

EQUINE VETERINARIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA – 220 years of service

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INTRODUCTION

Veterinarians in South Africa today are inclined to think their profession started with Arnold Theiler's arrival in 1891 from Switzerland, or Duncan Hutcheon's arrival in 1880, or even Samuel Wiltshire in 1874, all in the closing decades of the 19th Century. However, there is clear evidence of equine veterinary surgeons being active in the old Cape Colony from 1799, mainly with the British cavalry regiments that were sent to the country. One source states that 36 of 45 veterinarians active between 1800 and 1881 were in military service. Equine practitioners are clearly the oldest part of the veterinary profession in South Africa and have also made major contributions in the subsequent decades.

WHO WAS THE FIRST VET IN SOUTH AFRICA?

If 'Veterinary Surgeon' is defined as a person who qualified as such at a nationally recognised institution, then it is Thomas Burrowes, who qualified MRCVS on 30 March 1799 and served as Veterinary Surgeon with the 8th King's Royal Irish Light Dragoons (later Hussars) cavalry regiment that was stationed at the Cape from 1795 to 1803 during the first British Occupation. This reference was found:

"The British regiments arrived dismounted, and their horses were purchased at the Cape. The 8th and 28th Light Dragoons were mounted at the close of 1796, but Thomas Burrowes, the first Veterinary Surgeon, did not arrive until 1799. The chief difficulty appears to have been the supply of fodder. "

The 8th Light Dragoons Regiment, originally formed in 1693, was stationed in the Cape from November 1795 to February 1803, and Burrowes and his family arrived in 1799. Burrowes' second son, named John Fredrik Kirsten Burrowes, was probably born at the Cape during this period – note his middle names, likely given in honour of Jan Fredrik Kirsten who was a member of the Court of Justice at the Cape at that time. The Regiment departed for India in 1803.

In 1932 the Coat of Arms of SAVMA was designed with the Motto: *Pristinae Virtutis Memores*, which can be loosely translated as 'Pride in the Past, Faith in the Present and Hope for the Future', or literally as 'Remember our Noble Past'. This motto comes from that of the 8th Dragoons of Thomas Burrowes, thus serving as a direct link from those earliest days to the present.

SUBSEQUENT VETERINARIANS

There is evidence of several military veterinary surgeons at the Cape Colony thereafter, starting with William Levett of the 21st Light Dragoons from 1806 to 1813, then J Schroder who took over from Levett and who left with the Regiment in 1817.

John Crump is the first known private practitioner in the Cape Colony and was the first reference found to a veterinarian in digitised early South African newspapers. He placed the following advertisement in the *South African Commercial Advertiser* on Wednesday 28 September 1831:

VETERINARY SURGERY

Mr. John CRUMP, Veterinary Surgeon, "late to the Emperor of Brazil", offers his services to the gentlemen of this Colony in treating the diseases and accidents of horses. As a Member of the London Royal Veterinary College he trusts that the practice of his profession, founded on acknowledged principles and much experience, will render him useful in a community where good horses abound and their value to Man is appreciated.

Residence: Mrs. HUGHES', Burg and Church Streets
Cape Town Sept 20.

There are also several records of John Kingsley (1801-1866) who qualified MRCVS in London in 1838 and served with the Cape Mounted Rifles in the Eastern Cape frontier wars from 1840 to 1860. We have a death notice from the *Grahamstown Journal* of January 1867:

"DIED at Grahamstown on the 5th December [1866], after many years of intense suffering, John KINGSLEY, for twenty years Veterinary Surgeon of the Cape Mounted Riflemen. Aged 65 years."

There is fragmentary evidence of a Benjamin Channing Rouse Gardiner with the 7th Dragoon Guards in 1846, and a J B Minnikin also serving with the 7th Dragoon Guards from June 1843 to April 1848. The 7th Dragoon Guards were involved in the 7th frontier war between 1846 and 1847.

FIRST EVIDENCE OF LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (REGISTRATION)

In the records of the Cape Colony there is evidence that G A Martin requested a License to Practice as a Veterinary Surgeon and presented his Diploma in support of the request in 1859. But six years later he wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 16 May 1866 informing him that his attempt to set up a private practice had failed.

Edward A Gibbon requested a License in 1860. The background to this licensing system is not known but it is possible that it was put in place by Sir George Grey who was the Governor of the Cape from 1854 to 1861. Grey was a very progressive administrator whose name is commemorated in colleges, hospitals and towns to this day.

