

History of the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital: Caring for Animals Since 1907

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Located in the heart of Berkeley, California, the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital has provided animal care for nearly 115 years. In a building first used as a livery stable dating from about 1879 where horseshoeing and some veterinary services were provided, Dr. Frederick H. McNair established his own veterinary clinic with increasing focus on pets and companion animals—"a rather novel concept at the time"—at that location in 1907. His practice grew significantly over the years, particularly expanding its capabilities into specialty areas in the 1970s and emergency services in the late 1990s. This prominent veterinary hospital continues today, offering quality veterinary care in the San Francisco Bay area.

Background on Berkeley, California

In the latter part of the 19th century after the California State constitution was ratified in 1849, settlement increased on the northeastern shore of the San Francisco Bay. Originally part of the Rancho San Antonio that was granted to the Peralta family in 1820, it was settled as Ocean View in 1853. In seeking a new site for future expansion, Oakland's private College of California, founded by a former Congregational minister and Yale University alumnus and chartered in 1855, purchased 160 acres of land 4 miles north on the foothills of the Contra Costa Range.¹ The site was named "Berkeley" in honor of the 18th century Anglo-Irish Anglican bishop and philosopher, George Berkeley. In 1866, the College of California merged with the land-grant Agricultural, Mining and Mechanical Arts College to mutually "blend" the curricula of each into "a complete university." Two years later, the Governor signed the "Organic Act," creating the public University of California system, with Berkeley becoming its oldest campus.

After another 10 years of growth in commerce and education, the city of Berkeley was incorporated in 1878 and, like most urban areas in the 19th and early 20th centuries, depended largely on horses for transportation of goods and services. Sick or injured animals were housed in livery stables, where horseshoeing and some veterinary care were provided. In fact, many veterinary surgeons, as veterinarians were called then, located their practices in liveries to be conveniently close to clients.

Dr. Frederick Henry McNair

Frederick Henry McNair was born at Mount Morris in Livingston County, New York, on October 28, 1872. He was fifth of the seven children of Miles Bristol McNair (1833–1911) and Julia Clark (nee Hastings) McNair (1839–1881).² In his youth, tall and blue-eyed Frederick helped on the family

farm.^{3,4} Following 4 years of high school and 2 years at the Geneseo Normal School (now State University of New York at Geneseo), he spent several years as a teacher and nurse before graduating from the New York State Veterinary College at Cornell University in 1905 at age 32.⁵ (Fig. 1)

The *Class Book* called him the "Free Typhoidless Room Agency" man" for his unexplained room-renting activities. In addition to "dog doctoring, room renting, and class politics" at Cornell, McNair instituted the annual Veterinary College banquet. This seasonal tradition later became the annual Cornell Veterinary College barbecue that continues to be held to this day. Interestingly, a description in the *1905 Senior Class Book* relates a story that "certain Seniors chose to remove one-half of his Freshman mustache, thus nearly causing an inter-class riot."⁶ It was also noted that because of "love for the fair sex," he had enrolled at Cornell, with his free hours "spent time within the walls of Sage Hall," which housed the women's college dormitory on campus.

During this senior year and the next two semesters of the 1905–1906 academic year, McNair was appointed to the College's faculty as assistant and instructor under Professor Pierre A. Fish, teaching courses and overseeing research in comparative physiology, pharmacology, and *materia medica* (therapeutics).⁷ In the College's *1906/07 Announcement*, he was also listed as a "graduate student not working for a degree."^{8,9}

Although he passed the board examinations for a license to practice in New York State, Dr. McNair decided within 2 years to relocate to California, "as veterinarians at the University of California informed him that the people of Berkeley and the surrounding area sorely needed a veterinarian to care for their animals."¹⁰ After 5 days of examinations in 1907, he was granted a license by the California board of examiners.

