

Veterinary education in South Africa: the Classes of 1938 and 1939

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ABSTRACT

Concise descriptions are given of the life histories of the 10 members of the classes of 1938 and 1939. All of them initially joined the government service, Hugo, Steenekamp and Schatz spending their entire careers in the South African Veterinary (Field) Services. Mansvelt, the first recipient of the much-coveted Theiler medal, was the 2nd veterinarian to be appointed Director of Veterinary Services, a position specially created for the 'Field' in 1962. Having first established a successful private practice, Hofmeyr was appointed as the 1st full-time Professor of Surgery of the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1958 and its 1st full-time Dean in 1976. Albertyn opted for a career in public health, becoming director of 1 of the largest local municipal abattoirs. Turner spent virtually his entire career in private practice and was eventually joined by Brown who had served in the British Colonial Veterinary Service for many years. Fick was a government veterinarian for his entire career, first in South Africa, then in the British Colonial Service (for 13 years) and finally returning to South Africa. Like Hugo, Muller filled a senior position in Veterinary (Field) Services before he opted for a farming career.

Keywords: 1938 and 1939, British Colonial Service, Dean of Faculty, graduates, private practice, public health, state veterinarians, Theiler medal.

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The Class of 1938

The photograph of the Class of 1938 (Fig. 1) is the customary pre-graduation one on which the presumed Acting Dean, Prof. Dr G de Kock, and head of the hostel, HPA de Boom, feature with 5 of the 6 graduates. No graduation regalia are in

evidence. Therefore the photograph was probably taken at the end of the final year shortly after completion of the examinations. At this stage Prof. Dr P J du Toit was – and would for a further decade – be the Dean of the Faculty. His absence can probably only be ascribed to one of his many overseas visits.

Johannes Fuch Fick (Fig. 2) was born on

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Fig. 1: Seated (left to right): S G Turner, Prof. G de Kock, HPA de Boom (head of hostel). Standing (left to right): P R Mansvelt, G L Muller, C F B Hofmeyr, N C F Steenekamp.



Fig. 2: J F Fick.

10 September 1914 in Christiana and obtained his BVSc degree in 1938. He subsequently spent his entire career in the civil service, first with the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services, doing duty as state veterinarian at East London and Umtata. However, in 1949 he decided to join the British Colonial Veterinary Service and was posted to Swaziland as government veterinary officer. In 1958 he was transferred to Bechuanaland (now Botswana) where he was promoted to divisional veterinary officer and placed in charge of the Western Division, stationed at Maun and Lobatsi. He retired from the Colonial Service in 1962 to rejoin Field Services stationed at Kokstad, but was transferred to Umtata in 1963 where he served until 1965. From there he was transferred to East London where he had started. He died in service on 26 June 1972 at the age of almost 58.

Christiaan Frederick Beyers (Hoffie) Hofmeyr was born on 15 August 1916 in Pietersburg (now Polokwane) where his father farmed in the district. He matriculated at the Pietersburg High School and completed his 1st university year at Stellenbosch University. Qualifying as a veterinarian in 1938, he joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian and was posted to Umtata in the Transkei where he met his future wife Brenda (née Munro). She was a great supporter of Hoffie's career as veterinarian and very dedicated to their family consisting of 3 sons and a daughter.

After a transfer to Rustenburg, Hoffie

opened a private practice in Pretoria in Malan Street, Riviera. He obtained some financial assistance for this, in those days, dramatic step from Dr Jack Boswell, who had qualified in 1934. Hofmeyr later moved his practice to his home in Hilda Street in Hatfield and finally to Pretorius Street. Over the next 15 years he developed his practice into one of the finest in this country. Even as practitioner he specialised in surgery, raising the discipline to a professional level not reached by any of his predecessors or contemporaries. His professionalism was legendary. While still practising, he ran the ambulatory clinic of the Onderstepoort faculty on a part-time basis. He was also contracted as veterinarian to the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria.

