

## A HERITAGE VETERINARY PRACTICE: THE ALAMO DOG AND CAT HOSPITAL – SAN ANTONIO

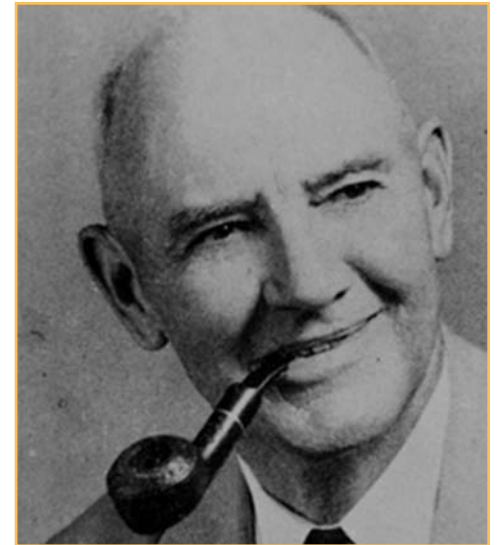
BY DECREE ON MARCH 7, 2009, BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE TEXAS VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION:

*“THE TEXAS VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION IS PRIVILEGED TO RECOGNIZE THE ALAMO DOG AND CAT HOSPITAL, SAN ANTONIO, AS A HERITAGE VETERINARY PRACTICE MERITING ADMIRATION AND RESPECT FOR HAVING BEEN IN CONTINUOUS OPERATION SINCE 1922.”*

A YOUNG VETERINARY STUDENT NAMED U.E. Marney who was attending the Kansas City Veterinary College worked as an assistant inspector for the Bureau of Animal Industry in 1911. Following graduation in 1912 as a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, he resigned from the bureau to enter private practice in Kansas as an associate veterinarian. He later left this practice to organize a company in Oklahoma City that focused on the production of blackleg bacterin (*clostridium chauvei-feseri bacterium*). He subse-

operating small animal-only private practice in Texas history. From the very beginning, it was a full-service animal hospital. Novel services such as pet ambulance transportation, grooming and boarding were also provided. He, as well as Dr. Frank E. Rutherford, a mixed animal practitioner in Dallas, courageously entered into the infancy of small animal medicine and surgery in extensive and untested ways. Failure was a real possibility during that era, but they were instead both successful and would permanently change the course of veterinary medicine. Other practitioners in San Antonio and Dallas would follow their lead three years later.

In 1927, an interesting and unique event in Texas veterinary medicine occurred at this practice. The story would continue for three-quarters of a century. Two married technicians who lived at the hospital, “Doc” and Mrs. Huizar, gave birth to their son, Santos “Skeezix” Huizar, in the surgery room. Skeezix grew up in the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital and became an employee at a very early age. He remained a lifelong faithful and popular



Dr. U.E. Marney – founder of the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital, San Antonio



Aerial view of the 1927 Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital and the Veterinary Service Institute, San Antonio

quently moved the company to San Antonio. After it was liquidated in 1922, Dr. Marney founded two businesses within one building on four acres of land at 1500 Pleasanton Road in the southern countryside of San Antonio that were named The Veterinary Service Institute and the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital. This facility, as well as his residence behind the hospital, were built of scrap wood from World War I barracks that were torn down at a nearby airbase. Within the Veterinary Service Institute, Dr. Marney patented medications such as worming treatments, creams, liniments and Marney’s Mange Cure that he shipped all over the United States. Although that business was successful for almost 30 years, it did not pass the test of time like the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital did.

Dr. Marney, the 1927 TVMA president, created what would become today the oldest continuously

employee, except for two stints in the U.S. Army and Navy, until his death 75 years later on April 24, 2002, at his son’s house. He began work in the kennels at 4:30 to 5 a.m. every morning while listening to big-band music that delightfully permeated the morning air around the hospital. When the other technicians and the veterinarian arrived at 7 a.m., Skeezix dependably had the business ready for the expected and unexpected joys and throes of veterinary practice at opening time. Skeezix had a great sense of humor, was usually prepared with practical jokes and corny euphemisms and would rarely have a bad day. Future hospital co-owner Dr. Ronald Orrell later said, “Skeezix was an animal technician of the first order, and we all learned many things about animal behavior, treatment of animals and humane animal restraint from him.” His loss was very difficult