Around the time Dr. McNair arrived in Berkeley, a number of stables and several village blacksmiths existed to support the 500 or so animals counted



Figure 1. Frederick H. McNair, DVM (1872-1966). Source: *The Senior Class Book compiled by the 1905 class Cornell University, Ithaca, New York*, p. 123. HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924118678063>

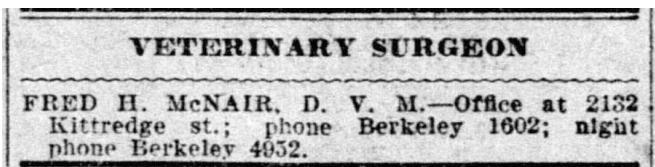


Figure 2. Veterinary surgeon. Source: *San Francisco Call*, 103(153):14, 1908 May 1. *California Digital Newspaper Collection*, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19080501.2.90.4&srpos=20&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-kittredge+veterinary-----1>

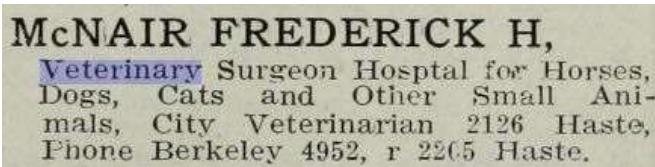


Figure 3. Listing for McNair, Frederick H. Source: *Husted's Oakland, Berkeley and Alameda City Directory 1909*. Oakland, CA: Polk-Husted City Directory Co, 1909; p. 1117. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/hustedoaklandal1909hust/page/n7/mode/2up>

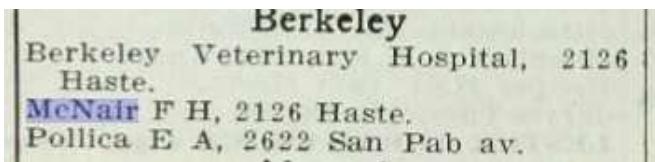


Figure 4. Veterinary Surgeons. *Husted's Oakland, Berkeley and Alameda City Directory 1910*. Oakland, CA: Polk-Husted City Directory Co, 1910; p. 1500. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/hustedoaklandal1910hust/page/n5/mode/2up>



Figure 5. Fire Department Veterinary Surgeon named. Source: *San Francisco Call*, 104(67):14, 1908 Aug 6. *California Digital Newspaper Collections*, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19080806.2.104&srpos=2&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-veterinary+surgeon+berkeley-----1>

in the local horse population census as of 1910.¹¹ Although the practice of setting up offices in livery stables was later discouraged in an effort to raise professional standards, many early veterinary surgeons did just that for convenience and proximity to clients. Johnson noted¹² "directly across the street from the California Theater [built in 1913] on Kittredge Street, John J. Fitzpatrick of horsecar fame operated his deluxe stable. Dr. McNair had his first office there. Fitzpatrick's stable held 90 horses, mostly boarders, at \$25 per month. They included eight teams of Wells Fargo Express."

Dr. F.H. McNair Establishes a Practice

"One of his first acts after becoming Berkeley City Veterinarian in 1907 was to purchase [and remodel] a two-story frame

house on Haste Street that previously served as a livery stable for police and fire horses. In 1908 it opened for business as the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital."¹³ This property at 2126 Haste Street occupied about 2 acres in downtown Berkeley.¹³

"Even earlier, this [land] had been the site first of a livery stable [which housed a blacksmith and horseshoeing services], then of a poultry butcher, and later of a large animal hospital [with stables adjacent to the building] serving dairy cattle and horses, including those owned by the police and fire departments in the Oakland and Berkeley area."^{14,15} In this approximately 2 blocks, now a residential area with a large mulberry tree, "there were numerous paddocks and holding pens for the animals, mulberry trees in the pasture, and equipment for treating the animals when ill."¹⁶

As described by Jensen,¹⁷ "Enclosed by a high board fence, a large, square red barn stood in the center of the property, its ventilating cupola topped by a weather vane. The inside of the barn was white-washed, and the center of the floor dominated by a large padded [surgical operating] table which could be stood on edge, a horse strapped to it, then cranked down flat. As business increased, Dr. McNair added an addition to the barn housing an office and a treatment room for small animals."

Although much of San Francisco had been leveled by the catastrophic event, "portions of the old building that survived the 1906 earthquake still form the framework in one part of the [current] hospital."^{18,19} However, over the years, "since the initial construction, there have been at least six facility remodels [and renovations]."²⁰

In first establishing his practice, Dr. McNair ran advertisements appearing in April and May 1908 issues of the *San Francisco Call* newspaper. (Fig. 2) His office was listed as being located at 2132 Kittredge Street.²¹

Listings in the 1909 and 1910 city directories^{22,23} (Fig. 3) noted that "Horses, dogs, cats and other small animals" were examined and treated at the hospital at 2126 Haste Street.

