

## PIONEER FEMALE VETERINARIANS<sup>1</sup>

Ivan Katić

### Summary

In this paper I have collected information about the first women veterinarians in approximately 40 countries. However, I am aware of the fact that some information may not be complete or correct, therefore, I shall be very glad to receive any missing information or rectification.

Nowadays, when in some countries female veterinary students make about 75-80% or even more of veterinary medicine students in total, it is good to learn that a century ago it was not easy for women to study veterinary medicine, a subject taught since Cheiron's time only to male students.

The first countries where we found female veterinarians are Switzerland, France, Great Britain and Germany. In all these countries veterinary schools have an old and rich tradition. A stimulating factor for women to study veterinary sciences was also the First World War because of good possibilities for employment.

After WWI it was easier to study veterinary medicine for women, especially in the newly founded countries: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Baltic countries. A lot of German university professors worked in the 1920s and 1930s in Bulgaria and Turkey, which probably also contributed to the situation: women were beginning to be accepted at studies of veterinary medicine.

The development and implementation of new fields such as hygiene, laboratory, pets, fish disease etc. also resulted in the opening of new working areas for women veterinarians.

**Keywords:** veterinary studies, female veterinarians, education, history

### INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the first veterinary schools were established in France, Austria, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, England and Spain. In the first 125 years, students of veterinary medicine were exclusively men. However, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women became interested in this field, too. As with fe-

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1 Paper dedicated to the memory of our colleague and pioneer researcher in this field, Dr. Marianne Sackmann, Riechen, Switzerland

Address of the author: Corresponding member of the Croatian Academy Ivan Katić  
Søndergade 39, DK-4130 Viby Sjaeland, Danmark



Dame Olga Uvarov the first woman president of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, qualified at the College in 1934.

male physicians and other university degrees which women aspired to obtain, becoming a female veterinarian was a long and hard road. In many countries women were not permitted to attend university, thus, for example, Russian women had to go to Switzerland, France or Sweden if they wanted to study at university.

Women had to overcome enormous obstacles, ranging from listening to the well-intentioned advice that it was unethical for female medical students to take part in the autopsy of a male corpse, to arguing that female students brought shame on their families by blackening the family name when they mixed with male students. In 1907, Russian police forcibly removed three female medical students from the auditorium, arguing that the university is not a proper place for women.

Female students were permitted to access the Medical School at John Hopkins University, established in 1893, only because the major donor was a lady who required that 10% of university places were awarded to female students. There were also other restrictions on academic studying in the USA, in relation to black people, Jews and other minorities in particular.

Dr. James Miranda Barry was one of the first Canadian military physicians. She wore uniform all the time, hence, everybody thought she was a man. The biggest problem in this respect were shoes – she needed a very small size! Florence Nightingale met dr. Barry on Crimea and described some habits of this physician, convinced that this was a man. It was made public only after dr. Barry's death that dr. Barry was a woman!

In the 1890s, an advertisement for the position of school physician in Canada ended as follows: "Women should not apply for this job because they will not be employed."

In the USA, it was almost an unwritten rule that women college graduates would leave their studies and job and stay at home so as to be able to devote themselves

to their families and children after they got married. A working woman with a university diploma was considered to be a factor significantly hampering her husband's successful career.

Also, it took a long time before the first women were appointed deans at universities. In Canada, the first woman dean was appointed at the Medical School as late as 1999, in Poland at roughly the same time, and in Great Britain, Dame *Olga Uvarov* became woman president of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

Nowadays women veterinarians are not only professors but also deans, vice-rectors and rectors (Poland 2000) and are permitted to study even mining, which was not really approved earlier.

At faculties of veterinary medicine there were many obstacles in the path of women who wanted to study; for example, there was no coatroom or toilet for female students, let alone a bathroom or a dressing-room. Comments made by male students were frequent and disparaging, and it was also sometimes suggested even by the Chair that the studies of veterinary medicine are not for women, since they would not get a job when they graduate, only maybe in a laboratory. Some female students were of low height, tiny and appeared weak, so, when they could not perform a rectal examination in a large animal, the comment was critical: "This is no study for women!" At the Chair it could also be heard that women were studying only to attract a man and ultimately get married. In the USA, a female student had to leave the hall every time the mare was mounted by the stallion. In Mexico, male students of veterinary medicine tried to scare their future female peers into leaving the faculty with a (tamed) puma, that was used to prevent the girls to reach the administration building and make them give up the idea of studying at this faculty.

On the occasion of opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nordic Veterinary Congress in Copenhagen in 1902, Professor Bernhard Bang said something like this: "It is great to see here quite a lot of veterinarians accompanied by their wives. However, many more years will pass, maybe half a century, before we shall be able to welcome our first female colleagues – women veterinarians to such an event." And he was quite right: as late as 1940, the first female student graduated in veterinary medicine in Denmark. Bang, physician and veterinarian himself, was able to follow up closely the struggle of the first Danish female student of medicine, Nielsine Nielsen, who was both tolerated and disturbed at the same time, but successfully graduated in medicine in 1885.

Female veterinary students took their studies seriously, disregarded all the advice and overcame formal obstacles they were encountering, giving in this way their response to all trouble and criticism they were confronted with. And there were so many problems they had to deal with! Some female students were tolerated only as



Copenhagen, around 1925, autopsy room at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine with only male students



The same place some 40 years later: male hats disappeared and the room is filled with female students.

hearers, and were not registered officially in the faculty records. Others, however, were registered by mistake because nobody realized these were women, particularly when female names could be differentiated from male names only phonetically. And once these women were registered, they could not have been expelled any more. They wanted to study this particular discipline so badly! For many of them their love towards animals was a decisive factor in choosing the study of veterinary medicine of all studies, as it can be seen in the cases of Polish or Russian female students.

