

A Biography of and Interview with Mark R. Crandall, DVM

Class of 1939, College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University

Author and Interviewer: Dr. Donald F. Smith, *Austin O. Hooey Dean Emeritus*

“The Best Speech I Ever Made”

Mark Crandall’s admission interview at Cornell occurred during a violent spring storm in 1935. Though two inches of rain already covered some streets, he left his home in Syracuse, New York, driving a borrowed car. He was determined not to miss his appointment with destiny in Ithaca!

Passing through the Dryden near the end of the 60-mile drive, a confluence of creeks was so swollen that water overwhelmed his vehicle, seeping into the trunk. He dared not stop for fear of being swept away in the current, a fate he later learned had tragically befallen another driver that day. Though he arrived at Cornell only a few minutes late for his scheduled interview, the faculty did not let their amazement of his daring trip diminish the rigors of their examination.



New York State Veterinary College Graduation Photograph

Mark R. Crandall 1939

As the committee inquired why he deserved acceptance into the veterinary program, Mark replied in words that underscored his desire to provide for a family during the Depression. “I want to attain that degree of security which well becomes any young man”, he began, and then articulated his goals in the “*best speech I ever made*”.¹ He was admitted.

Mark Crandall was born on December 20, 1912, the fourth of six children raised on a large farm in the Hudson Valley of New York State. His older brother, James, attended Cornell University, graduated as a veterinarian in 1931 and established a practice near Albany.² However, as the Depression became increasingly severe, there were no family resources to provide for Mark’s education. Taking matters into his hands following high school, he used his family’s team of horses and started a small business hauling wood. He also grew vegetables for local sale. By the end of the year, having saved \$65.00, he said good bye to his family and boarded a bus to Syracuse where he enrolled in that city’s university.

Mark was an impressionable young man, influenced by his mother’s religious faith and her strong encouragement:

“My initial academic interest was to attain a liberal arts education so I could preach or teach and be a leader among people. However, I gradually realized that I

¹ Mark R. Crandall, personal interview, 2009.

² Lawrence T. Waitz, whose interview is found elsewhere in this collection, also graduated in 1931.

fancied neither profession because I had ‘sat on a milk stool too long’. After three years at Syracuse University, I decided to seek a career in veterinary medicine.³

Mark was one of a handful of married male students in the Class of 1939. His wife, a nurse named Cora whom he had met at Syracuse, worked at the Tompkins County Memorial Hospital. They lived in a basement apartment on Eddy Street in Ithaca, next to Dr. Myron Fincher, one of the veterinary college faculty. Despite working his way through college, Mark achieved good grades and received the prize for distinguished work in large animal medicine.⁴

Dr. Crandall’s initial job was in nearby Dryden where he managed the first cattle artificial insemination program in the area. Within a year, however, he found himself searching for a community in which to establish a private veterinary practice. He looked in the Watertown area of upstate New York and as far north as the state of Maine before settling in Gloversville, midway between Utica and Albany.

Operating a mixed practice out of his home, he quickly developed a loyal clientele. Unlike several of his classmates who served in the Veterinary Corps during World War II, Dr. Crandall was asked to remain in his practice where he could test cattle for tuberculosis and brucellosis, as well as tend to the health care needs of the local farm animals throughout Fulton County.

In 1964, he built the Glove Cities Veterinary Hospital to meet the growing needs of pet care for local residents. This required that he juggle large animal calls on local farms, with office hours for dogs and cats. Dr. Crandall was also a member of the New York State Veterinary Medical Society and participated in a program that reviewed veterinary clinics for accreditation. Though he retired from active veterinary service in 1977 when Dr. Joseph Bryan purchased his practice,⁵ he remained active in the professional association.

Dr. Crandall has had a deep commitment to community service throughout his entire professional life. A member of Rotary for over 60 years, he also led a singing group that still provides weekly entertainment for the extended care unit of the local hospital. He chronicled aspects of his personal and professional life in a compendium of stories published in a book which he entitled, “*The Holy Beaver*”, to reflect the name by which he is known by his closest friends.

He and Cora had two daughters, Marilyn Joyce Swartout, living in nearby Mecos, and Judy Carol Simek, who lives in Clifton Park, New York. Since his wife died in December 2001, Dr. Crandall—now in his 97th year—lives independently in the family home in Gloversville.

³ Personal communication, 2009.