There is also evidence that it may have simply been referred to initially as the "Berkeley Veterinary Hospital" as listed in the 1910 Berkeley City Directory.²⁴ (Fig. 4).

Dr. McNair's appointment as City Veterinarian for Berkeley in summer of 1908, upon the recommendation of the municipality's first paid Fire Chief James Kenney, continued until 1920.^{25,26} (Fig. 5) In that role, he cared for the fire department's fire plug horses, maintained to pull heavy apparatus to protect the city. It was "his duty to see they didn't go lame or get stall sores or croup."²⁷ Meat and milk inspection were added to his responsibilities. When one of his former students at Cornell, Dr. Chester L. Roadhouse (1881–1969), was appointed to the faculty in dairy husbandry at the University of California at Davis, Dr. McNair said he took over local milk inspection for the Berkeley Board of Health in 1913.²⁸ In his governmental role, he was likely also involved in handling various animal-related public health matters for the municipality.

"During his first two years in Berkeley he taught three afternoons a week at the San Francisco Veterinary College, which is no longer in operation [after 1918]."²⁹

Also in 1908, Dr. McNair was one of a number of scientists and experts from the University of California who gave lectures and demonstrations on agriculture and horticulture. The Southern Pacific Railway lecture tour was open to agriculturists and the public in the Sacramento Valley.^{30,31} Dr. McNair spoke on diseases of animals, along with Dr. C.M. Haring, who spoke on "veterinary" medicine.

On December 31, 1908, Dr. McNair married Ida Irene Service (1877–1952), daughter of a local East Bay family.^{32,33} They had 3 children: John Frederick Hastings McNair (1911–1998) (married to Ruth Marie Banks), Virginia Irene McNair (1914–1989) (married to O.S. Gordon) and Constance Julia McNair (1919–1981) (married to Otto B. Johnson, later Richard Coffman).

In a recollection,³⁴ "Arthur A. Lewis was a boy of thirteen when Dr. McNair hired him in 1913 to work after school and Saturdays. In later years Lewis recalled how he once served as an anesthetist. *I was supposed to keep tension on a noose around the horse's upper lip while the doctor and an assistant cut a growth off the animal's ankle. I was supposed to keep the horse's attention off the operation. I didn't like my job, and once the assistant came running up and got after me for not twisting tight enough. I have often wondered which of us hurt the poor horse the most,*" he mused many years later."

Arburua noted that, "Besides conducting this busy practice, Dr. McNair always found time for professional and civic affairs. He was an instructor at the San Francisco Veterinary College, served as Berkeley's meat and dairy inspector, and as veterinarian for the Emeryville Race Track and the Berkeley Fire Department."³⁵ As Berkeley City Veterinarian, he was also one of the instructors giving special lectures at the 4-week short courses in animal industry and veterinary science in September 1910, a program instituted in 1907 by Dr. C.M. Haring in conjunction with the University of California at Davis College of Agriculture.^{36,37} Many years later, in 1959, Dr. McNair received certificates for 50-year membership in the American Veterinary Medical Association and the California State Veterinary Medical Association.

In addition to veterinary medicine, Dr. McNair was especially active in YMCA work and Boy Scouting, as well as supporting other children's recreational activities, including originating the Live Oak children's pet show. His efforts were recognized with a plaque from the Mayor of Berkeley in 1959, and an outstanding service award from the National Recreation Association in 1961. Also to his credit were terms on the board of the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce, church councils, and president of the Senior League that provided recreation activities for older citizens.

He may have been a sportsman of sorts as well. Dr. McNair had told Johnson "that until he purchased his first auto in 1912, he depended on horseflesh for transportation." It seems "one

of his horses, a black pacer, could pass every other outfit on the streets. When traffic was light, Dr. McNair could drive from downtown Berkeley, to the foot of Broadway, Oakland, in less than 25 minutes. That's a challenge for modern buses."³⁸ In a related story, "Dr. McNair was known to have raced an MD [physician] from Berkeley to downtown Oakland on dirt roads and usually won with his fine pacing mare and buggy."³⁹

Dr. F.H. White Joins Practice

From about 1922 to 1924, Floyd Henry White, DVM (1895–1962), worked with Dr. McNair as the practice grew.^{40,41} Born in Rhinebeck, New York, White attended Syracuse University and completed his DVM at the New York State Veterinary College at Cornell University in 1920.⁴² (Figs.6 and 7) Arburua⁴³ mentioned Dr. White as being one of 20 men employed in an avian-only practice and laboratory in Petaluma in 1923 that had been established by Dr. Cliff D. Carpenter. After Berkeley, Dr. White relocated across the Bay to San Rafael, California, where he spent the rest of his long career as a small animal practitioner.⁴⁴ He served as president of the California Veterinary Medical Association in 1946–1947.