In the USA, families repeatedly warned their daughters that they would have hard time in practice because as *horse doctors* it would be hard for them to raise a horse's leg or perform a rectal examination, for example. In America, it was often the case that farmers called in *exclusively male veterinarians*, and that veterinarians took *only another male veterinarian* as assistant. The main reasons for such behaviour were the regulation of maternity leave and maternity pay and allowance, which varied geographically, and secondly, looking for a substitute for the woman veterinarian on maternity leave. And here a Danish job advertisement:

"Decent" families gave permission to their daughters to study veterinary medicine only after they promised that they would specialise in fish diseases or parasito-

## Dyrlæge

**gerne kvindelig eller handicappet – evt. en ældre dyrlæge,  
der søger en behagelig retrætepost – i en landbrugsorganisation.**

**Billet 2667 til Jyllands-Posten.**

### VETERINARIAN

We are looking for an older veterinarian, even a handicapped veterinarian.  
If there is no other candidate, a female veterinarian may also apply.

logy or some other kind of laboratory work. Referring to their long traditions, some families rejected the idea about their daughters studying veterinary medicine, because for already three generations *only male members of the family were veterinarians!*

Still, times could not have been changed, and women began to go into the veterinary profession. One of the reasons for this change was the fact that during the First World War there was a shortage of veterinarians, so it was easier for women to find a job in the rear, for example, in the hygiene sector, such as slaughter-houses and dairy-plants, or in laboratories. One female veterinarian got a job in the Berlin zoo only because the manager was a woman, who was in favour of this female applicant!



Maria Gräfin von Maltzan

Besides for their professional work in the last 100 years, some female veterinarians are historically recorded for completely different reasons. The Russian veterinarian Margarita Fofanova (1883-1976) provided Lenin with shelter in Petrograd upon his return from emigration in 1919. On the other hand, the Polish veterinarian Helena Jurgielowicz (1897-1980) helped in sending fighters to Spain in 1936. Her countrywoman, veterinarian Prof. Irena Maternovska (1898-1941) was active in the Warsaw ghetto and ultimately lost her life there. During the Second World War in Berlin, Maria Gräfin von Maltzan (1909-1997) was helping Jews in any way she could, even to escape.

In the first days of May 1945, the victorious Soviet red flag had to be hanged out on the top of Reichstag. There were several attempts to climb the cupola, but this was difficult because it was in ruins. Finally, a slim *Russian female student of veterinary medicine* managed to reach the top. However, the official photo taken after the event shows a male Soviet soldier, Stalin's countryman from Georgia! Sic transit ...

### Switzerland, 1889

In 1889, *Österreichische Monatsschrift für Tierheilkunde und Revue für Thierheilkunde und Thierzucht*, Jahrgang 13 (editor A. Koch) published on page 96 the following advertisement:

After Stephania Kruszevska (from Warsaw), another female student, V. Dobrovolskaja from Ukraine is noted, who was in 1893 also asking from the Krakow University to recognize her degree acquired in Zurich in 1889, so as to be able to work in her homeland. The sources of this information are *La Clinica Veterinaria (Italiana)* 1893, 16, 64 and an oral announcement by Dr. K.S. Rudik from Kiev, member of the Academy there, stating that Dobrovolskaja practised as county veterinarian in Odessa. But it

seems that there was also a third lady in this group, B. Salomej, and a fourth, Jadwidza Dzyminski, who also applied for *ius practicandi* according to the Polish Veterinary Review, 1888 (*Przegląd weterynaryjny*) and 1889, but we do not know what the University of Krakow answered the applicants (Tropilo and Jakubik, 1977).

### France, 1896

Lyon was nursery of veterinary sciences, since *the first veterinary college* in the world was established there in 1762. A few years later, the second veterinary college in the world was opened in Alfort (at that time Alfort was near Paris, and today it is part of the city). The third French veterinary school was founded in Toulouse in 1827 and the fourth in Nantes in 1979.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at least one Russian girl, Marija Kapčević from Lochnica, Ukraine, who graduated in 1896, was studying in Alfort. In spite of careful investigation by the Swiss veterinary historian Dr. Marianne Sackmann, it was not possible to find anything recorded in the archives either on Marija Kapčević or other female students – it seems that Kapčević was present and tolerated in Alfort, while the absence of records can mean that she was permitted to take up study, but the professors, all of them men, did not want to lose face and put anything in writing. Kapčević was obviously an exception and came to this freedom-loving country some 10 to 15 years too early. In addition, there were some other Russian female students there, which was, as mentioned, recorded by the international press and veterinary journals.

It seems also that some of the women veterinarians got married, changed their family names, or even stopped practising veterinary medicine since their material existence had been secured in some other way (by marriage, they possessed own wealth, or belonged to the nobility). For them, the most important thing was *to graduate in veterinary medicine*, their love towards animals was huge.

The best countries to study veterinary medicine for Russian female students were Switzerland and France; in both of these countries many Russian women had already studied medicine or even engineering and other sciences, such as mathematics (Sofija Kovalevska in Sweden, for example). Some medical students never returned to Russia upon graduation, but stayed in Western Europe or emigrated to North America and Canada, where they easily found a job and were given favourable employment terms. Having realised that they were losing, in 1909, the Russian government founded a medical school only for women.

## Great Britain, 1900

Only four years after the graduation of the first female veterinarian in France, Aileen (Aleen) Cust (1868-1937) graduated from New Veterinary College in Edinburgh. She came of a rich family (father Sir Leopold Cust, mother lady-in-waiting) and did not have to learn, but she wanted to study exactly this uncommon science – veterinary medicine, not knowing how long she would have to wait to be officially recognized by the British Veterinary Association in London, which she needed to be able to practice veterinary medicine in her own right in the whole British Empire. She had to wait until 1922!

