

## *In memoriam*

### **George Martin Baer, DVM, MPH, 1936-2009**

The father of oral rabies vaccination



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George Martin Baer, known for his development of the oral rabies vaccine instrumental in rabies control in Europe, died on 2 June 2009 at the age of 73 in Mexico City, Mexico. He was born on 12 January 1936 in London, England, to German immigrants who had fled Nazi Germany. His family emigrated to the United States in 1940 where he grew up in New Rochelle, New York.

George had a love of animals, particularly horses, which may have influenced his career path. He earned an undergraduate degree in agricultural sciences in 1954 from Cornell University followed by a degree in veterinary medicine in 1959. He then went on to earn a master's degree in public health in 1960 from the University of Michigan. During some time in Mexico, George met and fell in love with his wife, Maria Olga Lara. Thanks to James H. Steele, his long-time friend and mentor, he started his public health career with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and was assigned to the New York State Health Department

where he learned epidemiology and virology. He went on to work on bat rabies at the CDC's Southwest Rabies Investigations Laboratory in New Mexico. From 1966 to 1969, he worked with the National Institute for Livestock Research (*Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Pecuarias*: INIP) in Mexico and helped develop the *Plan Derriengue* to control paralytic bovine rabies which became the early work in the development of Mexico's rabies control programmes. He returned to Atlanta in 1969 to direct the CDC Rabies Laboratory. There, he led a team of researchers in developing an oral rabies vaccine for wildlife, earning him the title 'The Father of Oral Rabies Vaccination'. His text, *The Natural History of Rabies*, first published in 1975 and again in 1991, continues to be a definitive international reference for rabies control.

After his retirement, George returned to Mexico and continued his research and training, working to develop not only public health programmes, but new researchers as well. At the time of his death, he was working on a new influenza vaccine. The laboratory where he worked was named in his honour. In addition to English and German, he spoke fluent Spanish, raising his children to speak all three languages in addition to French spoken by their governess.

George is survived by his wife of 49 years, his three daughters, Katherine Baer, economist, of Washington, DC, Alexandra Baer, sculptor and artist, of New Paltz, New York, and Isabella Baer, an opera singer, of Mexico City, and four granddaughters.

Funeral services were held at the Iglesia de Santa Rosa de Lima in Mexico City on 4 June 2009 followed by services in New York.

Paul E. Grunenwald, DVM, MSc  
Zoonosis Veterinarian, Texas Department of State Health Services

The CDC 2009 World Rabies Day Symposium was held on 28 September in memory of George Baer, his pioneering work on oral rabies vaccination and dedication to rabies control worldwide