Berkeley
McNair F H 2126 Haste
White F W 2126 Haste

Figure 6. Veterinarians. *Oakland Berkeley Alameda City Directory* 1922. Oakland, CA: Polk-Husted City Directory Co., 1922; p. 1711. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/oaklandberkeleya00polk>

White, Floyd Henry 14-17 19-20
DVM 2126 Haste St Berkeley
Calif

Figure 7. Source: *Cornell Alumni Directory*. Ithaca, NY: The University, 1922; p. 351. Cornell University Official Publication, v. XIII, No. 12. *Internet Archive*, [https://archive.org/details/cu31924032502704/page/n5\(mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/cu31924032502704/page/n5(mode/2up)

Berkeley Practice Passes to Dr. J.W. Roberts

After Dr. White left to establish his own practice, Dr. McNair was joined in 1925 by James William Roberts, DVS (1893–1967). Born in Davis Creek, California, Dr. Roberts had graduated from the San Francisco Veterinary College in 1915. When he arrived, "the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital at that time had a barn in the rear where farmers could bring horses and cattle for treatment having them much as they now have small animals."⁴⁵

"Reportedly, injuries from a horse kick forced him [Dr. McNair] to stop treating large animals and concentrate on his dog and cat practice."⁴⁶

By 1932, in addition to clinical services and boarding, the practice advertised selling wire-haired terriers in the *Oakland Tribune*.⁴⁷ (Fig. 8) The breeding source and extent of this sales activity are unknown.

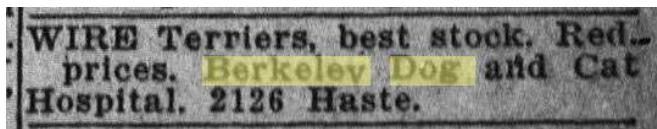


Figure 8. Merchandise. *Oakland Tribune*. 116(129):T-5, 1932 May 8. *California Digital Newspaper Collection*, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=OT19320508.1.27&srpos=26&e=-----en--20--21--txt-txIN-%22berkeley+dog%22-----1>



Figure 9. Dr. Fred H. McNair, date unknown.

Source: Arburua JM. Narrative of the Veterinary Profession in California. San Francisco, CA: The Author, 1966, p. 287.

In 1946, after many years of partnership, Dr. McNair was forced to retire because of a series of illnesses, and Dr. Roberts purchased the practice. (Fig. 9) However, Dr. McNair often went “back to the pet hospital to ‘baby sit’ for Dr. Roberts’ animal patients when the latter is called out of the city.”⁴⁸ Dr. McNair passed away on March 31, 1966, at age 94.^{49,50}

Shortly after becoming owner, Dr. Roberts began another remodel of the building, including many upgrades. In 1951, the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hos-

pital became one of the first accredited hospitals of the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) in California.⁵¹

Dr. Roberts became well known as a small animal practitioner for more than 50 years.^{52,53} Dog fanciers from distant areas brought their champions to him for routine visits and treatments. In addition to being a long-time member of the California Veterinary Medical Association and on the Honor Roll of the American Veterinary Medical Association, he was past president of the Bay Counties Veterinary Medical Association. He also served actively in many civic organizations. He was a life member and board member of the East Bay Botanical and Zoological Society and recipient of an award from the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce for his 50 years of service in the Chamber.

In addition to companion animals, many wild animals were brought in for treatment and boarding over the years, such as Oskie, the University of California at Berkeley’s black bear mascot. Students had first brought a live cub to a football game in 1933 that was housed at Dr. Roberts’ practice for 3 years.⁵⁴ Because keeping and handling a live, wild animal was impractical, it was decided that a costumed “Golden Bear” would be a better mascot, debuting at a game in 1941.

