Before 1894, no school of veterinary medicine existed in California, or in any of the western states. Today we have two veterinary colleges in California, the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine and Western University’s College of Veterinary Medicine. What were the options in California in between 1894 and 1948 for students interested in a career as a veterinarian?

The University of California Veterinary College, 1894-1900
The first veterinary school in California was affiliated with the University of California, yet it was supported entirely by student fees and private contributions. The entire faculty – six veterinary professors and lecturers plus five physicians – served without pay, and many of them contributed money to help defray expenses. The first class, three men, received the DVS degree in 1897. There were four graduates in 1898, and one graduate in each of the next three years. The reason the college closed was lack of funds due to lack of students. Tuition cost $100 a year, which was similar to other veterinary colleges, but this college required three years for a degree, rather than two, making it more expensive. The curriculum was more demanding too: high-school graduation was required for admission, which was more than most other veterinary colleges required.

The San Francisco Veterinary College, 1898-1918
The second veterinary school in California was established by Dr. E.J. Creely (CVMA president in 1904, incidentally). The San Francisco Veterinary College began with night classes over Dr. Creely’s office and hospital, but soon became a day school. The first classes graduated after two years of study, but after...
1902 three years of study were required (and cost a total of $345). The first class – four men – graduated in 1900. In 1901 there were nine graduates, 10 in 1902, and three in 1903. After that, however, the classes began to grow and by the time the school closed in 1918 there were about forty in each class. In 1905 there were 14 men on the teaching staff, including seven veterinarians and four physicians, which compared favorably with other contemporary schools. The school closed in 1918, along with most of the private veterinary schools in the United States, owing to World War I. Among its 330 alumni was one woman, Dr. Clara Lamplough, who graduated in 1917 and was the first woman licensed to practice veterinary medicine in California.

California State Polytechnic College, 1901–now
The California Polytechnic School was established in San Luis Obispo by the legislature in 1901. Originally it offered vocational high school education in agriculture and industry; by 1940 it offered a Bachelor of Science college degree. The only veterinary instruction given at Cal Poly was limited to livestock health and sanitation. The first veterinarian on the faculty worked there from 1921-23. At least a dozen of Cal Poly’s students up to 1950 went on to veterinary colleges.

University of California Extension Service, 1910–now
The UC Agricultural Extension Service was the result of the Morrill Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1862. Its purpose was to take teaching and research findings out into the field. Thus the extension veterinarians kept in close touch with county advisors, attended or called meetings of farm groups, and discussed animal diseases. At these meetings laws were discussed along with methods of handling diseases. New drugs and therapeutic measures were described and demonstrated. Extension veterinarians also wrote informative articles in farm journals to disseminate information. The first extension veterinarian in California was employed in 1910, in the area of milk control and dairying. In 1920 Dr. C.M. Haring (a CVMA member since 1904 and later the first dean of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine) was made director of the Agricultural Experiment Station and he made field trips, organized county agents, and touched upon veterinary topics. The UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine is a continuation and expansion of the Agricultural Experiment Station.

Before UC Davis opened in 1948, high school graduates who wanted to study veterinary medicine had to attend out-of-state institutions. The CVMA conducted a survey in 1937 showing that over 300 California high school students desired to study veterinary medicine, but had to go out of state to pursue this career path, where there weren’t enough openings to accommodate all of them. This data led in part to the formation of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

Sources: