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The Laboratory Rat (Second Edition)

American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine

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Chapter 1 - Historical Foundations

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Publisher Summary

This chapter traces the biomedical history including the early events and personalities involved in establishment of *Rattus norvegicus* as a leading laboratory animal. With the coming of modern civilization, a suitable ecological niche became available to the species as an economic pest, allowing its numbers to increase rapidly and spread over the world in close association with man. Regardless of the exact details, the Norway rat became the first mammalian species to be domesticated primarily for scientific purposes. There is some evidence available to suggest that rats probably were used sporadically for nutrition experiments in Europe prior to 1850. Use of the rat in behavioral research began in the Department of Neurology at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. The first behavioral studies using rats were done on an investigation of the effect of alcohol, diet, and barometric changes on animal activity. The Norway rat probably was first used as an experimental animal in a few nutrition studies conducted in Europe prior to 1850. Its popularity for this purpose continued upward as it was used increasingly in several nutrition laboratories in Europe for next several years.

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