Hoffie was appointed professor and Head of Surgery at the Faculty in 1958 – the faculty having just been restructured to accommodate so-called full-time appointments – and built up his department to one that could compete with the best in the world. In 1969 he became part-time Dean of the Faculty and in 1976 he was appointed as its 1st full-time Dean. He was instrumental in introducing postgraduate, specialist, mainly clinical MMedVet and BVSc (Hons) degrees in a large number of disciplines as well as a very successful diploma course in veterinary nursing.

Prof. Hofmeyr was a great and active protagonist of the Faculty's incorporation into the University of Pretoria, which, to his great delight, realised in 1973 when the Faculty became independent from the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute and the Department of Agriculture. A building programme for new lecture halls and administrative facilities, for example the new main building known as the Theiler building, as well as other essential teaching facilities plus supplying the equipment required, could now begin in earnest. It culminated in the state of the art new hospital, all of which materialised, however, after his time.

His postgraduate qualifications included an MMedVet (Chir) in 1965 and a DVSc-degree (*cum laude*) in 1967. He was also awarded a DVSc degree (*honoris causa*) by the University of Pretoria in 1990 and an honorary doctorate by the University of Asuncion, Paraguay, in 1980. He was author or co-author of more than 100 publications and also wrote a popular book on the life of a veterinary surgeon. Other forms of recognition of excellence were the awarding of its Gold Medal by the South African Veterinary Association (SAVA) in 1981 and the Gold Medal of the South African Academy of Science and Art in 1993. He served the veterinary profession as Vice President of the SAVA from

1971–1975 and as member of its Federal Council.

Prof. Hofmeyr was in considerable demand internationally, for example being invited to deliver the Peter Wilson lecture at the University of Edinburgh and chairing sessions at the congress of the World Veterinary Association in Mexico City and the congress of the World Association for Cattle Diseases in Israel. He paid no less than 16 visits to overseas countries for scientific purposes. After retiring, the Hofmeyr couple moved to George in the Western Cape. However, after a few years they returned to Pretoria where Prof. Hofmeyr died, 4 years after Brenda, on 14 January 2004 aged 88.

Pieter Rabe Mansvelt was born on 27 August 1916 in Parys and matriculated with honours at the Ermelo High School in 1933. He qualified as veterinarian at Onderstepoort in 1938, being the 1st recipient of the much-coveted Theiler medal as top student in his class. He was an excellent rugby player, for example as hooker for the University of Pretoria's 1st team. His first appointment was at the Onderstepoort Research Institute, and soon he was sent to East Africa to help run a vaccination campaign against a serious epidemic of rinderpest. On returning to Onderstepoort he experienced a personality clash with one of the senior officials, which resulted in his transfer to the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian at the Louis Trichardt office, where he stayed for 18 years. Here Pieter married Marion (Maisie) McGregor and the couple had 3 children, a daughter and 2 sons, the youngest son dying in infancy. In 1958 he was promoted to regional director (title: Assistant-Director) of the Transvaal Veterinary Region, transferring to Pretoria. He was finally promoted to Director of Veterinary Services of South Africa in 1972 and retired in 1976 at the age of 60.

Dr Mansvelt wrote several articles on aspects of his work, for example on the East African rinderpest outbreak in the late 1930s and early '40s and the foot and mouth disease campaign in the Eastern Caprivi in 1956. He was known among his field colleagues for his lucid style of writing official reports, which he enjoyed doing, much to their amazement. He showed a great interest in Nguni cattle, working closely with local animal scientists such as Manie Eloff, Jan Bonsma and John Skinner on the Mara experimental farm where the Bonsmara breed of beef cattle was developed. He also had an expert knowledge of the indigenous trees of the bushveld and was very well informed on the history of the Soutpansberg area. His hobby was carpentry.

Shortly after retiring, the Mansvelts moved to East London where Pieter played golf with much dedication, but opted for bowls in his last years when his health deteriorated. He died on 7 February 1988 aged 72.

G L (Laurie) Muller was born on 27 January 1917 and matriculated at Grey College, Bloemfontein, in 1933. Although he was a member of the 1938 class at Onderstepoort, he apparently had to write a supplementary examination because he only registered as a veterinarian with the South African Veterinary Board [now SA Veterinary Council (SAVC)] on 31 August 1939. He married Hester Aletta Morgenthal on 5 October 1940 and the couple had 4 daughters and a son.

