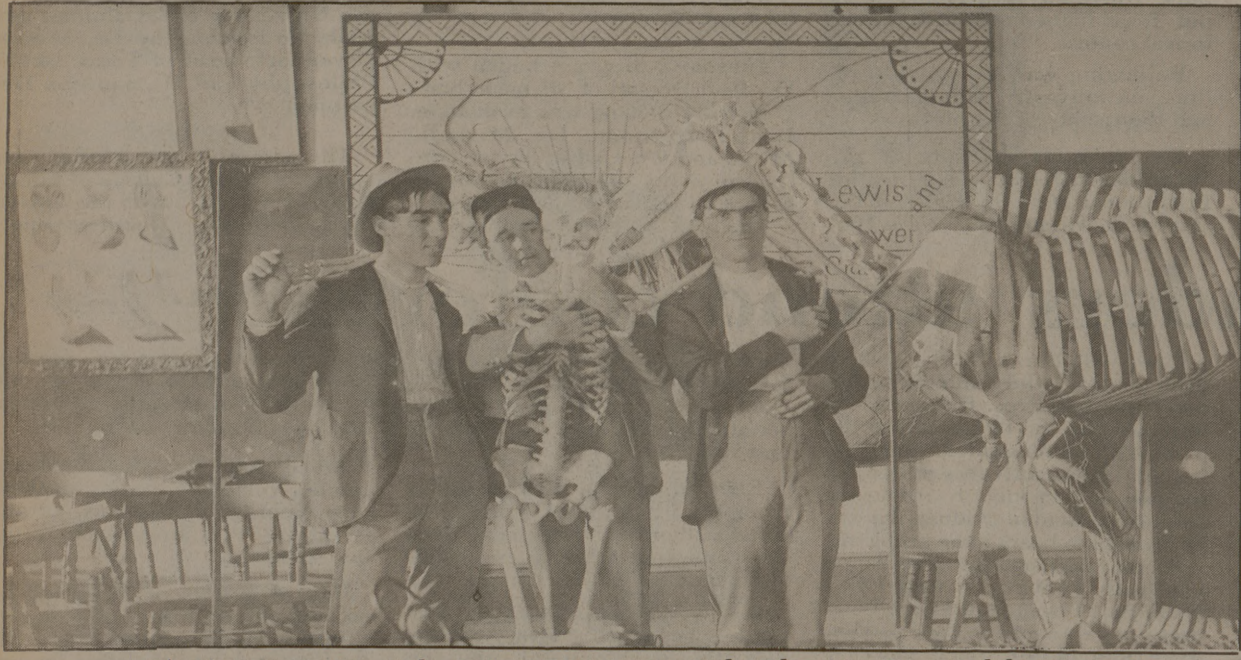


The first 100 years

# Early A&M vet's fight against tick fever makes history



Aggie veterinary students in 1910 preoccupied with a Dr. Francis lab practical.

By JOHN ADAMS  
Contributor

For years the Lone Star State has been the noted leader in the cattle industry. Vast herds were developed and shipped to the railheads of Fort Worth and Kansas City. Many were responsible for the success and development of the Texas cattle industry. None contributed more than Dr. Mark Francis whose fight against Texas tick fever has become veterinary history.

After graduation from Ohio University in 1887, he joined the faculty at Texas A&M on July 31, 1888. Shortly after arriving, he began research on "Texas" or "tick" fever, which was developing into a gigantic problem throughout the Southwest.

During periods following the Civil War, cattle from Texas were shipped into the Southern Cotton Belt. There these cattle were infested with ticks and the fever they carried. These initial herds of Texas cattle slowly became resistant to tick fever. As the tick fever spread

back into Texas, new purebred strains were not able to combat the fever. The problem by the early 1890s was very acute. Tackling this problem head on, Francis, after extensive research, developed a subcutaneous injection method of producing immunity. His efforts were not without obstacle.

He was subjected to much ridicule by the press and "city" politicians who labeled his research as "wanton waste of public funds." At times his efforts seemed fruitless. One of his associates, in a fit of despair, suggested a cow be wired for electricity and voltage used to kill the ticks which infested the animal. Determined to try "every fool suggestion," Francis put a steer on an insulated platform and wired it for 110 volts. No one had ever taken the trouble to find out how much electricity a steer could safely carry. Francis soon found out. The switch was thrown, killing the steer instantly, and the ticks continued to crawl about aimlessly.

Notwithstanding these research delays, Francis by 1900 had per-

fect his method of inoculating cattle, thus reducing tick fever mortality of susceptible cattle from 75 per cent to 10 per cent. His breakthrough was given international recognition and has made possible the great herds of Herefords and other fine breeds so prominent in the Southwest.