From 1882 and 1883 there are requests for Licenses from Bryan and Foreman but thereafter no more records have been traced to date. It seems that the registration system in the Cape Colony fell into disuse.

There are references to numbers of farriers being recognised throughout the Cape Colony during the 19th Century and this may suggest that they were the first para-veterinary profession that operated in South Africa. Farriers were recognised as part of the category of MANUFACTURES, MECHANICS & ARTIFICERS in the 1865 Cape Census; Veterinarians (very few) were enumerated in the LITERARY, SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL category.

DUNCAN HUTCHEON

In July 1895 Duncan Hutcheon, at the request of the Cape Mounted Rifles and the Cape Mounted Police, produced within 3 months the first veterinary handbook in South Africa, titled **Diseases of the Horse and their Treatment**. In his words in the preface:

The object aimed at has been to give a brief but plain description of the diseases and injuries of the horse, their known causes, most prominent symptoms, and the generally approved methods of treatment; written in language as free from technicalities as the subject would admit of in my hands.

I faintly would hope, however, that, incomplete as it is, the officers of the Cape Mounted Rifles and of the Cape Police, as well as the owners of horses generally throughout the Colony, will derive some assistance from a reference to its pages, when they, from necessity, have to be their own veterinary surgeon.

FIRST VETERINARY BOARD

The focus then shifts to the Crown Colony of Natal, where the Governor of the time, Hely-Hutchinson, enacted Act 21 of 1899, establishing the Natal Veterinary Board. This Act was driven by equine practitioners who almost certainly were suffering the effects of unqualified 'horse doctors'.

Attempts to extend the Veterinary Board to the Union were made after 1910 but were unsuccessful. This 1899 Act remained operational until the Veterinary Act of 1933 was promulgated.

Herbert Watkins-Pitchford was the first President of this Veterinary Board. He was, like all the veterinary surgeons of the time, primarily an equine practitioner.

SIDNEY THOMAS ARUNDEL AMOS

Sidney Amos was born on 3 March 1876 in Somerset, England and died on 31 July 1948 in Durban. He qualified MRCVS in 1897 and was part of a group of 8 veterinarians brought out to the Crown Colony and employed by the Natal Civil Veterinary Department to combat Rinderpest. He later served as Secretary of the Natal Veterinary Board and was granted his FRCVS in 1909. He was a member of the Natal Veterinary Medical Association and the

Transvaal Veterinary Medical Association and in 1920 he became a member of the South African Veterinary Association.

He was in Private Practice from 1911 to 1947, doing mainly equine work. He served the Durban Turf Club from 1911 and the Clairwood Turf Club from 1921. He served as SAVMA President from 1936 until 1945, a record 9 years.

JOHN BAGOT QUINLAN

Quinlan lived from 1887 to 1970 and qualified MRCVS in Dublin in 1912, where he distinguished himself as the winner of the Fitzwygram Prize, being the top veterinary student in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland that year.

He was a lecturer at Potchefstroom Agricultural College briefly and in World War 1 was a Captain in the SA Veterinary Corps. After a stint at Allerton Laboratory in 1920 he qualified Dr Med Vet (Hanover) in 1922 and FRCVS (London) in 1928; he was granted his DVSc in South Africa in 1929.

He served as Professor of Surgery, Gynaecology and Obstetrics at Onderstepoort from 1922 to 1947. Thereafter he was in private practice for 20 years and was widely regarded as the best equine veterinary surgeon of his time.

OTHER EARLY EQUINE PRACTITIONERS

More information about early practitioners can be found in Chris Marlow's excellent 2010 article. They include among others Jack Boswell, George Faul, Frik van Rensburg, Sandy Littlejohn, Jean du Plessis, Chris van Niekerk, Willie du Plessis, John O'Grady, Tremayne Thoms, Maurice Azzie, Frank Freeman, Brian Baker and Robin Rous. They were followed by many more equine practitioners of note.

SPECIALISATION

Faculty courses served as very important ways of improving knowledge and expertise, as did SAVA Congresses and Branches. The formation of the Equine Practitioners' Group in 1964 was possibly the first 'specialist' group in SAVMA, later restructured as the SA Equine Veterinary Association (SAEVA) in 2005.

CONCLUSION

Please preserve our history – Today's commonplace is tomorrow's priceless information. If you do not write it down or record it, nobody can find it when the memories have faded!

Honour the achievers in the equine practice as well as the researchers and teachers. SAEVA has an unequalled history of contributions and can be proud of its predecessors.

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