Aileen Cust studied in Edinburgh from 1894 to 1900. At enrolment she used a fictitious name, A.I. Custance. In 1900, she got a job with a veterinarian in Ireland, who did not object to women working as veterinarians. Cust was doing fine and was locum tenens for her boss quite often. In 1905, Cust participated in the 8<sup>th</sup> International Veterinary Congress in Budapest. From 1906, she was inspector, however, without the prefix veterinary, because many male veterinarians were against her, slandered her and spread false news about her. The local priest was also against her and advised his flock not to call her in emergencies, however, when his cow became ill, he decided to call her in. During the First World War she worked on the Western Front in a diagnostic laboratory.



Aileen Cust

After the First World War, Britain passed the law which made illegal for a woman to be barred from any profession that she was capable of pursuing. In this way it was possible for other English women, previously not permitted to study veterinary medicine to take up the study. After 1924, Aileen was practicing less and moved from Ireland to Hampshire, where her main interest was dog breeding.

To avoid the harsh English winter, at the beginning of 1937, she went to Jamaica, however, died of heart failure at the end of this year.

### USA, 1903

The first woman veterinarian in America graduated in 1903 in Chicago – this was Mignon Nicholson (McKillips Private Veterinary College, Chicago), followed by Elinor McGrath (1910), who graduated from the Chicago Veterinary College. It seems that McGrath was the first in the world to perform tonsillectomy in a dog (about 1910). She was also the first female member of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

Florence Kimball (1885-1947), born in Worcester, Mass., is the third American female veterinarian. Between 1903 and 1907 she attended Wheaton Seminary (later Wheaton College, Norton, Mass.), where she passed preclinical courses and decided to study veterinary medicine. 1907 she was accepted by the New York State Veterinary College, where she graduated in 1910. Between 1910 and 1915 she was working in a small-animal hospital, which was a renovated stable!



Florence Kimball

In 1915 Kimball moved to Boston, and enrolled in a school of nursing. It seems that she was a military nurse during the First World War. From 1918, she worked as head nurse at the Department of Infectious Diseases at the Children's Hospital in St. Louis. From 1929, she was chief night inspector at the State University Hospital in Oklahoma City, OK.

Between 1929 and 1947 she owned and managed a farm of pets in Edmond, OK. So the circle was complete – Kimball was working with animals again, which she loved so much.

Note that the first woman to graduate from medical school in the USA as early as 1845 was Elizabeth Blackwell!

### Australia, 1906

In Australia, Belle Reid (?-1946) was the first woman veterinarian. She graduated from the Victoria Veterinary Institute in Melbourne in 1906.

## Germany, 1915

Germany has several schools of veterinary medicines, the oldest being the University of Veterinary Medicine Hanover (Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover, established in 1778). However, the first woman veterinarian who graduated in Berlin already in 1915 was not coming from Germany but from Finland, where there was no veterinary college at that time. (Finland got its first veterinary college as late as 1945.) Therefore, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and partially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, young Finnish men studied veterinary medicine either in Denmark or Sweden, or at several German universities, mostly in Berlin, Leipzig or Hanover, but also elsewhere.

The Finnish woman Agnes Sjöberg (1888-1964) studied first in Dresden and then in Berlin, where she graduated.

At enrolment, the administration officers were not aware that she was a girl, so she was registered, then tolerated and later even liked because she was an excellent student. In addition, German authorities were not aware of the fact that at that time Finland was formally part of Russia, so Sjöberg avoided another trouble. However, she had to endure personal insults, which some 30 male students – her countrymen – were hurling at her. Maybe they were afraid that this excellent student would be their serious rival, that she ultimately really was!

At first, it was a bit strange to have a female student at the faculty, but a clerk helped her by telling her: “Sie machen wie die anderen Herren”, and this encouraged her. Upon graduation, Sjöberg returned to Dresden, where she obtained her PhD degree in 1918.



Agnes Sjöberg, 1918

Her career has been presented in *Historia Medicinae Veterinariae* in 2005, pp 107-110. Here, let me point out only the most important event in her career. In 1944, Sjöberg performed successfully a Caesarean section in the mare – note that at that time there were no antibiotics! And this was not her first and only Caesarean!

Only 10 years later, three female students graduated in veterinary medicine in Leipzig – Ruth Eber (daughter of professor of veterinary medicine Eber) and Inkeri Bernhard, both Germans, and Airi Borustedt, female Finn. It should be mentioned that exactly at that time the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Dresden was closed and moved to Leipzig, where the environment was somehow more favourable and progressive.

In 1926, Vilma von Düring, later a well known writer, graduated in veterinary medicine in Giessen. In 1927, Silvia von Borustedt graduated in Munich. As late as 1931, Margarethe Reuter, graduated from the oldest German faculty of veterinary medicine in Hanover.

Due to the political situation in Berlin after the Second World War, there were two faculties of veterinary medicine in Berlin, the oldest faculty (established in 1790) was in the East Berlin, and the other was part of the Freie Universität in the Western zone, where Vera Honoj graduated in 1951.

### **Romania, 1919**

The first female veterinarian in Romania was Zoe Drăgănescu (?-1980). During the First World War she completed the third year of her studies in Bucharest, but then she was recruited into the army and rose to the rank of lieutenant. She graduated after the war, in 1919. Just as many others who were in war, she enjoyed some benefits at the faculty: her whole generation could graduate upon complying with less strict conditions. This was granted by the Royal Decree of 1918, which specified benefits for 3<sup>rd</sup>- and 4<sup>th</sup>-year students who were in the war. Drăgănescu died in Bucharest in 1980.