Having joined the Division of Veterinary Services as a state veterinarian, he and his growing family were posted to various places in South Africa such as Kokstad, Umtata and Worcester, as was customary in those days. In 1941 we find them in Malmesbury, in 1944 in Upington and in 1952 in Ixopo. In 1959 they moved to Mossel Bay, where Laurie conducted valuable research on the seasonal occurrence of helminth infections in sheep in the George district under the guidance of Dr (later Professor) Richard (Henk) Reinecke of Onderstepoort, obtaining a DVSc degree in 1968 for a thesis based on these studies. In 1967 Dr Muller was promoted to regional director (title: Assistant-Director) of the Western Cape Veterinary Region. He resigned from the government service in the early 1970s to concentrate on pig farming and the experimental production of methane from their dung on a property in Agter Paarl. This enterprise was, however, not sustainable and he rejoined the government service in 1988. He was initially posted to Oshakati in South West Africa/Namibia (now Namibia) and thereafter to Keetmanshoop. Having finally retired, he moved to Hanover in 1996 to run an ostrich farm until 2001 when he and his wife Hester moved to a retirement village.

Laurie was also involved in the activities of his profession, serving as chairperson of the Western Cape branch of the South African Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA) in 1965, his predecessor being Dr Albertyn (see below).

Dr Muller died on 16 June 2008 at the ripe old age of 91, his wife having passed away 5 years previously.

N C F (Buffel) Steenekamp was born on 23 February 1915 and matriculated at the Barkly East High School. After qualifying as a veterinarian in 1938 he joined the government service for his entire career. He served as state veterinarian in Kokstad

(from 1939), Grahamstown (from 1943), Hoopstad (from 1945), Gobabis, South West Africa (SWA) – now Namibia – (from 1950), Outjo, SWA (from 1958), Otjiwarongo, SWA (from 1960, where his main activity was the control of foot and mouth disease in northern SWA) and Kroonstad (from 1971). He finally retired in 1984 at the age of 69, having been reappointed after reaching the customary age of retirement and receiving a special award for long-term government service. He died on 27 September 1995 at the age of 80.

He served in community activities such as school boards, the Dutch Reformed Church, 'Rapportryerskorps' and the 'Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings (FAK)'. His sporting activities included initially tennis and later bowls.

Dr Steenekamp married Dora (Theodora Susanna Ferreira) on 1 November 1941 and the couple had 4 children, a son followed by a daughter and finally twins – a son and a daughter.

Everyone who knew Dr Steenekamp referred to him by his nickname 'Buffel', but no one knows where it came from.

Sidney George Turner was born on 29 December 1911 in Port St Johns, educated at Dale College and qualified at the Onderstepoort Faculty at the end of 1939, having had to repeat 1 of his final year subjects. During his student years he was chairman of the house committee and captain of Pretoria University's (TUKS') athletics team, representing both TUKS and the South African Universities in long-distance running.

George was 28 years old when he qualified, having initially spent 2 years studying agriculture at Pretoria University, but interrupting this to work for a couple of years in the Standard Bank at Port St Johns to earn money to pay for his brother's schooling. After he qualified, Dr Turner joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian and was initially stationed at Dundee and then at Port Shepstone. However, in 1944 he decided to go into private practice, joining Dr Jack Boswell in Johannesburg. Later he moved to Pietermaritzburg as a partner to Dr A F Tarr, soon to be joined by Dr B T Paine. George then started a satellite practice in Howick for the Pietermaritzburg consortium before moving to Port Shepstone in 1953 to set up a very large, one-man mixed practice. Already suffering ill health, he was joined at the end of 1967 by his son G V S (Vincent) Turner who had just qualified as a veterinarian at the Onderstepoort Faculty.

Dr Turner was an active Rotarian, serving as Club President in Port Shepstone for several years. In his spare time he was

a very keen and competent angler, representing Natal in the 'light tackle' division. He was selected to represent South Africa in this category, but was unfortunately unable to honour this due to pressure of work.

