

Biography of Homer N. Calver

Homer Northup Calver was born in New York City on November 22, 1892, the only son of William Louis Calver and Mary Ella Northup Calver. Through his mother, he was a member of the Sons of the Revolution. His father was a distinguished antiquarian, noted for his researches in Indian life on Manhattan Island and his explorations of British and American camp relics of the Revolutionary War.

In 1914, Mr. Calver graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where Professor William T. Sedgwick had guided him to take courses in bacteriology and sanitation in preparation for public health work. After graduation, in order not to miss the only war he expected to encounter, Mr. Calver volunteered for service in France with the American Ambulance Service. After a bout with pneumonia, he was sent home and spent several months recuperating from suspected tuberculosis at Saranac Lake.

In 1916, he joined the health department of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, later becoming the Acting Health Officer. Here he brought the city through a diphtheria epidemic, secured the passage of a modern ordinance for protecting the milk and food supply and established one of the first local health education programs. In 1918, however, he returned to France as a commissioned officer in the Army and served at the front as a lieutenant and later captain of the Mobile Field Laboratory of the 89th Division. After the Armistice, he stayed to teach at the A.E.F. University at Beaune. On his return, he worked at the national headquarters of the American Red Cross, and was a pioneer in developing interest in health centers throughout the country.

In 1923, Mr. Calver became Executive Secretary of the American Public Health Association (APHA) and in 1925 editor of the American Journal of Public Health. During his seven-year-term of office, he put the Journal in the black and helped the society double its membership. He developed and promoted a plan for affiliated state societies and branches with the national group. His projected western branch of APHA was formed in 1925.

From 1928 to 1932, he was Assistant Professor of Hygiene at the New York University Medical College.

Mr. Calver had always been interested in reaching the public through health exhibits, which combine scientific accuracy with showmanship. He founded, and for ten years headed, APHA's Scientific Exhibits Committee. After visiting the German Museum of Hygiene in Dresden in 1930, he organized the Committee of American Museum of Hygiene under the auspices of APHA, serving as Secretary of this committee until it was absorbed into the American Museum of Health in 1937, when he became Secretary and Director of the new museum. In 1936, under a grant from the Oberlander Trust, he made an extended study of health and other exhibits in Europe and brought back from Dresden an outstanding collection of health exhibits, including the famous "Transparent Man." This exhibit became the nucleus of the famous Health and Medical Exhibit of the New York World's Fair, which Mr. Calver planned and directed. This exhibit attracted 12 million visitors, a record that has not been equaled for any health exhibition anywhere.

After Mr. Calver's resignation as Secretary of APHA, he became Secretary-Treasurer of the New York State League of Savings and Loan Associations. Under his leadership, every savings and loan association in the state came through the bank crisis of 1933 without loss to a single depositor. After the crisis, Mr. Calver returned to the public health field to organize a Public Health Committee for the Paper Cup and Container Institute (now the called the Foodservice & Packaging Institute), where he established and edited the widely popular Health Officers News Digest (now called Environmental News Digest, "E.N.D.") for nearly 25 years. Subsequently, he directed the public relations program of the Institute.

During the Second World War, Mr. Calver served as a consultant in health education to the Office of Inter-American Affairs, then working to stimulate production of vital raw materials in South America. In November 1951, he attended the Conference on Administrative and Scientific Problems of the Food Aspects of Civil Defense in London as a special advisor to the Federal Civil Defense Administration. He helped to found the Public Relations Society of America and define a code of ethics for this new profession. He served as a member of the Governing Board of the National Publicity Council, the National Thrift Committee and the Society of Public Health Educators, which he helped to found. He also served as a member of the Board of Municipal Art Society, the Child Study Association of America, the American Institute of the City of New York and the Public Resolutions Society of America. For 25 years he was a director of the Bankers Federal Savings and Loan Association and was a member of the Board of Directors of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization.

He was an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Sanitary Institute of Great Britain and was a visiting professor at the American University of Beirut in 1957 and 1959 and a visiting lecturer at the University of Hawaii in 1968.

In 1922 he married Elizabeth Hulings Lappe, a Pittsburgh woman of French Huguenot descent. They had two daughters, Judith Margaret and Cornelia, and six grandchildren. He made his home in Clinton Corners, Dutchess County, New York, but traveled extensively.