In 1916, a veterinary school was established at Texas A&M, with Francis being named its first dean. He served in this capacity until his death in 1936. During his twenty years as dean of the Texas A&M Veterinary School he improved lab facilities and expanded research endeavors.

Francis was very popular with the students. His main hobby was the collection of animal fossils from prehistoric days. During his half century of service at Texas A&M, he roamed the state identifying relics for his collection. This collection became so extensive a small museum was set up in Francis Hall, named in his honor.

One of the curious items that found its way into the museum was

an Egyptian mummy. After seeing the mummy as a gift, Francis stood the wrapped five foot figure the back of his lecture room. Students joked for years the mummy was only a fake. Once X-rayed, proven authentic, Francis put the lecture companion on permanent museum display.

The mummy's name was ANH-HR-H3CPJ. The inscription on the lid of his coffin contained a prayer for the offering of the dead, interpreted into modern terms: "May the deceased by the grace of the local god, Osiris, who is such and such districts and occupies a high place in the Amon-Re, the chief god of Egypt, receive food, drink and forever and ever."

The mummy was on display at the Texas A&M museum until the museum was closed in early 1976. Many of the bones were shipped along with ANH-HR-H3CPJ to the Houston Museum of Natural History. Part of Francis' prehistoric collection is on display at the Valley Museum of Natural History.

## Horses threatened

We have no Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis (VEE) in our Texas horse herds now, but if we don't keep them protected, we may have a serious problem in the future, says Dr. Dennis McIntosh, Texas Veterinary Medical Association Public Information Committee member.

Dr. H.Q. Sibley, Executive Director of the Texas Animal Health Commission, says that we never know about the VEE problem just south of our border in Mexico. The mosquitoes that carry this dread disease could move north at any time, like they did in the summer of 1971. That year, over 2,000 horses died from VEE in the Rio Grande Valley. This would not have happened if the horse population had been protected by vaccination. If VEE moves north again, those

horses that are unprotected are susceptible to this disease.

Sibley recommends that all horses in Texas be vaccinated, and adult horses receive yearly boosters. All horses shipped into Texas are required to be vaccinated. Many states require that horses shipped from Texas be vaccinated for VEE.

Show horses that are shipped to other states are required by most managements to be vaccinated for VEE, in addition to other vaccinations.

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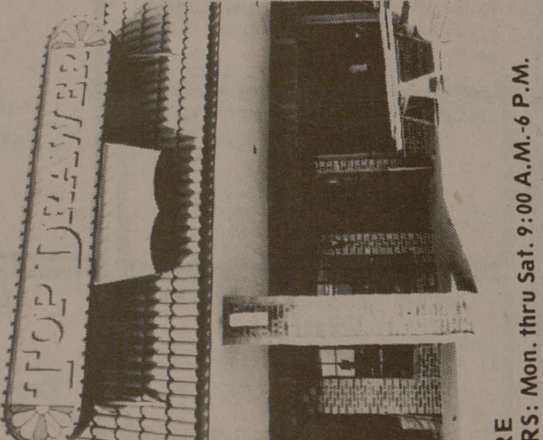
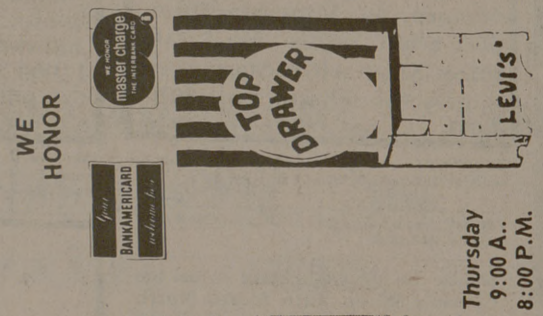
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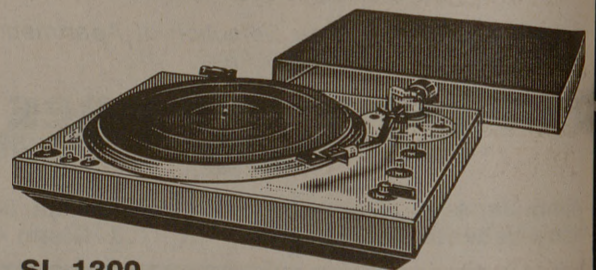
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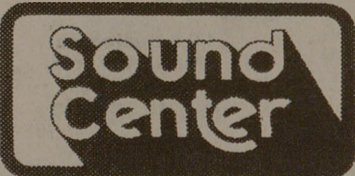
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