WHILE IT IS PROBABLE, due to the peculiar economic conditions which prevail, that there will be some falling off in the veterinary student population of the country for the next year or two, eventually, as the demand becomes emphasized through lacking supply, compensation will come in the increasing numbers of young men who will enter the profession...The outlook therefore for the veterinary school is brighter today than it ever has been..."

It seems fair to say that when Dean David White wrote the above in his 1920 Annual Report, he was putting up a brave front. Veterinary enrollment was beginning to decline, the result of a combination of factors, and one may surmise that an educator as astute as White anticipated more than a "year or two" of problems.

The causes of the decline included the state of the agricultural economy, which was beginning to slide into a depression that preceded by several years the general economic collapse, and conversely, industrial growth that was siphoning off potential college students. But the most prominent factor, and the most dramatic, was the abrupt decline of the horse as the dominant source of urban transportation.

The internal combustion engine and the cars and trucks it powered were signaling the end of "horse-powered" America. The change came swiftly, especially in the cities, impacting on practicing veterinarians and, through them, on potential veterinary students. Dr. Schalk observed in his 1956 College history that:

"Countless numbers of veterinary practitioners whose practices were almost solely confined to the equine were definitely concerned about the future of their profession. They, as well as others outside of their profession, discouraged young men in taking up veterinary medicine for their life work."

The pessimistic outlook of working professionals, reinforced by the very real problems of the period, had its effect. Enrollment continued to drop; in 1921, a report to the Ohio State Veterinary Medical Association noted that OSU veterinary enrollment stood at 106, with only 18 in the freshman class. The same year, Dean White reported "very unstable" conditions in the veterinary profession, adding that "there is a popular impression that since the horse is no longer the dominant factor in urban street transportation, no more veterinarians will be needed."

White didn't believe this; he remained optimistic, although conceding that veterinary education would have to pass through a "squeeze." He saw an answer to the profession's problems in the needs of the nation's food-and-fiber producing livestock industry, still ravaged by disease and long neglected by many veterinarians in favor of equine practice. Writing in his 1922
Annual Report, the Dean focused on this promising area:

"The livestock industry of the United States is valued in round numbers at about $10,000,000,000. The annual losses from fatal diseases among animals are estimated at about $250,000,000. To this must be added the economic loss due to the occurrence of sickness or injury which constantly involves some 10 percent of our livestock. These facts give a general idea of the urgent need of devising ways and means to reduce these enormous losses..."

The "ways and means" were obviously the province of veterinary medicine. But the process of devising them would require changes in both veterinary education and veterinary practice. In time, these would come; indeed, some were already underway. But even as the OSU Veterinary College anticipated the future, it had to contend with the depressing reality of the present.

Enrollment was still going down and the College was under pressure. By 1926, the situation was critical and a major effort was mounted to reverse the trend. At a January 26th faculty meeting, a committee on student enrollment outlined a promotional program that included reduction of the non-resident fee, use of WEAO Radio (now WOSU), solicitation of county agents and high school superintendents, and the placing of articles in influential publications.

Less than a month later, on February 16, 1926, the faculty approved motions to arrange for radio subjects and prepare publication material. Members also backed a proposal to "ask alumni to discuss the Veterinary Medicine situation with high school graduates and to send in the names of any graduates whom they think might be interested in a course in veterinary medicine."

In May, University trustees bolstered the recruitment program by agreeing to eliminate the non-resident fee for veterinary students. And by the fall of 1926 promotional efforts had been expanded to include letters to prominent livestock breeders and farm bureau organizations, contacts with the nation's agricultural colleges, and letters to all veterinarians in Ohio and adjoining states who were not OSU alumni.

The College was making a determined effort to attract students. At the same time, it also was reordering its own house in response to
the changing needs of the decade. In his 1926 Annual Report, Dean White noted:

"While formerly a course in veterinary anatomy was confined to the horse, nowadays, as noted, the other animals are given equal emphasis. Recently the course in anatomy was revised to meet the present day needs of the veterinarian in the field. Still further changes in this regard are contemplated."

The educational emphasis was shifting to other livestock, the food-and-fiber producing animals long overshadowed by the now-disappearing horse. And size of animal had nothing to do with its significance. In November 1926, the Executive Committee addressed the needs of an increasingly important segment of the livestock industry by approving a recommendation "that a course in Poultry Husbandry be included in the curriculum."

In this same period, small animal medicine, always prominent at OSU, became the focus of even greater attention. With the displacement of the horse by motorized "horse-power," urban veterinarians became increasingly dependent on companion animal care as a source of livelihood and, recognizing this trend, the Veterinary College began placing even more emphasis on what would become a major field of veterinary practice.