⁴ Anne Besse Prize for food animal medicine, Cornell University.

⁵ The practice was subsequently sold to Dr. Mark Will who expanded to a new facility (though retaining the original hospital name) in June 2009.

Interview

Listen to the Interview

Subject: Mark R. Crandall, DVM
Interviewer: Dr. Donald F. Smith
Interview Date: May 28, 2008
Location: Gloversville, New York

Photographs by Donald F. Smith



Dr. Mark Crandall and Veterinary Technician, 2008

Interviewer's Note:

Having known Dr. Crandall from his visits to Cornell for reunion and other activities, I looked forward to visiting him at his home in Gloversville, three hours northeast of Ithaca. After our interview in the room in which he had seen his first small animal patients almost 70 years earlier, we drove into Gloversville and he proudly toured me through the clinic that he had built in the sixties. Dr. Crandall's abiding love for the profession shone through his 95-year-old eyes as he reminisced about his work as a general practitioner fulfilling the responsibilities of a graduate of Cornell's land grant education. (Dr. Donald F. Smith)

Dr. Smith:

This is Donald Smith from Cornell University. I'm in Gloversville, New York,¹ with Dr. Mark Crandall, Class of 1939. It's May 28th, 2008.

Good morning, Dr. Crandall.

¹ City in Fulton County, New York, about 50 miles northwest of Albany.

Dr. Crandall:

Good morning, Don. This is a great privilege to have a dean call on an old-time practitioner. I've been retired 31 years. My memory is still pretty good at 95 years of age.

I was born in Mechanicville, New York, which is called an Irish-Italian neighborhood.² My mother died at an early age—I was five. We were very fortunate having a step-mother join us about two years after my mother died. She was a beautiful lady from the North Country. She was raised in Newcomb, New York,³ by her grandmother. She was a very accomplished woman. She took up dress making. She could make any attire. She even made coats and hats for us kids.

There were six of us (I was in the middle): two girls and four boys. We grew up in the church yard. We had every kind of childhood disease that you can think of: measles, mumps, scarlet fever, typhoid. I got typhoid out of the mighty Hudson because we'd swim in there. We had a swimming hole back of the pulp mill—there was a pulp and paper company and their [plant waste] went right through our bathing beach.

I got typhoid and had a high fever. My mother went through scarlet fever, too, with my brother, Ed. She kept infections under control. She put sheets over the doors and sprayed them daily with Lysol®. She brought us all through.

My father worked on the railroad. He drove a train from Mechanicville to Boston. It was always a freight train. He drove a train for 50 years and he didn't have an accident. Every holiday he had to work. We got one sled for Christmas, or one pair of skis.

My mother used to sit in the big wicker chair and she'd listen to one doing spelling and another arithmetic, and so forth. I don't know how she did it.

When I was eleven, we moved to the farm in Stillwater on the edge of the Saratoga battle field.⁴ My step-mother loved animals and birds and farm crops. We had 146 acres and my father kept working on the railroad and we, as a family, did the work. Sometimes we did it wrong, like covering up the corn on the side hill while we were cultivating it. We had pigs, and sheep and cows, and we raised corn, oats and buckwheat and harvested them all.

My brother, Jim—also known as Cliff—was the oldest and was the first to go to school. He went to the New York State Veterinary College and graduated in 1931, when I graduated from high school.⁵

When it came time to go to school, I was headed for Green Mountain Junior College.⁶ The president of the college—or dean—came over to see my father, and my father said, "I have

² City in Saratoga County, New York, on the Hudson River between Albany and Saratoga Springs.

³ Small community in the Adirondack Park, New York, about 120 miles northwest of Albany.

⁴ Five miles north of Mechanicville, also on the Hudson River.

⁵ James C. Crandall '31, Stillwater, N.Y.; deceased 1995. One of his classmates was Dr. Lawrence Waitz '31, whose biography is elsewhere in this collection.

⁶ Liberal arts college in Poultney, Vermont.

no money to send Mark to school”. So I stayed home a whole year on the farm—milked cows, drove a team of horses on a wagon or on the sleighs to haul wood. I made money that way and bought a pair of sleighs to do it with. I had a garden and I peddled vegetables in Mechanicville.

When I got ready to go to school, I had \$65.00. I went over in the meadow where my father was mating the cows and I said, “I’m going to Syracuse tomorrow.” He couldn’t believe it. I went to Syracuse on the bus and I never came home for 13 weeks.

