

Dr. R. A. Alexander, Director of
Veterinary Services for the period
1950-1961.



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AN APPRECIATION

On the retirement of Dr. R. A. Alexander from the post of Director of Veterinary Services, Department of Agriculture Technical Services, Republic of South Africa

Dr. Alexander retired on superannuation on the 28th of July, 1961, from the post of Director of Veterinary Services, thus ending a long and distinguished career in the Service.

Raymond Albert Alexander was born in Benoni, Transvaal, on the 29th July, 1899. He was educated at Jeppe High School, Johannesburg, and matriculated in 1915. He then studied at Potchefstroom School of Agriculture and farmed for a short period before being accepted for military training.

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In 1919 he proceeded to the Transvaal University College (Pretoria) and obtained the degree of Bachelor of Science, Agriculture, University of South Africa in 1922. He then enrolled as a student in the newly formed Faculty of Veterinary Science under the renowned Sir Arnold Theiler and was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Veterinary Science (cum laude) (S.A.) in 1925.

He then joined the Division of Veterinary Services and was stationed at Allerton Laboratory, Pietermaritzburg, for a short while. In 1928 he returned to Onderstepoort and joined the section of Virus Diseases and Protozoology. The following year he was appointed lecturer in Infectious Diseases in the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Onderstepoort.

In 1931 the Empire Marketing Board of Great Britain offered three Research Fellowships tenable at Onderstepoort and open to all research workers in the British Commonwealth. Dr. Alexander was one of those selected. He immediately proceeded to Europe on a twelve months' study tour spending much of the time at Strangeways Institute, Cambridge. There he worked on tissue culture techniques under Dr. Honor B. Fell. He also visited the major research institutes in the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Switzerland, Germany, Holland and Denmark. While in London he, together with Dr. P. J. du Toit, represented South Africa at the First Commonwealth Veterinary Conference and, by invitation, participated in the Fiftieth Anniversary Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

He returned to Onderstepoort in 1932 to continue research into virus diseases. On the dissolution of the Empire Marketing Board in 1934, he rejoined the Division of Veterinary Services.

On a thesis (1935) entitled "Studies on the neurotropic virus of horsesickness", he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Veterinary Science by the University of South Africa. From this work the present method of immunization against horsesickness was evolved.

He was appointed Senior Research Officer in 1938 and again proceeded overseas on study leave. The major portion of his tour was spent in the United States and Canada, chiefly at the Rockefeller Institute, Harvard University, the Federal Bureau of Animal Industry and the Canadian Veterinary Laboratory at Ottawa.

In 1944 Dr. Alexander's services were loaned to the Egyptian Government in connection with an extensive outbreak of horsesickness in Egypt and the Middle East. Outbreaks in Egypt and Palestine were successfully controlled by mass immunization with vaccine from Onderstepoort.

He was appointed Sub-Director of Veterinary Services in 1948 and in the same year visited England, Switzerland and Holland in connection with the control of foot and mouth disease with particular reference to methods of vaccine production.

In 1949 he was appointed Deputy Director of Veterinary Services and represented South Africa in Nairobi at the African Rinderpest Conference and the International Rinderpest Conference convened by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Later he served on a Commission appointed by the British Colonial Office to investigate veterinary problems and research in East African territories.

Dr. Alexander was appointed Director of Veterinary Services, Union of South Africa, in 1950 when he succeeded the late Dr. J. I. Quin. In 1952 he was elected an Honorary Member of the Medical Association of South Africa in recognition of his research work into virus diseases.

In 1953 he was invited by the United States Government to visit America and advise them on the control of bluetongue in sheep which was causing devastating losses.

Among the many important posts and honours he has held, are:—

- Chairman of the Interafrican Bureau of Animal Diseases (1955–1958).
- Life Vice-President of the South African Veterinary Medical Association.
- Chairman of the Veterinary Board.
- Member of the Committee for Research into Medical Sciences of the Council for Industrial and Scientific Research.
- Chairman of the Committee of the Virus Diseases Research Unit of the University of Cape Town.
- Permanent Representative of the Union of South Africa on the Board of the World Veterinary Association and on the Office International des Épizooties.
- Member of the Technical Advisory Committee of the Poliomyelitis Research Foundation and of the Advisory Committee on Virology to the Minister of Health.
- Member of the National Nutrition Council.
- Dr. Alexander was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science (*honoris causa*) by the University of Cape Town in 1955 and in 1957 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (South Africa).
- In 1958 Prof. Alexander assumed the chair of Infectious Diseases in the Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria, a position he still holds.
- He attended the World Veterinary Conference in Madrid in 1959 and was elected an Honorary Professor of the University of Madrid and was one of six who were awarded gold medals for meritorious services to veterinary science.
- In 1961 he was elected an honorary Member of the Section of Comparative Medicine of the Royal Society of Medicine. In the same year he was nominated as consultant to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations/Office International des Épizooties at a world conference on emerging diseases held at Ankara.
- He is a member of numerous scientific societies and on the editorial board of the British Veterinary Journal.

Although pre-eminently a virologist of worldwide repute, Dr. Alexander has always remained a veterinarian with a wide range of knowledge and interest in all branches of the profession. As an administrative scientist he radiated enthusiasm tempered with good humour. He has always assumed a leading role in the community and, despite his exacting duties as a scientist, is very active in social, sporting and community life. He has shown himself not only to be a brilliant scientist but also a leader of men and a good citizen of his country.

We are happy to report that Prof. Alexander's services have not been lost to Onderstepoort. On retirement he was appointed Technical Adviser to the Division of Veterinary Services and is still active in the research and academic fields.

We wish him many more years of productive work and hope we shall long have the benefit of his immense knowledge and experience.

A list of Prof. Alexander's scientific publications is appended.

PUBLICATIONS

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