



Equine Dental Specialty

### **Brief History of Equine Dentistry**

Equine dentistry has been practiced in many forms for hundreds, even thousands, of years by individuals of various levels of training. From domestication (circa 4000 BCE) through the end of World War II, the horse played a critical role in the development, expansion, and survivability of civilizations. The armies of the world used horses as a means of tactical and strategic battlefield maneuverability as well as a resource for both logistical and troop transportation. Horses were also used for commercial transportation and agricultural labor. Equine dentistry was a standard part of veterinary practice until motorized vehicles and machinery replaced the horse.

The foundations for modern equine veterinary dentistry in North America began after the US Civil War. Veterinary dentistry can be said to have begun with equine dentistry, as the horse was the animal most commonly treated by veterinarians until the mid-twentieth century. The earliest books on farriery or compendiums on agriculture often included sections on equine teeth. Books specific to equine dentistry in the early 1800's were initially descriptions of aging horses using the teeth. In 1855, E. Mayhew wrote *The Horse's Mouth*, which included a section on dental abnormalities; this was followed by equine dental books by Robert Jennings, W.H. Clarke, T.D. Hinebach and R.S. Huidekoper later in the 1800's. In his 1906 text, *Animal Dentistry and Diseases of the Teeth*, A. Merillat commented that "the principle objective of dentistry is to promote the general health (of the horse) by improving mastication and relieving pain", which remains the objective of veterinary dentistry today. Equine dentistry remained an important part of equine practice until after World War II, when the focus of large animal veterinary care and research was redirected toward livestock.

With the exception of Dr. Erwin Becker and his colleagues in Germany, equine dental care remained relatively unexplored and saw a decline in clinical practice between 1950 and 1980.

Over the past three-four decades, the hard work of a core group of determined and focused veterinarians developed equine dental clinical expertise, research programs and training opportunities, and published a wide array of articles regarding equine dentistry.

Equine dentistry has expanded well beyond "floating" and extractions, to encompass all dental disciplines including oral surgery, endodontics, management of occlusal abnormalities, periodontics, and restorative dentistry.

A list of historical references relevant to equine teeth, mouth and dental conditions is included in the separate bibliography file on this web site