Ownership under Drs. Frye and Cucuel

In 1966, the year before Dr. Roberts died after a brief illness (on June 22, 1967), the practice was sold to Fredric L. Frye, BSc, DVM, MSc, CBiol, FIBiol, FRSR, and Jean-Paul E. Cucuel, DVM (1930–2014).

Dr. Frye had received his DVM from the University of California at Davis in 1964, while Dr. Cucuel, who had been born in Angouleme, France, had earned his degree at the Ontario Veterinary College in Canada in 1957. When these veterinarians decided to form a partnership to purchase the practice, Dr. Cucuel had been working at a local humane society and was particularly interested in caged bird medicine. As Dr. Frye explained, “together we could offer the public a wide range of expertise.”⁵⁵

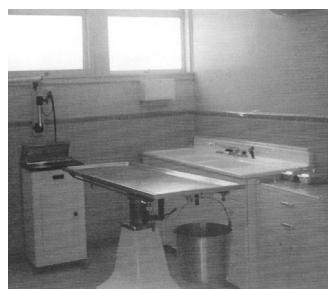
Interestingly, Drs. Frye and Cucuel decided to keep the name Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital, even “though it hardly described the variety of creatures that crossed our threshold.”⁵⁶

Remodeled Facilities Nationally Recognized

When Drs. Frye and Cucuel acquired the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital, the physical facilities, including the original building Dr. McNair had begun using in 1907, were described as “a conglomeration of architectural errors and add-ons.” (Fig. 10) A stucco and brick extension had been added to the front in 1932, and a one-story portion constructed on the west side. Further additions were made in 1963.^{57,58} (Figs. 11 and 12)



Figure 10. Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital, 2126 Haste Street, circa 1960s. Original courtesy of Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital. Source: Jensen, p. 17.



Figures 11, 12. Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital, circa 1960s treatment room (left), Kennels for overnight and extended stay (right). Source: Jensen, p. 18.

Facilities sizable enough to serve as a central hospital, accommodate modern advancements in medical technology, and advance the “growing sophistication of the practice” were needed. Drs. Frye and Cucuel wanted to make improvements that would enable pursuit of professional interests and also provide an opportunity “to train young people who are still in school or who have recently graduated and need some work experience.”⁵⁹

Three years later, the building had been successfully remodeled to better accommodate the advances occurring in veterinary medicine. The extensive renovations involved razing the oldest portion and replacing all the less-than-functional sections with a modern hospital facility.⁶⁰ Oakland architect John Lovejoy determined that the original 2-story 1880 vintage house could not be salvaged, but that some of the existing buildings were still structurally sound and could be repurposed and seismically retrofitted. “A new structure was designed to incorporate the existing and new elements into a single entity. Interior plans were completely overhauled, changing the floor space from 6595 to 7538 square feet.”⁶¹

The mechanical systems were upgraded, and the layout was redesigned to provide separate waiting areas for cats and dogs and a patient discharge route. A central treatment area with numerous examination rooms, 2 surgical operating areas, and efficient staff support features were included. In addition, raised beamed ceilings and a glassed-in aviary were incorporated for aesthetics and a spacious feel. The building exterior was redesigned in colored concrete brick and redwood siding, with client parking available in front.

All the tear-down and new construction during the renovations were undertaken gradually “without missing a day of practice.”⁶² When remodeling was complete, Dr. Frye remarked, “we have already found greatly increased efficiency resulting from the spacious treatment and surgical areas. In general, the entire plan allows four clinicians and a large lay staff to work in harmony without getting in each other’s way.”⁶³ Subsequent to a detailed description of the remodeling process in the April 1971 issue of *Veterinary Economics*, the design and construction received top recognition, earning the “1970 Remodeled Hospital of the Year Award” as announced in the July 1971 issue.^{64,65}

Dr. Frye was interested not only in dogs and cats but also in many other species, including birds, reptiles, and marine mammals. This led to the practice developing a reputation for special expertise in reptile and amphibian medicine. In addition to serving as a consultant to the Steinhart Aquarium in San Francisco, Dr. Frye wrote more than 8 books, several with revised editions, on captive reptile and amphibian husbandry, care, and medicine from *Husbandry, Medicine and Surgery of Captive Reptiles* in 1973 to *Self-Assessment Color Review of Reptiles and Amphibians* in 1995. With his gift for storytelling, he also related numerous tales of incidents and experiences with clients and patients of all species in a 1984 book entitled, *Phyllis, Phallus, Genghis Cohen and Other Creatures I Have Known*. Among those recollections, Dr. Frye commented,⁶⁶

As a university town, it [Berkeley] has long been known for the liberal views and diversity of the population. Among our clients at the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital were professors, Nobel laureates, impoverished students, and a generous sprinkling of people whose behavior was beyond the bell-shaped curve of what is considered ‘normal.’”