Zoe Drăgănescu

### **New Zealand, 1920**

Pearl Howard Dawson, the first woman veterinarian in this country, obtained a diploma in veterinary science through an American correspondence course at one of several institutions which offered this type of education in the USA – today we find this very uncommon. (Still, in the U.S.S.R. this type of education was also in place even in the 1970s, due to a shortage of veterinarians and the fact that this is a huge country. Such a course was named in the Russian language *zaočnij kurs*.)



Waldy Bergegren



Helena Jurgielowicz (1975)

The College of Veterinary Medicine was founded at Massey University in New Zealand in the early 1960s, after much struggle and complications. Jan Jones, the first female veterinarian there, graduated in 1967.

### Sweden, 1921

Soon after the First World War, Waldy Bergegren, graduated at the 100-year old Royal Veterinary College in Stockholm (1921). Upon taking the school-leaving examination in 1912, she enrolled at the Royal Veterinary College in Stockholm in 1914. Upon graduation she had to undergo a few-month training given by several Swedish veterinarians. In 1923, she was employed as veterinarian in a milk testing laboratory in Norrköping; 1931 she was appointed city health inspector in the same city. She retired in 1956. Throughout her career she did not have unpleasant experience, however, some people may have been surprised to see the first Swedish woman veterinarian at work.

Twelve years after her graduation, two other Swedish female students graduated from the Royal Veterinary College in Stockholm: Gunilla Marg. Elis. Nordlander (1933) and Rut Dagmar Katarina Morein (1933).

### Poland, 1923

After the First World War Helena Jurgielowicz (1897-1980) graduated in the new Republic of Poland in the city of Lviv (Lwow/Lemberg) in 1923. She was successful in several fields, active also in sports, riding in particular.

### **Estonia, 1925**

The Estonian Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was the first and oldest on the territory of the Russian Empire, founded by a Dane, Peter Jessen, in 1848. After the First World War, Estonia became independent. Otilie Therese Markus, born in 1901, studied at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in the city of Tartu between 1919 and 1925. After her marriage in 1939, she changed her name to Tiiu Koplus. She worked at the Veterinary Bacteriological Laboratory in the university city of Tartu from 1967. In co-operation with a team of experts she discovered the preparations Hemin and Lactamin. In 1965, she received meritorious service award from the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. She died some time before 2000.



Otilie Therese Markus

### **Lithuania, 1926**

In the new independent state of Lithuania the first woman graduated in veterinary medicine in 1926.

### **Czechoslovakia, 1926**

Upon the disintegration of Austria-Hungary in 1918, Czechoslovakia got its Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Brno. Just like in many other countries, at first, military barracks and military veterinary hospitals were renovated and turned into buildings suitable for education.

The first female veterinarian, Vilma Šeplova, graduated in 1926. She was born in Plzen in 1899. Upon graduation, she died shortly after delivery in 1929.



Marie Hromádková – Svěráková (1906-1985) graduated in 1931 and obtained her PhD degree already in 1932.



Vilma Šeplova (first from the left) in the leading role in Smetana's opera "The Bartered Bride"

As Czechs are known for their love of music, it was normal for the Veterinary School to have its amateur music corps, which is still active. Not surprisingly, that as a student, Šeplova acted in a little-theatre group at the Faculty in Brno in Smetana's opera "The Bartered Bride".

### **Italy, 1927**

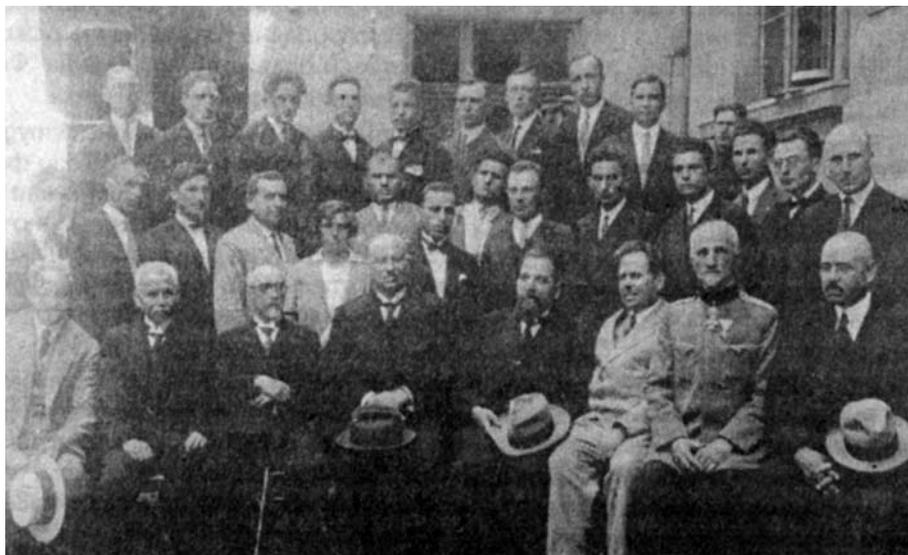
Jenny Barbiery, first Italian female veterinarian, graduated from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Bologna in the 1926/1927 academic year. After that, for many years until 1953, she was teaching anatomy at the Department of Anatomy of the Bologna Veterinary Faculty.

### **Bulgaria, 1928**

The interest in studying veterinary medicine grew among women soon upon establishment of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Sofia in 1923. Two of the first 33 freshmen were female students. However, between 1930 and 1944 no female applicants were accepted at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, since it was strongly believed that this are "studies only for men" and that only men can do this difficult job properly. This is a bit surprising, because some of the professors teaching there



Anatomy teaching assistant Jenny Barbiery (2) with her students, photo dated March 4, 1941



Sola sum – Mara Georgieva with a group of students and teachers, 1928

were educated in Germany or were Germans. However, after the Second World War this perspective changed, and in the next 20 years about 10% of students of veterinary medicine were women. Since 1967 this percentage has been growing and the ratio reached almost 50 to 50 %.