George married Natalie Moorhouse, who came from a well-known Pietermaritzburg family. Dr Turner died in harness, 2 years after his son joined the practice, on 12 November 1969 at the age of 58.

The Class of 1939

There is no official photograph of the Class of 1939, which consisted of 4 students. Is it a mere coincidence that 1939 was also the year that World War II broke out?

Andries Adriaan Louw (Pierre, Albert or Boks) Albertyn (Fig. 3) was born in Aliwal North on 16 December 1917 and matriculated in Phillipolis in 1934. After qualifying at Onderstepoort in 1939 he joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian and was stationed at Nongoma, Barberton, Pilgrims Rest, Rustenburg and Lydenburg where he was in charge of districts in which he had to deal with one or more of the then rampant important scheduled stock diseases such as East Coast fever, nagana, foot and mouth disease, tuberculosis and anthrax. In 1947, after a 9-year stint as state veterinarian, he was transferred to the Pathology Department at the Veterinary Research Institute, Onderstepoort as a research officer.

At the end of 1948, however, after only 2 years at the Institute, Dr Albertyn decided to devote himself to public health work, eventually serving this discipline of the veterinary profession with distinction for the greater part of his career, i.e. almost 30 years. He first joined the municipal service of Johannesburg. His main duties involved the health and hygienic aspects of the ~500 dairy farms supplying milk to the City, and safety and quality control of the final product in the laboratory. He also supervised the breeding of beef cattle on the City's sewerage farms and provided a veterinary service to its zoological gardens. In 1953 he moved to Cape Town as head of the City's milk control branch, his duties being similar to those in Johannesburg. However, the new technology of bulk storage of milk and compulsory pasteurisation (introduced in 1953) required innovative adaptation of surveillance systems and laboratory tests. In 1968 he was promoted to Director of the Cape Town Municipal Abattoir in Maitland, succeeding Dr B M Horwitz (a 1929 graduate) who had just retired. Maitland was one of the largest and most productive abattoirs

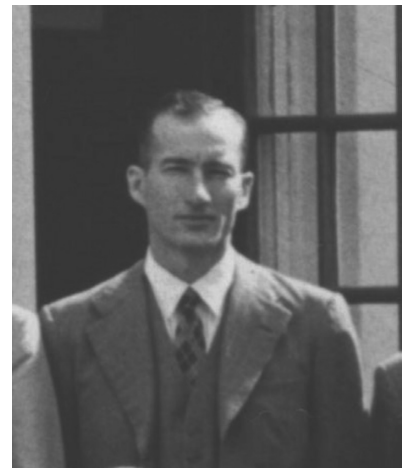


Fig. 3: A A L Albertyn.

in South Africa and Dr Albertyn was director until 1977 when he retired from municipal service at the age of 60. He was very strict and meticulous in applying the Animal Slaughter Act and its regulations, thus running a well-managed abattoir to the advantage of the local population. His contribution to public health was suitably awarded when he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Health in 1965.

A completely new phase in his career followed in 1977 when he was appointed head of the Provincial Animal Centre, also known as the Delft Animal Centre, in Kuils River. This was a new experimental animal breeding facility that had previously been designed and managed by Prof. D G Steyn, who qualified at Onderstepoort in 1948. Its function was to supply the medical faculties of Cape Town and Stellenbosch with laboratory animals for research purposes and Dr Albertyn's task was get it up and running, which he did very effectively in the 10 years that he spent there. Boks retired from 'Delft' in 1987 aged 70.

Dr Albertyn took an active interest in SAVMA matters. He was honorary secretary of the Cape Western Branch of the SAVMA from 1958–1960. In 1961 he was elected chairman, serving until 1965 when he was replaced by Dr G L Muller, Boks taking on the position of vice chairman, which he filled until 1968 when he became an additional member. However, 1969 and 1970 saw him back as vice chairman.