The free speech movement in Berkeley in 1964 and antiwar protests in spring of 1970 resulted in disruption to the practice. Student unrest forced Drs. Frye and Cucuel to suspend panels of plywood in front of the large windows to protect the building from damage. When civil disobedience erupted in the immediate area and on campus,⁶⁷ Frye explained that,

Berkeley residents responded with a wide spectrum of emotions, not always determined by age. Many older citizens expressed bewilderment and disgust at the civil disobedience shown by some younger demonstrators, others vociferously supported them. Many young people tried to prevent the wanton destruction of public and private property; others delighted in hurling garbage, paint, dung and bricks at the representatives of law and order.

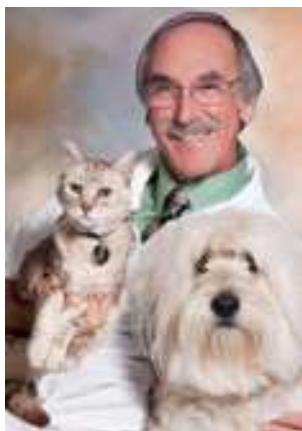
Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital was located near the center of the turmoil. More than once, tear gas and other chemical agents were drawn into our central ventilation system. Preoccupied with a patient, I would suddenly become aware of the acrid odor and a smarting of the eyes, as tears formed uncontrollably. When this happened, we would turn on the air conditioning, which would quickly dilute and dissipate the chemical.

Several dogs were brought to us after having been sprayed directly with the ‘crowd control’ agents. The creatures were frantic, their eyes streaming and their mouths drooling uncontrollably. We would flush their eyes out and calm them, and send them back into the embattled streets.

Next Transition to New Owners

In 1973, Dr. Frye had bought out his partner, Dr. Cucuel. Then, in 1976, after 10 years at the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital, Dr. Frye took a position as clinical professor of veterinary medicine at the University of California at Davis, where he also served as a consulting surgeon and pathologist. Dr. Cucuel retired from practice in the mid-1990s, after which he “helped establish PETs, an emergency care service in Berkeley.”⁶⁸

When Dr. Frye departed in 1976 to begin an academic position, he sold the practice to Drs. Richard Benjamin (Fig. 13a) and Alan G. Shriro (Fig. 13b), both of whom had received their DVM degrees from Cornell University, in 1972 and 1973, respectively. Together, Drs. Benjamin and Shriro set even higher standards with expanded services. They, too, kept the practice’s name. Dr. Shriro later explained that “the name was always a misnomer... We have always treated all kinds of animals. The name was chosen to distinguish it from the other vet in town, who specialized in horses.”⁶⁹



Figures 13a,b. (left) Richard Benjamin, DVM, with Ferrous (cat) and Scruff (dog); (right) Alan G. Shriro, DVM, with Gracie (dog). They both became owners of the practice in 1976. Photos courtesy Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital, <https://www.berkeleydogandcat.com/about-us/our-practitioners/>

Drs. Benjamin and Shriro also both served as board members and terms as president of the Alameda County Veterinary Medical Association. In addition, Dr. Shriro served a lengthy term as president of the Berkeley Humane Society. The two doctors were also volunteer veterinarians for the Oakland's Children Zoo, Lawrence Hall of Sciences at the University of California Berkeley, the Solano County Wildlife Rescue Organization, and the San Francisco Zoo. Under their ownership, the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital also participated in field trials for more than twenty animal health drugs undergoing clinical investigation by large pharmaceutical companies.