The first female veterinarian in Bulgaria was Mara Georgieva (1903-1976). She was born and grew up in Vratza, Northeastern Bulgaria. Her father knew a little about animal diseases and sometimes was able to help sick animals, all of which influenced Georgieva in her decision to study veterinary medicine. She graduated in Sofia in 1928. She worked in several veterinary clinics in Bulgaria. For a short period of time she also worked in the Bacteriological Laboratory of a meat-processing industry in Sofia. She died in 1976.

### **The Netherlands, 1930**

In the Netherlands, the only Faculty of Veterinary Medicine is and has always been in Utrecht – it was founded in 1821. The first female veterinarian, Jeanette Voet (1907-1979), graduated from this faculty in 1930.

When Jeanette Voet wanted to get enrolled at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in 1925, both professors and the dean opposed this idea, but she persisted in studying veterinary medicine. The fact that this very year the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was made part of the Utrecht University helped her realize her plans. She obtained her PhD degree in 1934 (D-vitamin in the diet of poultry and its standardisation).

After obtaining her doctorate, she was granted a two-year scholarship for study at the Institute Pasteur in Paris. In 1934, she published a paper on the first isolation of *Leptospira canicola* in humans. In 1936, she went with her husband to Asia, to the Netherlands dependencies. Her husband was employed on Java, and she was working at a local hospital helping the Red Cross organisation during the war.

After the Second World War she was employed at the Institute of Veterinary Medicine in Bogor, where she was working on the development of the vaccine against Newcastle Disease in poultry.

From 1950 she worked in Holland at the Institute of Infectious Diseases at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, and in 1955 she joined the Bacteriological Department, where she was dealing with listeriosis, leptospirosis and mycoplasmas and was participating in numerous congresses of veterinary medicine.

Following her example, other women veterinarians of Holland went her path. Voet celebrated her 40-year anniversary of enrolment with all women veterinarians of Holland, evoking memories from the rough past times when she was fighting for something which ultimately became completely natural: the right of women to



Non sola sum ... Jeanette Donker-Voet, first female student at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Utrecht, Netherlands, surrounded by her male colleagues (1930)

study any discipline they wanted, including veterinary medicine, without restriction at a faculty of their choice.

### **Croatia, 1932**

In 1919, soon after the First World War and the disintegration of Austria-Hungary the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was founded in Croatia, in Zagreb. Jelka Bojkić graduated in veterinary medicine as the first woman in 1932. As student she was very active, working also on the establishment of the dormitory in Zagreb, Ilica 83. She was president of the female students' organisation of the University of Zagreb. She was also very interested in theatre, movie and music. She was working



Jelka Bojkić

in laboratories in several cities of the First Yugoslavia.

In 1932, she got employed in Zemun at the Central Veterinary Bacteriological Department. Although Bojkić actually wanted to study medicine, which she never could due to financial reasons (the study of medicine lasted longer and fees were higher), veterinary medicine brought her much satisfaction. Referring to injustice, she experienced it only rarely. The number of her diploma, issued in Zagreb on July 27, 1932, is 144.

### Spain, 1935

Maria Luz Zalduegni Gabilondo (1914-2003) was the first woman to get a degree in veterinary medicine at the University of Madrid in 1935. She started her veterinary studies in 1930, at the age of 16. During the Spanish civil war, she was an official veterinarian in two municipalities in the Basque county. After the war, with her husband, also a veterinarian, she wanted to apply for the position of official veterinary administrator of the protectorate of Marocco, but was not allowed because Africa was not a place for ladies. After that, she was not a practising veterinarian any more but held several positions as civil servant in the state administration, dealing with veterinary issues.



Maria Luz Zalduegni Gabilondo

### Turkey, 1935

The first Turkish female veterinarian was Merver Ansel (1935)

Nihal Erk was among the first female students at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, at which, just like in Bulgaria, there were several visiting professors from Germany, which probably had a positive effect on getting a different “perspective on the opposite sex”. Nihal Erk became later a distinguished historian of veterinary medicine and thanks to her, Europe got an insight into Arabian veterinary medicine through the books (bajtara) coming from the University Library in Istanbul and Ankara.



Nihal Erk



Welcoming new students at the Matriculation Ceremony at the Ankara Veterinary Faculty (1933). Rector Geheimrat Prof. Dr. Friedrich Falke (shaking hands with a new student). Teaching staff of the Veterinary and Agricultural Faculties.

## Hungary, 1937

Erzsébet Schwartz (1915-1993) was born in Budapest, where she also graduated in 1937. Her father was a field veterinarian. In 1933, she enrolled at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Budapest under special conditions – she was the first woman at this faculty.

Upon graduation she volunteered for two years, received no salary at Prof. S. Kotlán's Institute of Parasitology, where she also completed her excellent dissertation on gasterophilosis in horses and became *ornatissima & doctissima domina*. Between 1940 and 1944 she worked in a private clinic in Budapest, and after that in the pharmaceutical industry Philoxin. At the same time she was active in the Hungarian Veterinary Association as secretary general. In 1952, she introduced drug control at the National Institute for Control of Serological Products. She was then appointed director, which position she held till retirement in 1971.



Erzsébet Schwartz

When she started working at this Institute there were only five veterinarians employed, and after twenty years under her directorship the Institute became a huge research centre for the production of biological preparations employing many experts. In 1973, she completed her PhD thesis entitled "*Modern production and control of serological products*". Thanks to Schwartz, the Hungarian journal of veterinary medicine (*Magyar Alltorvosok Lapja*) was re-published and continuing education courses for veterinarians in both the capital and other regions of Hungary were organized.