But internal change and external promotion notwithstanding, enrollment remained a problem. The number of veterinary graduates was dwindling and Dean White, writing in 1926, commented on the gravity of the situation:

"For the past five years, the matter of enrollment in the veterinary schools of North America has occasioned considerable anxiety among thinking people interested in one of our nation's greatest assets, the livestock industry...The number of veterinarians now being graduated, less than three for each state, does not fill the gaps in the profession caused by death alone. It is probable that a campaign of greater publicity will help remedy the situation, but in the opinion of the writer it will remedy itself once the people of the country realize that, despite the 'passing of the horse,' veterinary service will still be needed as long as a livestock industry is maintained. The faculty of the College of Veterinary Medicine is doing everything in this matter to give publicity to the facts."

It was an effort that would take time. In the years immediately ahead, graduating classes at the Veterinary College averaged only 15 members and even then OSU fared better than other colleges in the United States and Canada. But, eventually, the tide began to turn and in 1928 the College's Annual Report sounded a more optimistic note:

"It need only be mentioned that the increase in student numbers has been very encouraging and gratifying. Incidentally, Ohio State has this year a larger entering class of veterinary students than any other school on the American continent. The outlook for the coming year is also encouraging."

The worst was over. By responding to, rather than resisting change, and by effectively publicizing its crucial mission, the Veterinary College had survived a formidable challenge. Never again would declining enrollment be a major problem.

The enrollment crisis dominated the 1920's, but it would be misleading to say that it did so to the total exclusion of other concerns. In Dean White's case, these concerns included thinking about future expansion, a clear indication that he viewed the drop in enrollment as a temporary aberration. Addressing the subject of expansion in his 1923 Annual Report, he posed a question and the answer:

"Other veterinary colleges, no larger than this one, are expanding; why should we not continue to grow...? It would seem, therefore, that the time will soon come when it will be necessary to abandon entirely both the Veterinary Laboratory Building and the Veterinary Clinic Building and rebuild, probably on the west side of the Olentangy River, the Veterinary College and make it an institution of greater service to the people of the state and nation."

It was a bold proposal, but also clearly another idea that would have to wait its time. And the time did not come soon; it would be thirty years before the Veterinary College finally got the signal to "go west."

But if White could not promote a new college campus, he could at least restructure the college he had. From 1906 on he had sought authority to create departments, only to have University officials consistently reject the proposal. Finally, in 1925, White went ahead on his own, creating the subdepartments of
Above—The College held its first Conference of Veterinarians in March, 1926, and drew an impressive number of participants. The Conference marked the beginning of formal continuing education at the College and was continued as an annual event for some thirty years. (Veterinary College Files)

Left—Two scenes of Pathology work at the Veterinary College in 1922.

Below Left—Activity at the Veterinary Clinic in 1926. Enrollment was still a problem, but better days were ahead.
Anatomy, Pathology, Surgery and Clinics, and Medicine. Four years later, in another step toward departmentalization, the College’s curriculum and functions were grouped into seven distinct divisions: Anatomy, Physiology and Pharmacology, Parasitology, Medicine, Pathology, Surgery and Clinics, and Research.

The 1920s also saw the beginning of a formalized program of continuing education at the Veterinary College. It took the form of an annual Conference for Veterinarians and the very first one, held in March 1926, was an overwhelming success. Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting for March 30th record that:

“The total registration for the three-day conference was 225. This exceeds by twenty-five the largest attendance at any conference of its kind in this country.”

Through the late 1920s, the Conference also was used to focus attention on the Veterinary College and stimulate enrollment. It remained an annual event for some three decades before giving way to new programs of continuing education.

In the 1920s, graduate education also began to evolve. The Veterinary College conferred its first higher degree, a Master of Science in Pathology, on L.E. Starr in 1922. Over the remainder of the decade, five additional master’s degrees were presented, a still-modest but notable advance in a field of veterinary education that would continue to grow in importance.

The final year of the decade saw an upgrading of the ambulatory clinic service, which had its beginning in the early days of the veterinary school. First organized by Professor Detmers, the clinic was apparently discontinued for a period after his retirement, then reestablished on a limited basis in 1913 under the direction of Dr. J.N. Shoemaker. In 1929, Dr. Walter Krill joined the faculty to “develop and operate” an ambulatory clinic offering complete veterinary service, including emergency care, to farm clients.

The same year Dr. David White retired, closing out 34 years as Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine. Having guided the College from humble beginnings to a position of preeminence, he bequeathed to his successor a rich heritage and all the challenges of the years ahead.