I ate for \$3.50 a week. They had meals for poor folks. I went out for football for twelve weeks; the coach was Reaves Baysinger. We didn’t do much as freshman, only act as dummies for the varsity to run around and pass around. But we did have one scrimmage one night and I played tackle. We were going to the locker room and Reaves Baysinger said, “Nice going, Crandall”. I thought for sure I’d make the team.

I got to the locker room and they’d stolen my money out of the locker—all I had! I turned in my [football] suit and went to work, mowing lawns, washing windows and doing chores for everybody on Euclid Avenue in Syracuse. I stayed in Syracuse three years and my father helped me while he could.

I took philosophy, sociology, physiology, botany, chemistry, history, liberal arts in Syracuse. When I got ready to go further, I went down [to Cornell] to see the dean of the Ag School. I decided I’d better do something that I could earn a living with. I told him I wanted to take education and milk testing and see if I could make a living that way. [The dean] said. “Oh, goodness sakes, we teach that course in two weeks. Why don’t you go down to the vet school and see if they won’t accept you?”

Well, I bothered Dr. Hagan⁷ [dean of the college] all summer long and every time I went to see him, he’d be up in the laboratory looking through his microscope. He made a date with me to appear before the admissions committee: Olafson⁸, Miller⁹, Dukes¹⁰, Hagan and others on the faculty.

The day came for me to appear. I was working in the laundry at the Good Shepherd Hospital where my [future] wife was a nurse. Well, we had a cloudburst that day, and I do mean a cloudburst.

My wife had a car and I was privileged to use it. I figured I’d make 50 miles an hour between Syracuse and Ithaca. When I got to the gas station on the south end of Syracuse, I asked about the road to Ithaca. He said, “The bridges are all out and you can’t get down there”. I think I was the last car to get down there from Syracuse. When I went through Dryden, there was a little brook that comes off the side hill. My car sputtered and almost stalled in the

⁷ William Arthur Hagan, DVM, MS, DSc, professor of bacteriology and dean of the college, 1932-59.

⁸ Peter Olafson ’26, MS ’27, professor of pathology.

⁹ Malcolm Eugene Miller ’34, instructor in anatomy

¹⁰ Henry Hugh Dukes, BS, DVM, MS, professor of veterinary physiology.

brook, but it went through. When I arrived, Dr. Milks¹¹ said, “Where did you come from?” They were all up there in a dither because the lake was overflowing and flooding the places in downtown Ithaca.

I think I made the best speech that I ever made. I was bound I was going to get somewhere. They said, “Why do you want to take veterinary medicine?” “Well”, I said, “I want to attain that degree of security which well becomes any young man, if you can admit me. Well, they said, “If you go to summer school and take the rest of the requirements, we’ll take you in the fall”. It was 1935. I went to summer school, I got married and in the fall I went to Cornell.

I lived on Eddy Street. My wife, Cora, worked at the Tompkins County Memorial Hospital. I worked in the cafeteria as a page boy cleaning tables. I studied Udall’s medicine¹² down in the dish room downstairs because I washed trays and I could put my book up on the table and read and work at the same time. I did that the whole four years. Some weeks I’d earn ten dollars and some weeks I’d earn more.

I kept a car out in Slaterville¹³ and used to walk five miles out there to get it. I put it in a barn out there for ten dollars for the winter. After the first year, I lived next door to Dr. Fincher and he would call me frequently to go on night calls with him.¹⁴ We had packing boxes for furniture. I took care of the heater, shoveled the walks for my rent.

When I graduated, I held up my right hand and they made me a commissioned officer. I did not take military training. It was optional when I went to Syracuse and I took swimming instead. I didn’t think it would mean anything.

I got here [in Gloversville] and I was practicing in this room right here in 1941 when the Japanese raided Pearl Harbor. I didn’t know what to do because I had not taken military training [in college]. You don’t graduate from Cornell unless you’ve taken military training, but I was excused by a higher-ranked officer who wrote me out an excuse. He said, “Now don’t you lose that. You won’t graduate unless you have that.” I kept it.

I registered in Johnstown for the draft and they classified me as “essential” and left me home. They let me test eight townships of Fulton County and take care of the animal industry of the country here, which I was very thankful for. But I feel that I couldn’t run for dog catcher now without having served my country. I think that is one of the biggest regrets that I have had in my lifetime that I didn’t serve my country.