Her life, motivation and will to work and succeed provide evidence that choosing this profession was a good choice. Among many awards she received, let us mention the bronze medal forged to her credit: it is a medal, 10 cm in diameter, with her name Erzsébet Dr. SIMONYI engraved. (It is kept at the Museum of Veterinary History in Budapest.) Simonyi was not always Erzsébet's name; her first name was Schwartz. After the Second World War it was customary in Hungary to replace German names with names which "sounded better", so she became Simonyi. The data on her work and life as well as her obituaries, written in several languages and kept in the archives, is extensive.

It is well known that the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Budapest was very advanced and enjoyed excellent reputation, thanks to Prof. Hutyra and his textbook,

which was translated into about ten languages. He also organized the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Veterinary Medicine in Budapest in 1905, and contributed to the establishment of the Office International d'Epizootie in Paris in 1921.

### **Austria, 1939**

Although one of the first veterinary schools was founded in Vienna in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the first two women veterinarians obtained their degrees there as late as 1939. These were Honorata Knopp and a Polish student, Maria Wanda Dubienson.

### **Denmark, 1940**

A year later, in 1940, the first female veterinarian of Denmark, Ester Mortensen née Thomsen (1913-1999), graduated in Copenhagen. It seems that before her there were two or three female students enrolled at the faculty, but because of the strictness of some teachers they failed their exams. E. Mortensen, besides being talented, was also working hard and had a strong and indisputable "background" – her father was a world-renowned scientist and censor in some exams, so not only the fairness of professors was ensured, but she also paved the way for her female colleagues. There was about a dozen of female students in the next years, one of them being Maria Helena Jakkola (1917) from Finland, who obtained her Danish diploma in 1943.

Ester Mortensen worked for a while at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, in the sector of hygiene of food-stuffs, and from 1952, she worked in a small animal clinic in Copenhagen.



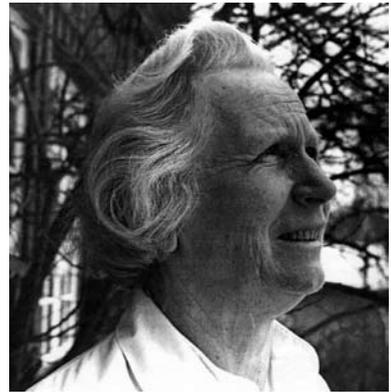
Ester Mortensen

### **Portugal, 1941**

In 1941, Portugal got its first woman veterinarian, L. A. Loup-Braz, who graduated in Lisbon.

### **Norway, 1945**

Due to political circumstances (union with Denmark and later with Sweden) lasting for over 125 years, Norway founded a college of veterinary medicine in Oslo quite late, in 1935. However, as soon as 10 years after the establishment, Louise Iversen (1920-2006) graduated in veterinary medicine. She completed secondary education in 1939 and graduated from the Oslo University in 1945. For a year she was in training, and in 1946, she was employed by the National Veterinary Institute in Oslo, where she worked until 1950. Between 1951 and 1957, she worked at the Veterinary Institute for northern Norway in Harstad, where she was mostly focusing on mastitis. After 1967, she was city veterinary inspector there. She was also member of the city council and other social and community institutions, and was in office for several terms, until her death in 2006. She authored several scientific papers.



Louise Iversen

### **Belgium, 1951**

Cristine Cotteleer graduated from the 100-year old Veterinary Faculty in Brussels in 1951. Hilda Wijverkens graduated from a younger faculty, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Ghent in 1954.

Upon graduation Hilda Wijverkens worked for two years in a laboratory at a large animal clinic at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Ghent. Then she turned to general practice because her husband was a field veterinarian. Between 1960 and 1999 she was treating only small animals. She was happy to have chosen this profession, and was also among the first veterinarians in Belgium.

### **Finland, 1951**

Due to political circumstances (union with Sweden and Russia) and several wars, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was founded in Finland quite late (1946). In 1951, Helvi Vasenius graduated in veterinary medicine.

### **Greece, 1956**

After the Second World War, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was founded in Thessaloniki under difficult conditions, thanks to extraordinary efforts of the regi-

strar professor Nic. Aspiotis, who managed to obtain some useless military facilities, which could have been used for teaching purposes. Before that, Greek students studied veterinary medicine mostly in Italy, France and Austria. In Greece, however, there were some veterinarians (9) from Denmark (1880s); one of the reasons was that King of Greece, George I, was originally a Danish prince. Some Danes acclimated themselves, stayed and died in Greece, while some of them returned home because of the unpleasant Mediterranean climate or illness. Prior to the arrival of Danes, there were only two(!) veterinarians in Greece. Most veterinary interventions were performed by military farrier assistants, who did the best they could. Around 1900, there was a permanent shortage of civil veterinarians, while there were about ten military veterinarians.

Already in 1956, the Thessaloniki Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was proud of the first female veterinarian, Maria Mastroyani. (Some ten years ago a new faculty of veterinary medicine was founded in the city of Karditsa.)

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1957**

Marija Filipović (1930- ) was the first woman who graduated from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Sarajevo in 1957. She was born in Kotor (Montenegro), where she completed primary education. She completed grammar school in Travnik.

Marija Filipović, married Paninčić, was active as a teacher, worked in clinics and had a distinguished scientific career. During her active years of teaching and research she published numerous scientific and professional papers in the field of obstetrics and reproduction of domestic animals, focusing particularly on physiology and pathology of the mammary gland.

In 1965, she obtained her PhD degree with a dissertation entitled *“Value of modern diagnostic methods in determination of disturbed mammary gland development and their application in the systematic health control of the udder”*. As dr.vet.sci. and full professor Marija Filipović Paninčić retired in 1997. She was a role model for her younger colleagues, who she helped professionally whenever she could. Upon retirement she stayed in contact with her colleagues at the Faculty and clinics, and continued to cooperate as a professional and friend.