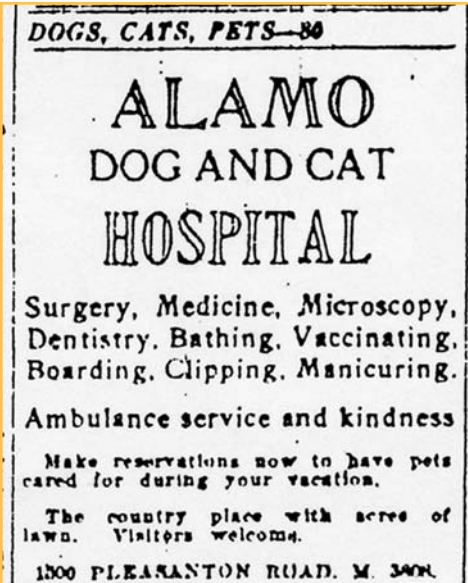
emotionally for the staff as well as countless clients.

On an unknown date in the later 1930s, the original wood building was made obsolete by the construction of a two-story hospital on the same acreage. As a result of the slight location change, the street address for the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital and the Veterinary Service Institute changed from 1500 to 1619 Pleasanton Road. This was a much larger building, which had an apartment on the second story for residential use by Dr. Marney and his family. The Huizars lived in a small house to the rear of the hospital. Additionally, the Veterinary Service Institute had its own separate building to the rear of the hospital. Both the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital and the Veterinary Service Institute continued to grow rapidly into the 1940s and beyond.

(MANGE MEDICINE) -----	O.B. Pkg
8/ -----	8 oz Blake
Kerosene ----- 11 gal 2 pts	16 oz Blake
Lined Oil, raw ----- 11 gal 9 pts	32 oz Blake
Fine Tar ----- 3 pts 4 oz	
Sulphur ----- 40 lbs	
DIRECTIONS: Printed labels	
--DO NOT USE ON FELINES --	
Comment:	
- May be used	
- by painting freely on all forms of mange, eczema and ringworm	
in dogs and other animals (except cats); clip animal before	
using.	
- for worn foot pads, pear pricks	

Marney’s Mange Cure was one of Dr. Marney’s most popular products that he sold from the Veterinary Service Institute.

As World War II was coming to a heroic conclusion, Dr. Marney was giving strong consideration to retirement after practicing for almost 36 years. He and his family had worked and lived on the grounds of both Alamo hospital buildings for 26 of those 36 years. The practice of small animal medicine and surgery was growing throughout the larger cities in Texas at this time, and the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital continued to be



Upon reading this 1926 newspaper advertisement whereby Dr. Marney indicated that the hospital was the “country place with acres of lawn,” one can only reverently chuckle when thinking of how large a city that country became! The word “microscopy” is an interesting notation on the ad as well.

no exception. In 1948, three former classmates of the Old Army A&M Class of 1943 purchased the practice, land and building from Dr. Marney. This group was comprised of Gerald W. Parker, DVM, Richard Culpepper, DVM, and R.D. Brown, DVM.

Dr. Parker initially came to the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital in 1943 but left in 1944 to serve in the U.S. Army. Dr. Culpepper practiced briefly in Beaumont, Tyler and Paris after graduation before coming to the Alamo hospital in 1944 to fill Dr. Parker’s position. In his relatively brief lifespan, Dr. Culpepper (1918-1968) distinguished himself as a highly competent and energetic practitioner as well as an active civic volunteer and leader. Dr. Culpepper was extremely interested in small animal nutrition and was quite proficient in the subject. His colleagues chose him to be president of the TVMA in 1949.

Dr. Parker served his tour of duty with the U.S. Army in Europe for which he was awarded two battle stars for his service in the Rhine and Germany campaigns. After he returned from the service, he spent two years in Corpus Christi, where he created and later sold a practice. Dr. Parker returned to the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital to join Dr. Marney and Dr. Culpepper. He and his family, as did all three partners and their families in the early years of their association, lived either in the apartment above the hospital, in the apartment on the first floor of the hospital or in the house behind the hospital building. Dr. Parker’s daughter, Anne, and son, Gerald Jr., grew up actively working in the practice. Anne married Dr. Ronald



Pictures of Santos “Skeezix” Huizar as an infant, young man and older adult at the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital. Note in the first picture to the left, “Doc” and Mrs. Huizar are holding the infant Skeezix. Also, note the picture with Skeezix and the dog with a monkey riding its back. The hospital in the background was sided with the boards from the demolition of the World War I airfield barracks.