So I tried to make up for it in other ways. I’ve been community oriented since I got here in 1940 and I’ve worked for the Cancer Society and the Salvation Army, and the YMCA. I planted a garden of half an acre and gave it to the local people here and didn’t charge them for it.

¹¹ Howard J. Milks ’04, professor of therapeutics and director of the small animal clinic.

¹² Udall, Dennie Hammond ’01, *The Practice of Veterinary Medicine*.

¹³ Small community east of Ithaca.

¹⁴ Myron Gustin Fincher ’19, MS, assistant professor of medicine and obstetrics.

I built the veterinary hospital down there on Steele Avenue where we're due to go shortly.¹⁵ In 1964, I went to Europe with the "People to People Program" with the other boys from Cornell. I've been associated with the North Main Street Church and I've been in Rotary the longest of anybody in this area. I joined Rotary in 1942 and I've had perfect attendance for 53 years. I figured that Rotary was a community-minded service club so I could make up for my not serving my country that way.

I still go to Rotary and I still have a singing group at the extended care of the hospital. I prepare a program every Saturday, take it up on Monday—18 songs—and we entertain the patients in the extended care. That has been going on for 18 years. I have ten or twelve men join me and we just sing the old songs and entertain. They like it and we kind of like it, too.

I did give Cornell \$1,000 when I was in business and my brother, Cliff (Jim) – I think he gave them \$10,000 at one time.

The members of my class were all very sociable and became practitioners except one of our members who sold ice cream at Coney Island [after graduating from Cornell].¹⁶

Dr. Smith:

Do you remember Dr. Kwong, Dr. Francis Kwong?¹⁷

Dr. Crandall:

Yes. Dr. Wiswall¹⁸ who traveled a lot—went on cruises and so forth—visited Dr. Kwong.

When I graduated, I took over the artificial breeding unit at Dryden and I worked it for nine months. Dr. Fincher brought artificial breeding to us from New Jersey in our senior year.

There was one thing about the senior year and our final days at Cornell that I'd like to say. I'm sure now it's altogether different and it's been remedied, but they did not have classes in jurisprudence enough. If they could have taught us better business methods, some of us would have been better practitioners.

I was not a good business man and I finally grew the practice and learned to issue bills and itemize bills and instigate appointment practice.¹⁹

Dr. Smith:

Going back to your class, do you remember Dr. Skelton very well?²⁰

¹⁵ Glove Cities Veterinary Hospital, Steele Ave, Gloversville, N.Y.; currently owned by Dr. Mark Will.

¹⁶ One of the 40 graduates of 1939 did not practice veterinary medicine, instead returning to Coney Island to participate in his family-owned resort.

¹⁷ Francis Jung-lu Kwong '39, originally from Taisun, Kwangtung, China.

¹⁸ Roscoe George Wiswall '40, originally from Ballston Spa, N.Y.; deceased. Following his trip to China, he reported witnessing Dr. Kwong operating on a cow using acupuncture.

¹⁹ Veterinary clinic appointments were uncommon in that era. "Walk-ins" were the rule, not the exception.

²⁰ Daniel Skelton '39, an African-American student from Tennessee, who graduated from Owen College in Memphis, then moved to New York City before matriculating at Cornell. Currently resides in Wichita, KS.

Dr. Crandall:

Oh yes, he was a black man and he became involved in meat inspection in Chicago, and so forth. He was a good animal industry inspector and operator.

Dr. Smith:

Two of the people in your class were sons of faculty: Birch and Sunderville.

Dr. Crandall:

Ed Sunderville died early of liver trouble.²¹ His father was the anatomy teacher.²² 'Daddy' Milks died of melanoma of the liver, as I remember.

The other one was Birch, Frank Birch,²³ the son of Dr. Birch—I don't know what his specialty was.²⁴

Dr. Smith:

Did you remember going to Dean Hagan's house for dinner?

Dr. Crandall:

No, I didn't ever do that. Dr. Olafson was a very impressive man, next to Hagan. Hagan was the astute scientist.

²¹ Edwin Joseph Sunderville '39, originally from Ithaca, N.Y.

²² Earl Sunderville '08, professor of veterinary anatomy.

²³ Frank McKeeman Birch '39, originally from Ithaca, N.Y.

²⁴ Raymond Russell Birch '12, PhD '16, professor and superintendent of the Veterinary Experimental Station.