Marija Filipović Paninčić

### **Albania, 1958**

The Socialist Republic of Albania founded its Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Tirana. The first woman veterinarian in this country was Meropi N. Mile.

### **Slovenia, 1963**

Branka Sainar (married Lazar) was the first Slovene female veterinarian who graduated from the University of Ljubljana in 1963.

### **Iceland, 1973**

The first female veterinarian who originated from Iceland was Eufemia Hanna Gisladdottir. She graduated in Copenhagen in 1973.

Before her, however, the Danish veterinarian Kirsten Henriksen, married to the Icelandic chief veterinary officer Pall A. Palsson, worked in Iceland since 1945.



Eufemia Hanna Gisladdottir

### **Luxembourg, 1975**

The first woman from Luxembourg studied veterinary medicine abroad, as there is no faculty of veterinary medicine in this small state. This was Lexy Nilles (1948-2002),



Lexy Nilles

who studied in Italy (Perugia, Pisa). She graduated in 1975, and her diploma was acknowledged in 1979, however without problems, by the Grand Duke of Luxembourg. Upon graduation she worked in a small animal clinic. She was also active in the Veterinary Association as vice-president from 1989. She was also one of the founding members of the International Association for Veterinary Homoeopathy (since 1985). In 1974/1975 she obtained in Pisa her PhD degree with a thesis on adrenal hormone.

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| Prof. dr. L. Leonides, Karditsa       | Prof. dr. Ivo Zacarotto, Turin         |



One of the lecture-rooms at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Moscow, 1970s. Many students are women.

Review by countries

ALBANIA	Tirana, 1958	Meropi N. Mile
AUSTRIA	Vienna, 1939	Honorata Knopp Marie Wanda Dubienson
AUSTRALIA	Melbourne, 1906	Belle Reid
BELGIUM	Brussels, 1951 Ghent, 1954	Christine Cotteleer Hilda Wijverkens
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	Sarajevo, 1957	Marija Filipović
BULGARIA	Sofia, 1928	Mara Georgieva
CROATIA	Zagreb, 1932	Jelka Bojkić
CZECHOSLOVAKIA	Brno, 1926	Vilma Šeplova
DENMARK	Copenhagen, 1940	Ester Mortensen
ESTONIA	Tartu, 1925	Otilie Therese Markus married Koplus
FINLAND	Helsinki, 1951	Helvi Vasenius
FRANCE	Lyon Paris/Alfort, 1896 Toulouse, 1942 Nantes, 1979	Marie Kapcewitsch Huguette Bireaud
GERMANY	Berlin, 1915 Leipzig, 1924  Giessen, 1926 Munich, 1927 Hannover, 1931 Giessen, 1944 Berlin Freie Uni., 1951	Agnes Sjöberg, Finland Ruth Eber Inkeri Bernhard Airi Jääskeläinen Vilma von Düring Silvia von Bornstedt Margarethe Reuter Lore Zekau Vera Houri
GREAT BRITAIN	London, 1900 Edinburgh, 1948	Aleen Cust (4 ladies)
GREECE	Thessaloniki, 1956	Maria Mastroyani
HUNGARY	Budapest, 1937	Erzsébet Schwartz
ICELAND	Copenhagen, 1973	Eufemia Hanna Gísladóttir
ITALY	Bologna, 1927	Jenny Barbiery
LITHUANIA	1926	
LUXEMBOURG	1975	Lexy Nilles, graduated in Italy
NETHERLANDS	Utrecht, 1930	Jeannette Voet

### Review by countries

NEW ZEALAND	Massey, 1967	Pearl Howard Dawson Jan Jones
NORWAY	Oslo, 1945	Louise Iversen
POLAND	Lviv (Lwow/Lemberg), 1923	Stephania Kruszewska Helena Jurgielewicz
PORTUGAL	Lisbon, 1941	L.A. Loup-Braz
ROMANIA	Bucharest, 1919 Iasi Timisoara	Zoe Draganescu
SLOVENIA	Ljubljana, 1963	Branka Sainar
SPAIN	Cordoba, 1925 Madrid, 1935  Leon	Maria Cerrato Rodriguez Maria Luz Zalduegui Gabilondo Indalecia Martines Revuelta Francisca Vacas Espinosa
SWEDEN	Stockholm, 1921	Waldy Bergegren
SWITZERLAND	Zurich, 1938 Bern, 1941	Ella Blatter Elsa Mühlethaler
TURKEY	Ankara, 1935	Merver Ansel
UKRAINE	Odessa, 1892	V. Dobrovoljskaja
USA	New York, 1910	Florence Kimball



