

Robert Marshak, Penn Vet

NOVEMBER 3, 2020

VOL 67 ISSUE 17 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-67-NUMBER-17](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-67-number-17)) | DEATHS | PRINT



Robert Marshak

Penn Vet Dean Emeritus Robert R. Marshak died on October 19 at Penn Hospice at Rittenhouse. He was 97.

Dr. Marshak graduated from the New York State Veterinary College (now part of Cornell University) in 1945. For the next 11 years, he engaged in clinical investigation and practice on dairy cattle in Vermont, researching two metabolic diseases of cattle, parturient paresis (“milk fever”) and ketosis. In 1956, Penn Vet dean Mark Allam recruited Dr. Marshak as an interim chair of Penn Vet’s department of medicine. Five years later, he was also appointed a professor of medicine. During the 1960s, Dr. Marshak researched bovine leukemia, influential work that in 1965 culminated in the establishment of the National Cancer Institute-sponsored Bovine Leukemia Research Center at Penn Vet’s New Bolton Center. In 1968, Dr. Marshak received an honorary Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Bern in Switzerland.

As department chair, Dr. Marshak brought Penn Vet’s clinical program up to the standards of medical schools’ clinical programs at the time. He recruited eminent clinician-scientists, incentivized research from professors, and redefined clinical veterinary specialties for a new era of veterinary schools. In response to this innovation, Penn President Martin Meyerson appointed Dr. Marshak the ninth dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine in 1973 (*Almanac* September 18, 1973 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v20pdf/n04/091873.pdf>)). He served in this position until retiring in 1987, an era that Penn Vet called “a period of sweeping change, innovation, and investment” in an online tribute to Dr. Marshak.

As dean, Dr. Marshak oversaw the construction of Penn Vet’s small animal hospital in the late 1970s (*Almanac* May 10, 1977 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v23pdf/n32/051077.pdf>)). In addition, he oversaw enhancements and additions to Widener Hospital at New Bolton Center (*Almanac* May 8, 1980 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v26pdf/n34/050880.pdf>)) and the building of the C. Mahlon Kline Center for Orthopedics and Rehabilitation, at the time the world’s most advanced equine treatment center. Under Dr. Marshak’s leadership, Penn Vet garnered an international reputation as a trailblazer in comparative medical research. Among other curricular innovations, he introduced a core-elective curriculum and launched the pioneering Program of Aquatic Animal Medicine and Center for Interactions of Animals and Society.

In 1983, Dr. Marshak led the five-year, \$41.5 million *Second Century* capital campaign that accelerated the School’s breakthroughs in cancer research, reproductive physiology, and pathobiology; and set the stage for the School to flourish in the decades since. In recognition of his contributions to the School, Vernon and Shirley Hill established the Robert Marshak-Vernon Hill Scholarship Fund for VMD-MBA Training at Penn Vet and Wharton in 2016 (*Almanac* July 12, 2016 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-63-number-1#vernon-and-shirley-hill-1-million-scholarship-fund-for-vmd-mba-trainin>)). “Dr. Marshak transformed veterinary medicine, and we are pleased to partner with him as Penn Vet and the Wharton School take the next big step,” said Mr. Hill. After retiring in 1987, Dr. Marshak became emeritus professor and Penn Vet Dean Emeritus.

Dr. Marshak was a charter diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine and served as president in 1975. He served on the editorial boards of several journals, including the *American Journal of Veterinary Research*, the *Journal of the American Veterinary Radiology Society*, and the *Cornell Veterinarian*. He held numerous veterinary association leadership roles, including at the American Association of Veterinary Clinicians, the National Academy of Sciences, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

“Dean Marshak’s accomplishments as Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine are surpassed only by his unwavering love and dedication to our community,” said the Gilbert S. Kahn Dean of Veterinary Medicine, Andrew M. Hoffman. “He worked tirelessly to redefine the veterinary profession and he is unquestionably the ‘Father of Veterinary Clinical Specialties.’ Dr. Marshak will be greatly missed; by his adoring family, by the veterinarians and scientists who respected him so deeply, and by his extraordinary network of cherished friends and colleagues. His passionate and deep commitment to basic science revolutionized our institution, and his legacy will live on.”

Dr. Marshak is survived by his wife, Margo; sons, William, John, and Richard; stepson, Derrick Marshall; and a grandchild. Donations in Dr. Marshak’s memory may be made to the Dr. Robert Marshak Memorial Fund at Penn Vet Office of Institutional Advancement, 3800 Spruce St., Suite 151E, Philadelphia, PA 19104, “Attn: Marshak Memorial Gifts” or at <https://giving.apps.upenn.edu/fund?program=VT2&fund=604863> (<https://giving.apps.upenn.edu/fund?program=VT2&fund=604863>)