we work together. Every once in a while, however, it is worth stepping back from that seemingly unending series of particular problems—however serious they may seem at the time—and glance at the larger scene. And in terms of that scene, the School and its dean are magnificent.

An 18th century Hasidic line I like—particularly at this season—goes like this. “Just as the hand, held before the eye, can hide the tallest mountain, so the routine of everyday life can keep us from seeing the vast radiance and secret wonders that fill the world.”

The University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine is hardly a secret, but it is a wonder. Tonight as we step back from the routine of everyday life for this special moment of celebration, I salute all of you who have helped in so many ways to build that wonder, and, most particularly, I salute our dean, Bob Marshak.

Thomas Ehrlich

The Founders Day of the School was celebrated with a formal dinner at the University Museum. More than 200 guests, University and City officials, alumni, friends, benefactors and faculty, gathered Oct. 2 for the hundredth anniversary of the School's founding.

Provost Thomas Ehrlich addressed the group and Mayor W. Wilson Goode presented a proclamation declaring the School's birthday as “University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine Day” in Philadelphia.



The Honorable John A. Lafore, Jr., former U.S. Congressman and immediate past president of the American Kennel Club and Mrs. Susan Williams Catherwood, University Trustee.



The University Glee Club, under the direction of Bruce Montgomery, entertains.



Dean Robert R. Marshak accepts the City Proclamation from Mayor W. Wilson Goode.