Orrell, a future co-owner of the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital. Anne later served as the President of the Auxiliary to the Texas Veterinary Medical Association. Gerald W. Parker Jr. graduated from the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine in 1977. He was commissioned in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps and attained the rank of Colonel. He is a recognized authority on national security and protection against bioterrorism.

Dr. Gerald Parker Sr., a very popular veterinarian, continued to practice until the early 1990s. Over time, Dr. Parker was elected to the San Antonio City Council for four terms, served as president of the Bexar County Veterinary Medical Association in the mid-1950s, was appointed to the Texas State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners and was the 1964 TVMA president. Dr. Parker is currently 88 years young and still lives in San Antonio.

Dr. Brown left his classmates in 1942, before their last year of veterinary school, to serve in World War II. Captain Brown returned from service in 1947, finished his last year of veterinary school and joined his two old classmates and Dr. Marney in practice. Dr. Brown enjoyed a long career with the Alamo hospital and served as the president of the Bexar County VMA. He, in conjunction with Dr. Culpepper and Dr. Parker, built five smaller practices at various times and in different cities. Those practices remained separate from the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital and were later sold. Dr. Brown retired in the late 1980s and died on April 18, 2001, in Victoria, Texas.

In 1948, as stated, Dr. Marney retired. Those who knew him well said that Dr. Marney savored his retirement years. He came to the animal hospital on a regular basis, generally in the afternoons, to drink room-temperature Coca-Cola while observing the clinic activities and talking with the new owners and staff. He and Mrs. Marney enjoyed a virtual lifetime of eating dinner at the Luby’s Cafeteria in the



The hospital ambulance in the early to mid-1940s

Milam Building in downtown San Antonio. They would oftentimes take young Anne Parker with them, and today she has fond memories of those times. However, all of this would sadly end in the early 1950s when Dr. Marney was struck with a sudden illness and subsequently passed away while at an American Veterinary Medical Association meeting in Kansas City, Kansas.

In the late 1950s, the Veterinary Service Institute was sold to a pharmaceutical company. The remainder of the four acres that was not being used by the hospital was sold to the Circle K Company Inc.

In the 1960s, a new treatment facility was built. Some technicians, such as Alvin Baucom, continued to live on the premises but for only a few more years. After that time, no one would live on the grounds of the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital ever again. In the late 1960s, sadness would once again prevail over the animal hospital with the sudden death of Dr. Culpepper. The partnership, however, continued between Dr. Parker and Dr. Brown.

In 1970, Dr. Ronald Orrell (Texas A&M University, 1968) joined the staff at the animal hospital. He had previously worked there as a veterinary student, served in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps

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The Old Army A&M Class of 1943. Pictured are Drs. Gerald Parker and Richard Culpepper. Dr. Brown, who is not in the picture, deferred his 1943 senior year of veterinary school to go into the service for four years. He completed his last year of veterinary school and graduated from A&M in 1947. The three future veterinary partners were, therefore, classmates in almost every sense of the word.



Dr. Gerald W. Parker



Dr. Richard Culpepper



Dr. R.D. Brown

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for two years after graduation from veterinary school and, as stated, he was married to the former Anne Parker. Also in 1970, Dr. Eric Lange (Texas A&M University, 1970) entered into a partnership agreement with Drs. Orrell, Parker and Brown.

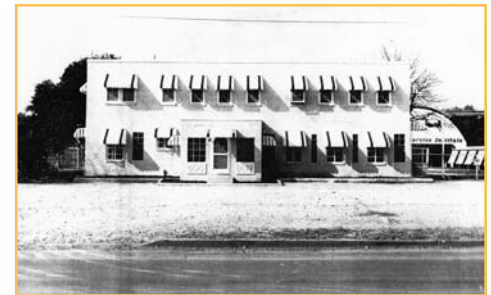
Referring to his past days at the practice, Dr. Orrell said, "The Alamo was a busy hospital that cared for and treated most of the (small) animal population on the south side of San Antonio. We always had plenty to do. Scheduled surgeries were done in the morning if possible. One veterinarian would be seeing clients while others would be in surgery or treating animals in the hospital. Many of the clients were reluctant to see any of the new veterinarians and that included Dr. Lange and me. This placed an undue load on Dr. Parker until he could convince the clients that we really did know what we were doing and would take

good care of their pets." Recalling the technicians of the past, Dr. Orrell said, "In addition to SkeeziX, there was another technician named Alvin Baucom. He was a person from whom we learned many lessons about the care of animals. If there was ever an animal that needed restraint, one could not have had a better assistant than Alvin." Alvin worked at the hospital from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. He also lived on the property for a portion of that time. Commenting about past daily events, Dr. Orrell said, "Saturday was usually a very busy day and although our hours stated that we closed at noon, we would often stay on after closing the doors to treat and care for animals admitted that morning. It became a Saturday ritual to order lunch from Bill Miller's Bar-B-Q and break for lunch before finishing treatments."

