



A corner of the new Club Room

Photograph by Tom Burgers

MR. A. C. HARRISON – A TRIBUTE

(Compiled by the former Director of Nature Conservation, DR. DOUGLAS HEY, whose close association with Mr. A. C. Harrison extended over many years.)

IT was with deep and very sincere regret that we learned of the passing of Mr. A. C. Harrison, an exceptionally competent and dedicated fisheries officer; a man of the highest integrity and a most endearing personality.

Mr. Harrison served the Cape Provincial Administration very ably as an Inland Fisheries Officer for more than 40 years. He had a deep interest in all matters relating to inland waters and fisheries, and, with his exceptional knowledge of aquatic fauna and flora, was indefatigable in promoting the stocking of inland waters. His numerous and detailed reports portraying the development of inland fisheries in this Province are exceptionally well written and will be of great historical value in years to come. In collaboration with the eminent Dr. Keppel H. Barnard of the S.A. Museum he wrote a number of scientific papers covering his studies of mayflies, stoneflies and caddis flies; many of which are named after him.

When I was appointed as Assistant Curator at the Jonkershoek Hatchery in 1937, Mr. Harrison befriended me, acting as my mentor in fisheries' matters over many years. He was the liaison between the hatchery and the Provincial Administration, and his weekly visits to Jonkershoek became an institution. These often included field trips to angling waters in the vicinity of Stellenbosch. In those days Paardevelei, near Somerset West, was one of the finest largemouth bass waters in the world. The water was crystal clear and the bottom covered with a dense growth of *Nitella*, teeming with aquatic organisms. The angling method employed was trolling with a spinner from a rowing boat. On one memorable day Mr. Harrison and I took over 185 fish for research purposes on a pearl spoon with a barbless hook. They were all in perfect condition, weighing from 8 oz. to 4½ lb. The subsequent deterioration of this water due to the use of chemicals for the control of algae was a matter of grave concern to Mr. Harrison.

Another favourite trip, usually undertaken in Mr. F. G. Chaplin's 1918 model Talbot tourer, was to the Junction Pool on the upper Berg River where the Dwars River joins it. Towards the end of summer large trout would congregate in this deep pool, and to lie on one's belly on a vantage point and watch these huge fish drifting gently over the bottom, with barely a movement of their fins, was an experience I shall never forget. We often speculated on their size, which must have been well over 10 lb., but were never successful in taking one with lure, bait or net. Today the pool is no more; the result of floods and canalisation of the river.

Mr. Harrison was deeply interested in all aspects of our work and was largely responsible for the introduction and acclimatisation of largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass, bluegill sunfish, brook trout and the Shasta strain of rainbow trout. He conducted a lengthy correspondence with eminent fisheries experts in the United States of America on the subject, including Dr. Carl L. Hobbs of the University of Michigan; Dr. J. R. Dymond of Ontario; Drs. Swingle and Smith in Alabama, and others. When arrangements had been concluded for the supply of the fingerlings, he maintained personal contact throughout the voyage with Mr. Albert M. Vida, the Chief Radio Officer on the M.V. City of New York, who cared for the fish in transit.

Today the introduction of alien species is not favoured, but it must be remembered that in those days Nature Conservation was still an unknown concept, and the sole objective of the provincial service was to improve angling. I believe that, on balance, trout and largemouth bass have proved an asset to our country, promoting both outdoor recreation and tourism. The bluegill sunfish, introduced as a forage fish for bass, proved

an undesirable species and an unnecessary introduction in view of the wide choice of indigenous species. He was particularly interested, too, in the food organisms of fish and took a keen interest in the culture of small crustaceans such as *Daphnia magna* and the brine shrimp at the hatchery.

Mr. Harrison was involved in the formation of the Department of Inland Fisheries in 1942, serving as secretary to the Provincial Inland Fisheries Advisory Committee, and editor of the annual report, in addition to his duties of Inland Fisheries Officer. The first report of the new department, incorporating a survey of inland fisheries development during the previous 50 years, is a most valuable historical document. Mr. Harrison played a major role in drafting a sound fisheries ordinance for the Cape Province, incorporating the first measures to combat pollution of inland waters.

He and I travelled many thousands of miles together, surveying and stocking inland waters. We have camped on the banks of the Olifants River studying the spawning of yellowfish, trudged many miles along the headwaters of the rivers of East Griqualand, and nearly frozen in our hotel room in Kokstad. Always good humoured, he was a delightful companion with a limitless fund of anecdotes relating to inland fisheries (provided you could endure the fumes of his strong Magaliesberg tobacco in the confined space of the cab of an old 1942 model 3-ton Chev. truck). Nothing ever seemed to ruffle the even tenor of his good nature.

When the Department of Nature Conservation was established in 1952, Mr. Harrison was appointed secretary of the Provincial Advisory Committee for Nature Conservation and served as a member of that committee until late in the seventies. In the early days he accompanied the members on their annual field excursions, but, although he was a staunch conservationist, his interests were largely liminological. He was inclined to regard the avid collecting of some museum directors with a measure of disdain. I remember one evening, sitting with him in camp comparing notes, when we heard a shot in the distance. "Another tawny pippit bites the dust," was his dry comment.

As the Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation grew, and I became more and more deeply involved in administrative and committee affairs relating to nature conservation, we gradually lost contact, but Mr. Harrison maintained his keen interest in the work of the hatcheries and his association with the fisheries personnel. He was always ready to advise and encourage the young members of staff, and was an inspiration to many who will always honour his memory. Over a period of more than 40 years, Mr. A. C. Harrison served the cause of inland fisheries and nature conservation in the Cape, working tirelessly on field surveys, drafting reports and legislation and editing publications. We in the Cape Province are indebted to him for a lifetime of outstanding service.