In his spare time Pierre was actively involved in the SA National Defence Force, rising to the rank of Colonel and serving as commanding officer of a Commando Group in the Western Cape. In 1976 he was awarded the De Wet decoration for long and efficient service. He was also a keen rifleman and bird hunter. His involvement, with a few colleagues, in the Western Province Horse Endurance Riding Club as veterinary judge led to his



Fig. 4: P H Brown.



Fig. 5: P P Hugo.



Fig. 6: W H G Schatz.

election onto its executive committee.

Boks married Esmé Harvey in 1948 and the couple had 3 daughters.

He died in Cape Town on 20 October 2000 at the age of 83.

Paul Hornidge Brown (Fig. 4) was born at Trail in Canada on 1 November 1916. In 1924 his parents emigrated to South Africa where Paul attended St John's College in Johannesburg. He was good at sport, playing first team cricket and hockey for the University of Pretoria in 1936 and 1938 while at Onderstepoort. After qualifying early in December 1939, he immediately joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian and was stationed at the following places: Port Shepstone from 1939 to 1940; Umtata from 1941 to 1942; Bedford, 1943; Flagstaff from 1943 to 1945; Aliwal North from 1946 to 1948; Port Elizabeth from 1948 to 1951.

He married Lindrea Swift Shone of Bedford, Cape in 1943 and the couple had 2 daughters, Pauline and Verrall.

In March 1952 Paul transferred to the British Colonial Veterinary Service as government veterinary officer to the Basutoland Government and was stationed at Maseru. Part of his duties was to improve the livestock in that area, taking a particular interest in the local horses. He was presented with an Arab stallion, Silver Eagle, by the Basutoland Government for his services in improving the Basuto Pony. He left Lesotho in 1963 to practice until 1967 on a part-time basis with his erstwhile 1939 classmate Sidney Turner (see above) in Port Shepstone. He died on 8 August 1978 at the age of 62.

P P (Piet) Hugo (Fig. 5) was born on 15 September 1916 in Pietersburg (now Polokwane). He matriculated at the Pietersburg High School. He then enlisted in the South African Defence Force but left after a year to study veterinary

science. After qualifying at the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1939 he joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian and was initially stationed at Allerton Laboratory near Pietermaritzburg. His next post was Upington from where he was transferred to Worcester. Here he developed a keen interest in horses, doing stud work in the vicinity of Rawsonville. In 1950 he was transferred to Eshowe where he worked for 6 years. He was then transferred on promotion to Vryheid where he was involved in the winding-up phase of the seemingly endless East Coast fever eradication campaign in Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal). His last position as state veterinarian was at Vryburg. Here he was *inter alia* involved in the erection of the veterinary fence between South Africa and Botswana in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park.

In 1964 he was transferred to Potchefstroom on being promoted to regional director (title: Assistant Director) of the Highveld Veterinary Region. Here he was involved in the planning and finalisation of the erection of the local regional veterinary laboratory. Dr Hugo was known as a tough supervisor and strict disciplinarian.

Piet met his future wife, Geesje Marie Jansen van Rensburg, while working at Allerton Laboratory and they married on 5 January 1943 at Babanango. The couple had 2 sons – one dying in infancy – and 2 daughters. He retired in 1976 at the age of 60 to farm with cattle in the northern Transvaal (now Limpopo). Dr Hugo died in Potchefstroom on 25 July 1994 aged 78.

Walter Heinz Gerhard Schatz (Fig. 6) was born in Usakos on 4 March 1914 and was educated in Germany, but returned to South West Africa (now Namibia) and matriculated in Swakopmund in 1934. After qualifying from Onderstepoort in 1939, he joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services in 1940 and was first

stationed at the Allerton Laboratory at Pietermaritzburg from March 1940 to September 1943 when he was transferred to Windhoek in South West Africa. In 1947 he was transferred to Omaruru but returned to Windhoek in 1956. During 1959 he developed a serious illness, which was treated in Germany and later again in Pretoria. However, due to persisting ill health he was transferred to Cape Town where he died on 16 September 1962 at the age of only 48.

Dr Schatz married Liselotte Scherer in 1944 and the couple had 3 daughters and 1 son.

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