

## Book review — Boekresensie

### Onderstepoort 1908–2008

D.W. Verwoerd and R.D. Bigalke (editors)

2008. *Veterinary History Committee of the South African Veterinary Association, Pretoria, pp. 216, hardback. Price R200.00. ISBN 978-0-620-41399-2. Available from the South African Veterinary Association at zandile@sava.co.za*

October 2008 saw the commemoration of the centenary of the inauguration of the first building on the Onderstepoort campus. This building was declared a national monument in 1983. The roots of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute actually go back further, to 1896, when the rinderpest pandemic sweeping down the African continent prompted the government of the then Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek to establish a 'disinfection station' at Daspoort, on the outskirts of Pretoria, under the supervision of Arnold Theiler. The activities of that rather basic laboratory were transferred in October 1908 to the state-of-the-art building that had been erected on the farm 'De Onderstepoort', north of Pretoria. The name Onderstepoort has since become synonymous with veterinary research and education, not only in South Africa, but also far beyond its borders.

The Veterinary History Committee of the SAVA, and in particular the 2 editors, Drs D W Verwoerd and R D Bigalke, are to be congratulated for taking on a mammoth task and producing a comprehensive account of the history of the 1st 100 years of Onderstepoort in time for the centennial celebrations.

The book is attractively laid out and reader-friendly, with a wealth of black-and-white and colour illustrations. It is divided into 3 sections: the general history of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute, the general history of the Faculty of Veterinary Science, and the history of individual disciplines. Chapters within these sections were compiled by various authors.

Selecting the contents of a book of this nature, covering such a vast field, is a daunting task for an author or editor. No two persons will make the same selection. One also assumes that there were cost constraints and that the editors could not

allow the contents to expand to unmanageable dimensions. What I personally found disappointing, though, is that the late Anna Verster, who spent her entire career at Onderstepoort and was a world-renowned expert in her field, did not merit a photograph. Some accounts of the history of individual disciplines give a broad synthesis of research at both the Institute and the Faculty, while in others only the Institute is covered.

Although the book is technically well-produced, some typographical errors slipped through, including the misspelling of the surname of one of the editors on the spine. The organism causing heartwater (in 1 instance referred to as the 'casual' organism) is variously given as *Ehrlichia ruman-tium* and *E. raminantium*. A more serious error is a statement (on p. 151) that *Chlamydia trachomatis* causes river blindness in humans; the latter is a parasitic disease caused by the helminth *Onchocerca volvulus*, transmitted by blackflies (*Simulium* spp.). In various places, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (the UK equivalent of the South African Veterinary Council) is mentioned when it is clear from the context of the statement that the Royal Veterinary College (part of the University of London) is implied.

Overall, though, the few errors are of minor importance. This book is a thoroughly good read for anyone who is interested in the development of veterinary science. It left me with a great sense of pride in the immense contribution that Onderstepoort, as a whole, has made to the welfare of humans and animals not only in South Africa, but worldwide.

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