In 1979, Dr. and Mrs. Orrell left the practice for him to attend the Medical School of Juarez. After completing his residency program in Nashville,



Drs. Marney (3rd from the left) and Brown (4th from the right) receiving formal recognition, with other past presidents, by the Bexar County VMA



The Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital in the late 1940s and early 1950s



1951 Willis Overland ambulance driven by technician Alvin Baucom

the Orrells moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where Ronald Orrell, DVM, MD, was in a private anesthesiology practice until he retired in 2006. Upon retirement, Dr. and Mrs. Orrell moved to College Station. Dr. Lange left the Alamo hospital about five years after the departure of Dr. Orrell. He opened a practice in San Antonio, which he sold several years later. He then established the La Cantar Animal Hospital in San Antonio in July 2002 where he currently practices small animal medicine and surgery. The Orrells' daughter, Jaye, married the Langes' son, Todd.

In 1985, Dr. Mark LaBrie (Texas A&M University, 1982) purchased the practice and property of the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital. Dr. LaBrie has remained the sole owner of the animal hospital to current date.

In 2004, Dr. LaBrie replaced the aging



The Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital in the mid-1950s and then in the 1960s



Dr. Mark LaBrie and The Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital from the 1980s to present day. Note that continuing education has always been an important part of this practice.

structure with a beautiful modern building. He constructed it to the rear of the older building, demolished the older structure and then used the resulting vacant ground for larger parking lot purposes for his new hospital.

Over time, many associate veterinarians, such as Dr. Anmarie Macfarland, a 1990 graduate of Texas A&M University and the 2008 TVMA president, have worked at the hospital. Several technicians have entered veterinary school, graduated and joined existing practices or created their own. Numerous family member combinations have existed at the practice: mothers and daughters; fathers and sons; sisters and brothers; husbands and wives, and even whole family units.

When asked about the history at his animal hospital, Dr. LaBrie reminisced, "It is great to be honored as the oldest private (small animal) practice in Texas. When I look back on the history

of Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital, I think of all the talented people who worked together from 1922 to present day to provide state of the art veterinary care to the San Antonio community. The previous owners all stressed quality medicine and surgery, continuing education and involvement in veterinary associations. Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital has always been a supporter of local schools and Little League teams. The hospital has been remodeled, enlarged, razed and replaced but the established practice values have remained constant throughout these many years as well as the longevity and dedication of both the clients and staff. When presently we stand on the shoulders of the past and look back, it is truly humbling to see how far we have come. We started with patent medicines (that we still have formulas for!) then antibiotics, chemotherapeutic agents and today we have genetic therapeutics.



The Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital in the 1970s. Please note that the second story apartments were removed during a remodeling process which caused the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital to become a one-story hospital building.

Who knows what my successors will be treating diseases with in the future?"

Head technician and hospital historian, Vicki Gonzalez, remarked with great pride and joy as she and Dr. LaBrie discussed their animal hospital, "The Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital has not strayed from its roots. It has remained committed to being a full-service hospital for small animals all these many years." Vicki Gonzalez is dedicated to keeping the history of the "Alamo" alive and well.

At the annual TVMA meeting in San Antonio on March 7, 2009, 88-year-old Dr. Gerald W. Parker Sr., his son Dr. Gerald W. Parker Jr., Dr. Mark LaBrie, Dr. and Mrs. Ronald Orrell, Dr. Eric Lange and head technician Vicki Gonzalez were present to receive the Texas Veterinary Heritage Practice Award for the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital. The President of the Texas Veterinary Medical Association, Dr. Anmarie Macfarland, presented the award to her old boss, Dr. Parker, and to his successor, Dr. LaBrie. ★



Dr. Macfarland presented the Texas Veterinary Heritage Practice Award to Dr. Mark LaBrie, the owner of the Alamo Dog and Cat Hospital.