In other areas of need,⁷⁰ “Dr. Benjamin has consulted and served as a veterinary advisor to the pet insurance industry. Long ago, seeing a need for overnight emergency care in the bay area, Dr. Benjamin was instrumental in convincing 23 local veterinarians to start PETS, the first veterinary emergency facility serving this area. He voluntarily oversaw its first 20 years of operations.”

Specialist Practice Added

Drs. Benjamin and Shriro had yet another vision of expanding beyond the existing services of this well-known hospital to create a multispecialty practice department. They “quickly realized that the rapid advancement of technology occurring in the medical fields was beyond the financial reach of local veterinarians. Two years later in 1978, the Berkeley Center for Special Veterinary Services was opened within our facility to identify the then-novel concept of a group of specialists all sharing a single facility and a single set of advanced instrumentation.”⁷¹

Prior to 1976, if a veterinarian wanted to refer a case for care for advanced diagnostics and therapeutics and/or consults, the only option was to send the patient to the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital at the University of California at Davis, about 65 miles or 1 hour drive away. At that time, only a few specialists worked in private practice. Dr. Benjamin explained,

“Concerns related to client referral for specialty care within an existing (and often competing) general practice, were that they would lose the client to the other facility that they supported. This required a special approach for us wherein we made it quite clear to local veterinarians that any client referred to our specialists would not be seen or become a client within our general practice. As one might imagine, this took some convincing and proving among practices to maintain positive working relationships.”

The specialist group was created and, although the specialists were employees of the practice, the group was given its own name, sign, stationary, and telephone numbers. Special Veterinary Services operated successfully, convincing local animal hospitals that any clients referred for specialty services would be returned to their original practice for general care. Clients who refused to return to their original veterinarian were advised to seek veterinary services elsewhere.

Special Veterinary Services further increased the quality of medicine, raising the bar again in terms of level of care. The general practitioners learned from the specialists, elevating the quality of patient care provided throughout the entire practice. This was facilitated by the specialists and general practitioners occupying the same space and sharing the same support staff. Over the years, these specialists, nearly all of whom were board certified, provided services in the following areas: acupuncture, dentistry, dermatology, internal medicine, neurology, oncology, ophthalmology, radiology, and surgery. This consolidation also enabled the acquisition of advanced equipment, such as a CT scanner, the second installed in a small animal facility in the United States.

Emergency Service Implemented

As both the general and specialty practices continued to grow, it became apparent that 24-hour care was also needed. The specialists were highly concerned about critical care patients having to be transported to an all-night facility after 6 pm closing and then returned the following morning—the “wear and tear on the patients was terrible.” An in-house service was the obvious solution and, in 1991, the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital established a 24-hour service, the first private veterinary hospital in the Bay area to do so.⁷² Yet another service was the availability of a 24-hour ambulance to transport sick and injured pets in case an owner was too distraught to drive.

The three practices—the general practice, specialty practice, and emergency service—were structured independently, while operating cohesively. The professional staff grew from 2 general practitioners in 1976 to 14 full-time veterinarians in 2021, with a current technical and nursing support staff of 65.⁷³

The use of advanced technology, the presence of multiple specialists to handle complex cases, and a philosophy that the veterinarians can work in concert with one another to the benefit of the animals was groundbreaking in 1977. Many of the changes in the services and style provided in Berkeley became a model for other specialty referral practices throughout the United States and Canada.



Figure 14. Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital, 2126 Haste Street, circa July 2009. Source: Google Maps

Epilogue

Facilities were further expanded when a building next door was purchased in 1999. (Fig. 14)

The building was seismically retrofitted and remodeled to house the specialty group and advanced technologies, which also increased the number of examination rooms to a total of ten.

Over its more than 10 decades of existence, the Berkeley Dog & Cat Hospital has grown into “one of the largest and most sophisticated veterinary facilities in California.”⁷⁴ It is now part of the PetVet Care Centers Network, a national network of over 260 general, specialty, and emergency veterinary hospitals. Given its proud historical foundation, positive reputation, and time-honored legacy, this well-established practice will undoubtedly continue to provide diverse and quality veterinary care for many years to come.

Dr. Benjamin personally planted the orange trees along the sidewalk on Haste Street making the fruit freely available to anyone who would like it. Dr. Shriro has remarked, “I really love practicing in Berkeley... I get a chance to meet an amazingly high number of bright, educated, and slightly eccentric people, which I consider to be wonderful.”⁷⁵

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