Poland 2000 – now are seats reserved not only for male professors

### Chronology

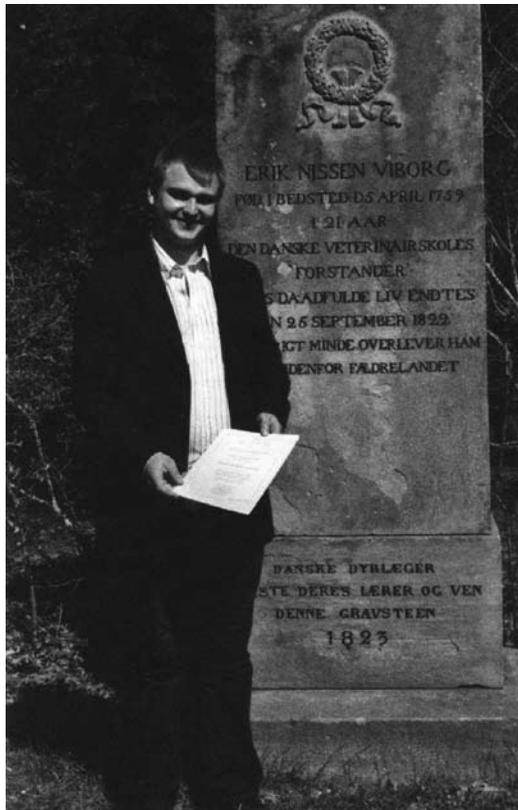
1889	Switzerland	(Zurich); 1941 (Bern)
1896	France	(Alfort); 1942 (Toulouse)
1900	Great Britain	(Edinburgh); 1922 (London)
1903	USA	(Chicago)
1906	Australia	(Melbourne)
1915	Germany	(Berlin); 1924 (Leipzig); 1927 (Munich) 1931 (Hanover); 1944 (Giessen)
1919	Romania	(Bucharest)
1920	New Zealand	(via an American Correspondance – courses)
1921	Sweden	(Stockholm)
1923	Poland	(Lviv/Lemberg/Lwow)
1925	Estonia	(Tartu)
1926	Lithuania	
1926	Czechoslovakia	(Brno)
1927	Italy	(Bologna)
1928	Bulgaria	(Sofia)
1930	The Netherlands	(Utrecht)
1932	Croatia	(Zagreb)
1933	Turkey	(Ankara)
1935	Spain	(Madrid)
1937	Hungary	(Budapest)
1939	Austria	(Vienna)
1940	Denmark	(Copenhagen)
1941	Portugal	(Lisbon)
1945	Norway	(Oslo)
1951	Belgium	(Brussels)
1951	Finland	(Helsinki)
1954	Belgium	(Ghent)
1956	Greece	(Thessaloniki)
1957	Bosnia and Herzegovina	(Sarajevo)
	New Zealand	(Massey)
1958	Albania	(Tirana)
1963	Slovenia	(Ljubljana)
1973	Iceland	(study in Denmark, as there was no faculty of ve- terinary medicine in Iceland)
1974	Luxembourg	(study in Italy, as there was no faculty of veterinary medicine in Luxembourg)

## AFTERWORD

For the 29<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Association for the History of Veterinary Medicine, which took place in Brno in 2000, I prepared a paper on female veterinarians: who the first women veterinarians were, how great the difficulties they encountered had been, how the problems had been attacked and solved in different countries, etc.

Because of some other pleasant reasons (the title of dr. med. vet. honoris causa was awarded to me in Tartu, Estonia, on the same day), I had to withdraw my paper at the last moment. I postponed the publication of my talk "for better times". Now, it is here!

In connection with this topic I would also like to mention that in 2006, the Danish Veterinary History Association awarded Henrik Norman - Andersen, student of veterinary medicine, a 10,000 Kr. prize (ca 1,300 €) for his project on first female veterinarians in Denmark (published in Danish in Dansk Veterinarhistorisk Årbog 2006, vol. 42, pp 45-86).



In 2006, the Danish Veterinary History Association awarded Henrik Norman - Andersen for his project on first female veterinarians in Denmark.



Professor Nihal ERK when she was in examination as a last year student  
in Ankara Veterinary Faculty in 1942.

From left to right: Ismet İnönü, the Second President of the Republic of Turkey,  
Dr. Selahattin BATU, Professor of Animal Husbandry, Hasan Ali YÜCEL, Minister of Education

### Women veterinarians

The fact that after 1913 girls who passed school leaving examination could study veterinary medicine had no practical meaning. Namely, opportunities for women veterinarians to find a job upon graduation were very limited, therefore, it was believed that it was not even worth making such a sacrifice as studying veterinary medicine. Due to tough competition with men, even positions in laboratories or as specialists in dog diseases were hard to get. Therefore, it was in the best interest of women to simply drop the idea of becoming veterinarians.

*Der Tierarzt heute*

### Sažetak

#### Prve žene veterinarke

Iako su prve veterinarske škole počele izobrazbom 1761 (Lyon) i 1765 (Alfort, Pariz) žene nisu tamo mogle studirati sve do pred kraj 19. stoljeća. Prvih nekoliko žena koje su diplomirale veterinarsku medicinu bile su iz Rusije odnosno Poljske, no čini se da su udajom promijenile prezime te da nisu djelovale kao veterinari zbog toga što su udajom osigurale ekonomsku sigurnost. Rusija naime nije dopuštala da se žene upisuju na medicinske i veterinarske fakultete sve do 1910. godine pa su žene zato veterinu studirale u Francuskoj, a humanu medicinu na medicinskim fakultetima u Zürichu i Ženevi.

Jedna Finkinja, koja je u to vrijeme također bila ruski podanik, uspjela se upisati na Veterinarski fakultet u Dresdenu samo zato jer kod prijave njezino ime nije prepoznato kao žensko ime. Slična je situacija bila s A. Cust u Engleskoj.

Studentice su nailazile i na druge administrativne i socijalne poteškoće (ženske presvlačionice i WC-i), no to je s vremenom riješeno, naročito nakon što su žene same svojom djelatnošću dokazale ravnopravnost s muškim kolegama koji su ih onda i prihvatili. Tako je, na primjer, Agnes Sjöberg, prva žena veterinar u Finskoj, izvela carski rez u kobile još 1944. godine, u doba kada još nije bilo antibiotika.

Obitelji su često pokušavale odvratiti žene da postanu „horse doctors“ jer se smatralo da bi ženama bolje odgovarao rad s malim životinjama ili ribama ili da rade kao parazitolozi. Na zagrebačkom Veterinarskom fakultetu diplomirala je Jelka Bojkić (1932.) koja se bavila laboratorijskim istraživanjima.

Danas je postotak studentica na mnogim veterinarskim fakultetima širom svijeta već iznad 50 %, a na nekima i 90 %.

**Ključne riječi:** međunarodna povijest veterinarstva; žene veterinarke; 19. stoljeće; 20. stoljeće

*Translation  
Snješka Kereković*